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NEGOTIATING A LIVING: WORKING CHILDREN IN KOLKATA

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ABSTRACT

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The majority of children, involved in both waged and unwaged work exist beyond the control and comprehension of national and international regulation, within the informal economy. Research has shown that the informal economy, contrary to general perception, is not a sphere of unregulated activity, but rather, operates through alternative structures and techniques of power. Children's work within the informal economy, and therefore outside the regulative reach of the state, is subject to extra-legal modes of regulation that are pursued through elaborate systems of discipline and power exercised by non-state actors, groups, and social institutions and networks.

Through a case study on children in Kolkata, India, who are engaged in specific forms of informal work in three distinct urban spaces – domestic servitude in the private realm of the home, small-scale manufacturing and service work in factories and shops, and ragpicking, scavenging and begging on the streets – this thesis aims to explore the way children's lives are constructed through work and space, to uncover the social processes and relations of power that working children navigate in order to build and sustain their livelihoods. I examine the way that children's spaces of work are imbued with social relations of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity and power that are enacted through the construction of hierarchies, divisions of labour, and work regimes. I also explore the politics of these spaces, revealing the primary economic partnerships and obstacles that children contend with in constructing their working lives. Overall, I aim to uncover the ways in which children engage with and negotiate the extra-legal systems of regulation by categorically analysing children's work in the home, shop and factory, and street.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND FOREIGN WORDS

ABBREVIATIONS

CBD	Central Business District
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CINI	Child in Need Institute
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRCSC	Development Research Communication and Service Centre
ILO	International Labour Organisation
KMA	Kolkata Municipal Area
KMC	Kolkata Municipal Corporation
KMDA	Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority
NGO	Non-government Organisation
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

FOREIGN WORDS

<i>Aacha ghar</i>	good home; suitable family
<i>Amir</i>	the rich
<i>Badhmashi</i>	mischievous; up to no good
<i>Baisharam</i>	shameless
<i>Baqvas</i>	nonsense
<i>Bhabhi</i>	older brother's wife
<i>Bhaiya</i>	older brother
<i>Chai</i>	tea
<i>Chau-bis gunta kam</i>	24-hour work
<i>Dia</i>	prayer lamp
<i>Didi</i>	elder sister
<i>Gharib</i>	the poor

<i>Gully</i>	small lane; side street
<i>Jaan Paichaan</i>	acquaintance; known person
<i>Kagaz Kam</i>	ragpicking – directly translated to ‘paper work’
<i>Mamaji</i>	mother’s brother
<i>Mandir</i>	Temple; place of prayer
<i>Masi</i>	mother’s sister; used to refer to older female domestic workers
<i>Masti</i>	jokes; fun; mischief
<i>Maugh masti</i>	fun
<i>Mistry</i>	skilled fabricators and artisans
<i>Namaz</i>	day of prayers among Muslims, which takes place on Fridays
<i>Nazar</i>	evil eye
<i>Panchayat Samitis</i>	local government bodies
<i>Puja</i>	a Hindu festival celebrating Goddess Durga; largely celebrated in West Bengal
<i>Udaan</i>	CINI drop in Centre for ages 4-12
<i>Uttaraan</i>	CINI drop in Centre for boys ages 13-16
<i>Vishkakarma Puja</i>	an important Hindu festival

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INTRODUCTION

The existence of child labour is a part of the everyday reality throughout the country. Working children are found everywhere – in homes, in the streets, in the fields and the factories.

Jha 2009, 208

Enter any work organisation and we are, necessarily, engaged in complex spatialities: engaged with the meanings, materialities and bodily performances embedded in and produced by these organisations of space and spatialities of work.

Susan Halford 2008, 927

This study is about children who are engaged in informal work, both waged and unwaged, in distinct urban spaces. It is also about the complex social processes and relations of power that children encounter and navigate through work and space. Children's participation in work has received considerable attention in child-related policy and by scholars over the past two decades. One of the principal debates guiding recent national and international legislation on child workers is around the distinction between child labour and child work. Conventionally, all economically active children below 14 years of age were considered as child labourers (Burra 2005, 5199). More recently, however, international policy has moved to create a clear delineation between child labour and child work. The former is represented by the International Labour Office (ILO) as work that 'deprives children of their childhood and their dignity, which hampers their access to education and the acquisition of skills, and which is performed under deplorable conditions harmful to their health and their development' (Burra 2005, 5199), while the latter includes all paid and unpaid work that does not necessarily lead to the exploitation of children and may have the capacity to contribute to the development of the child (Liebel 2004). This distinction has served as a basis for drives to abolish harmful forms of child labour. There is a concern, however, that the majority

of children who are involved in both waged and unwaged work, exist beyond the control and comprehension of national and international regulation (Haider 2008, 49).

In India, the majority of children's work falls within the informal labour economy – in small-scale trade, home industries alongside parents, domestic servitude, and in various forms of street work (Bhukuth 2008, 389). The recognition of working children in official statistics remains surprisingly small (Nieuwenhuys 1994). Official statistics on India, for example, show that only 11.28 million children serve as 'child labourers', in clear contrast with the almost 100 million children between ages 5 and 14 years who are not in the school system (Burra 2005, 5199). It is evident that a significant section of children involved in work in India – both harmful and beneficial – remain invisible, and thus, are outside the regulative reach of national and international governance and action. The informal economy, subsequently, plays an important role in the lives of children who work – both in producing opportunities for work, as well as in terms of governance.

The informal economy is often defined according to standards of regulation, against the 'conventional' formal sector which functions through access to state social security (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2009, 90). Evidence suggests, however, that informality is not necessarily a 'sphere of unregulated activities', but instead a realm where regulation is pursued through elaborate systems of discipline and power exercised by non-state actors, groups, and social institutions and networks (Roy 2003, 140). Particularistic hiring practices, moreover, have strong implications for how informal workers access, participate, and negotiate their rights at work (Shaw and Pandit 2001). Barbara Harriss-White, one of the few scholars examining the informal sector in India, explains:

Social regulation determines the acquisition of skills, contacts, information and technology, and starting capital and credit; ... the definition of a range of contracts considered 'proper' and the settlement of disputes about transactions; certain

kinds of collective insurance and representation; the organization of space and territory; ... entitlements to help in times of need; hygiene in marketplaces; and physical security, from the night watch to protection mafias. (Harriss-White 2003b, 460)

Despite the increasing interest in scholarly work on the place and condition of children in the workforce, two topics that are curiously absent from the study of working childhoods are the spatial dynamics of children's work, and their everyday social relations. Studies have shown that children do not participate in work in isolation, but within specific social and spatial settings – often building, relying on, or resisting social links (Dyson 2008). These links, and the specific ways in which children engage with and in them, however, are unclear. In this study, I am keenly interested in the spatiality of children's work and the way the spaces in which children work are imbued with social relations of gender, caste, ethnicity, and power that are enacted through the construction of hierarchies, divisions of labour, and work regimes. Moreover, given that most working children in India participate in occupations beyond the reach of the formal regulation structures of the State, my intention in this study is to reveal the extra-legal regulatory relationships that children contend with in their everyday working lives and to understand the diverse power dynamics underlying their participation in work.

1.2 DEFINITION OF TERMS

WHAT IS WORK?

The importance of work in the everyday lives of young people has been of significant interest in recent studies on children (Liebel 2004; Katz 2004; Dyson 2008). The 'work' with which children engage is considered in diverse ways and through various definitions. Conventionally, researchers and policymakers have perceived children's work as a 'social problem' – a burden and a sacrifice of childhood (Jha 2009). More recently, however, and partially driven by a wave of 'right to work' movements across

the global South, working children are being re-considered in scholarly work as social and economic agents able to negotiate their labour and exercise agency over their working lives (Edmonds and Pavcnik 2005; Abebe 2008; Nieuwenhuys 1994; Jennings, et al 2006). Liebel (2004), for example, who has written on working children in a range of global North and South contexts, perceives children's work not merely as a burden or a necessity, but as a means of education and a source of pride and agency. Invernizzi (2003), along similar lines, defines work through a social lens, rejecting the notion that work is exclusively for material benefit. Instead, she considers children's work, in addition to sustaining daily life, as a way of establishing social relations, fostering belonging, and as identity-building (321).

In its broadest sense, work can be defined as encompassing all activities that sustain our daily lives (McDowell 2009, 26). Work can involve the 'application of labour' or an exchange of goods, services, and ideas (McDowell 2009, 26). It can be secure or insecure, waged or unwaged, easy and organized, or dirty and violent; it can be conducted in a variety of spaces and under a range of conditions (McDowell 2009, 26; Castel 2000). Together, this definition and Invernizzi's notion of work is particularly useful to my study on children's working lives, for it, with equal importance, pays heed to the life-sustaining necessity of work, as well as the social relevance of work in terms of, both, its influence over participation, and its wider social bearing.

CHILDHOOD AND CHILDREN

The concept of childhood, which will be explored in detail in the next chapter, has been a source of contention among scholars for decades. Children form an integral aspect of studies in geography, however, scholars continue to confront childhood from a Western perspective, universalising the child, rather than recognising the nuanced ways in which children experience the world according to culture, religion, and location. Recent studies

in Geography, Anthropology and Sociology have challenged the conventional Western ideals of childhood and slowly begun to recognise the differences between children in the west and non-west, however, this dichotomy often essentialises children in the non-west as poor and underprivileged. It is my intention in this study to treat childhood from a cultural, spatial, and identity-based perspective, incorporating the variables of ethnicity, culture, class, and caste, rather than essentialising children in India as a homogenous category. At the core of my analysis on working children and their socio-spatial relations is the understanding that children are neither passive victims, nor unaware of their circumstances, and instead, actively engage with the everyday processes within which they are embedded.

It should be noted that I intentionally use the term children in this study, rather than youth, or young people, for my research incorporates children ranging from four years old, up to sixteen years old, effectively spanning a range of 'stages' in the lifecycle, according to childhood theorists¹. The term youth is generally reserved for children beyond the age of 16 years old (cf. Jeffrey 2010; Skelton 2009), while the term young people is often used to refer to children and youth, collectively (Jeffrey 2010).

1.3 AIMS, OBJECTIVES, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis contributes to wider debates on children's work through a case study of the livelihood-building strategies of children in Kolkata, India. The primary aim of this research is to uncover the way young people's lives are constructed through work and space, and understand the social processes and relations of power that working children navigate in order to build and sustain their livelihoods. With a strong empirical base and an interest in the connections between working childhoods and social and spatial

¹ Refer to Chapter Two for an in-depth discussion.

regulation, it is my primary intention to unravel constructions of working childhoods, and direct attention to the complex web of factors that shape children's involvement in and experiences of work. This includes relations of family and community, and the influences of religion, caste, gender, and ethnicity on the types of work that they undertake and the ways in which they are positioned in the labour market. The key questions guiding this research are:

- a) What are the patterns of work and employment in which children in Kolkata are involved?
- b) How do working children find employment and become involved in informal sector work?
- c) How do children experience work, based on their spatial contexts?
- d) In what ways do social structures of identity influence how and where children work?
- e) What are the social processes and relations of power that influence their daily negotiations in local labour markets?

This research suggests that children's participation in labour and employment in urban spaces are often defined through specific individual, familial and community negotiations linked to the social structures of religion, ethnicity, gender and caste, and regulated through related social and political networks. These networks, which range from small-scale social alliances and religious and cultural associations to civil society groups, and formal institutional groups are at times consciously sought out and embraced by children through informal interactions. In other cases, however, they are aggressively imposed upon children, forcing them into specific forms and spaces of work. This argument is explored through an analysis of five of the key spatially-based occupations in which children in Kolkata are active: ragpicking, begging, domestic work, home-based manufacturing, and shop work.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In this introductory chapter, I have outlined the conceptual themes guiding my research on working children in Kolkata, India to identify some key questions around the way children work and their working lives are governed. I have presented the primary aims of my research along with the central argument guiding this study.

In the chapter that follows (Chapter two), I set the stage for this research through a critical engagement with the existing literature around childhood, work, and space. In particular, this chapter considers the broader academic debates on the geographies of childhood and work, informal economy, and forms and structures of social regulation, in order to identify knowledge gaps and justify the basis for this research. The chapter begins with an overview of conceptualisations of childhood to uncover the growing interest in the study of children. I seek to highlight the way dominant 'Western' discourses on childhood continue to inform non-Western constructions of children in both scholarship and policy. Next, I critically examine the literature around children's work by interrogating the varying definitions of work to justify my approach to work in this study. Furthermore, I examine the arguments around why and how children participate in work, and highlight the importance of the informal economy as a metaphysical space of children's work. In the final section of this thesis, I critically examine the intersecting themes of informal economy and regulation, including the varying mechanisms of regulation that informal sector workers engage with. This discussion provides the foundation for my study of how children's work is regulated.

Chapter three, Context and Methodology, consists of two sections. In the context section, I locate the city of Kolkata, India and provide an overview of the diverse historical, political, and economic geographies of the city that made Kolkata an ideal location for this study. I focus, specifically, on the segmented nature of Kolkata's labour market – a large part of which operates informally. In the second part of the chapter, I

present and critically discuss my research methodology. I describe and justify my case study approach and methods for data collection, placing particular emphasis on entry into the field, trust-building, and data collection through observation and interviews. I also critically assess my role as researcher and the ethical issues and challenges surrounding representation and positionality that I continuously struggled with throughout the course of my research.

In chapters four to seven I present my empirical findings. In the first empirical chapter, (chapter four), I explore the patterns of children's work in Kolkata as a product of various push and pull factors beyond poverty and necessity. I examine children's work as a means of learning and education, economic determination and growth, but also social control – all linked in varying degrees, to social structures of religion, ethnicity, and gender. I argue that overlapping familial and community arrangements facilitate children's entry into waged work in Kolkata. Moreover, I present and discuss the ways the children involved in my research negotiate and reconcile their place within the socio-economic landscape of work and employment. This chapter incorporates observational data and interviews with children and their social networks who are involved in the unregulated service economy, small-scale manufacturing, and non-sexual street work.

While my aim in Chapter four is to empirically illustrate the unique nature of children's work in Kolkata's informal labour market, the remaining three substantive chapters draw on the argument made in Chapter four to interrogate the socio-spatial processes and relations that children contend with in constructing and sustaining their working lives. I explore children's work through the lens of the workplace – moving from the private realm of the home, through paid domestic servitude in Chapter five, to the semi-public shop spaces and small-scale factories in Chapter six, and finally examining the public street, where children perform waged and unwaged tasks of begging, bottle collection, and scavenging in Chapter seven.

I place *space* centre stage to explore the intricate social and labour relations within children's specific spaces of work. The spaces in which children's work is constructed and conducted are important in understanding the ways children engage with and negotiate their livelihoods. Space is highly political and quite often managed, regulated or governed by specific forces, both formal and informal. In the chapters, I examine the way that children's spaces of work are imbued with social relations of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity and power that are enacted through the construction of hierarchies, divisions of labour, and work regimes. I also explore the politics of these spaces, revealing the primary economic partnerships and obstacles with which children contend in constructing their working lives. Moreover, I examine the precise nature of governance and regulation around children's work, focusing on the roles of institutional actors (e.g. police, municipality, NGOs), employers, community, family, and friendships.

Overall, I aim to uncover the ways in which children negotiate the complex structures and relationships, by categorically analysing the spaces of the home, shop and factory, and street through the experiences of the children involved in this research. The empirical chapters essentially explore how children's work is regulated institutionally and socially; why children engage with these governance structures; and how they negotiate and navigate potentially exploitative networks.

I conclude my thesis in Chapter Eight, with a summary of the empirical results and an outline of the main contributions to research on working childhoods. I reflect on the policy implications of this study, and consider the potential for future research in the field.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: CHILDHOOD, WORK AND INFORMAL REGULATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I provide and discuss the conceptual framework that guides my study of working children in Kolkata. Through a critical engagement with the literature, I situate my study on working childhoods at the intersection of the social and the spatial. I approach children's work as a function of complex social and power relations that are both organised in space, as well as a reflection of space. I examine, in particular, four strands of literature to identify the points from which this research departs and to justify the basis for this research: a) constructions of childhood; b) children's geographies of work; c) informal economy; and d) regulation. I begin this chapter with an overview of conceptualisations of childhood, uncovering the growing academic interest in children. I engage with children's geographies to highlight the link between discursive constructions of childhood and the nature of childhood as a spatial phenomenon. Next, I critically examine the intersecting themes of work, informal economy, and regulation, to illustrate the perceived contradiction between childhood and work; examine the informal economy as a metaphysical space of children's work; and to understand the varying mechanisms of regulation that informal sector workers are prone to. This provides the foundation for my study of how children's work is regulated. This chapter closes with a look at the gaps in the literature, some of which I address in this study.

2.2 CHILDHOOD

Childhood has emerged as an important area of study within the discipline of geography since the late 1980s. This has largely been driven by an interest in understanding the

experiences of children as subjects in the world (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011, 12), and is reflected as a shift from earlier sociological concerns with childhood as a stage in the lifecycle – as ‘adults-in-waiting, whose development proceeds along a series of pre-defined steps’ (Holt 2011, 2), toward a focus on children as knowing actors with agency (Holloway and Valentine 2000a).

Academic research has engaged with childhood as a historical, social, and cultural institution (Cunningham 1995; James and Prout 1997; Holloway and Valentine 2000a), and children have increasingly become a lens through which scholars investigate broader questions around participation, agency, identity, and space (Jeffrey and Dyson 2008). Yet childhood continues to be framed ‘as a thing or a possession that may be given, lost, stolen, or even disappear’ (Thorne 2009, 19). In this construction, largely promoted by Western institutions, children are not valued producers, but economic dependents (Ansell 2005, 11). As Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998, 12) highlight ‘[t]he instrumental value of children has been largely replaced by their expressive worth. Children have become relatively worthless (economically) to their parents, but priceless in terms of their psychological worth’. In this section, I interrogate these varying constructions of childhood in order to outline the importance of studying children’s everyday experiences with work, particularly within the dominant present-day regulatory policies/frameworks at all scales (local, national, and international) that favours Western conceptualisations of childhood as a time of innocence, protection, and play (Ansell 2005, 11).

2.2.1 CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

The topic of childhood emerged as a key area of interest in scholarly writing during the last half of the twentieth century. Early work on childhood was driven primarily by social historians concerned to demonstrate the category of childhood as a socio-historical

process (cf. Ariès 1962; Cunningham 1995; Hendrick 1997). This body of work illustrated the way the concept of childhood has evolved over time. One of the most influential studies on the construction of childhood is Historian Philippe Ariès' (1962) seminal work that traces the rise of the socially-constructed category of childhood through time. Ariès famously argues that the concept of childhood did not exist prior to the fifteenth century, during which time children beyond the stage of infancy were treated as 'miniature adults' and fully integrated into adult life (Ariès 1962, 8). According to Hendrick (1997), under the influence of Romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, social theorists began to view children as inherently different from adults. Childhood became a period set apart from the adult world, and was postulated as a time of dependence. This construction of childhood and the child/adult dichotomy emerged alongside the decline of industrialism in Western Europe, and the parallel rise of the modern nuclear family and the creation of age-segregated schools (Hollos 2002; Ariès 1976, 45). Ariès (1976) argues, however, that childhood remained limited to aristocratic boys, and therefore, was markedly structured around class, race and gender. It was only during the twentieth century that ideas about childhood, specifically in Europe and the United States, were extended to the less privileged and socially marginalised (Ariès 1976, 45; Thorne 2009, 20).

Chris Jenks (1996) reinforced and extended the notion that childhood is a social construction linked to socio-historical processes by identifying two distinct images of childhood (Figure 2.1): a) Dionysian, which he argues, dominated in the west during the nineteenth century; and b) Apollonian, which emerged later. In the Dionysian understandings of childhood, linked to the Catholic doctrine of original sin, children are conceived as 'little devils' in need of moral guidance and strict discipline to protect them from themselves (Ansell 2005, 11). Scholars engaged in contemporary social scientific studies of children such as Boyden (1997) argue that this ideology continues to influence

policy on poor children in the global South today. Similarly, Ansell (2005) suggests that there remains a fear that children in certain spaces and conditions may ‘liberate the demonic forces already present in the child... [a]llowing evil forces inherent in the child to be unleashed ... [and] threaten not only children themselves, but also wider adult society’ (11). The construction of childhood in relation to particular spaces, especially those beyond the private boundaries of the home, remains a pertinent theme in the contemporary context, and will be discussed later in the chapter, as well as through each of the space-based empirical chapters of this study.

Jenks’ (1996) Apollonian perceptions of children partly contradict those represented by Dionysian and cast children, instead, as ‘little angels’ born innocent and pure and in need of protection, rather than discipline (Holloway and Valentine 2000a, 4). In this view, childhood is seen as a time of play and joy – a period of innocence to be preserved and protected for as long as possible. Hendrick (1997) writes that in this perspective, ‘growing up became synonymous with the loss of Paradise’ (36). Holloway and Valentine (2000a) emphasise that neither perception of childhood is unproblematic, nor should they be taken as mutually exclusive replacements of each other (4). Rather, both continue to be mobilised in contemporary societies, both in the North and the South

FIGURE 2.1: CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD: DIONYSIAN AND APOLLONIAN VIEWS

Dionysian Childhood is a time to learn discipline Children should be seen and not heard Children need protection from themselves	Apollonian Childhood is a time for play, and not for work Children need protection from the world Children are innocent and passive Children should be happy
Both Childhood is a time set apart from the adult world Children belong in families Children are closer to nature than adults Children should be recipients of adult care	

Source: Adapted from Ansell 2005, 11

In mapping the emergence and evolution of the category of childhood through time, Aries (1962), Holloway and Valentine (2000a), Jenks (1996), Hendrick (1997) and other scholars discussed above reveal that childhood is not a natural category, but is a social construct. As Aitken (2001a) suggests childhood is a 'social, political, economic and moral construction and it always relates to particular cultural histories and geographies' (120).

In conjunction with the social construction argument, scholars such as James and Prout (1997) note a reconstruction of childhood during the latter part of the 1980s that moved to establish children as social agents rather than passive recipients. Studies that draw on this notion of childhood are often referred to in the literature as 'the new social studies of childhood', and prompted the widespread interest in childhood within disciplines such as Anthropology and Geography. According to Holloway and Valentine (2000a), through the new social studies of childhood there has been 'an explicit recognition of the growing cross-fertilisation of ideas between researchers in a variety of social science disciplines, including geography' (6). Aitkin (2001a) suggests that this was directed by a concern over the 'everyday contexts of children's lived experiences' (120). James and Prout (1997) refer to this new approach to the study of childhood as an emergent paradigm, and established a list of six key features of the paradigm². Included in this list are: childhood is a social construction; childhood cannot be separated from other social institutions, such as class, ethnicity and gender; children's social relationships are worthy of study in their own right; children must be recognised as social agents who are not passive subjects; and children's voices must be incorporated into studies of childhood (Prout and James 1997, 8). Hollos (2002) suggests that this new paradigm in the study of childhood 'emphasises the economic, rather than the

² The 'emergent paradigm' is produced in its entirety in Prout and James 1997, p. 8.

sentimental value of children' (168). The re-construction of childhood in these terms was driven by a concern with the approach to children in academic literature as happy, safe and innocent despite emerging media depictions of children experiencing poverty, famine, and war in the non-Western contexts, and child abuse, adolescent homelessness, and poverty in the west (Prout and James 1997, 1-2). In my study, I engage with, and build upon, several key features of the emergent paradigm, recognising, in particular, that childhood is a social construction, the importance of social institutions in defining childhood, specifically class, gender and ethnicity, and the recognition of children as social agents with voice.

2.2.2 CHILDHOOD TODAY

The new paradigm has propelled research on children toward a concern over their everyday lived experiences. It is clear from the literature, however, that the most influential feature of this new paradigm has been the call to examine childhood and children as active social actors, and not simply passive subjects in respect to their social construction by adults (Prout and James 1997). It is within the framework of children's social agency that, in the last two decades, there has been a burgeoning interest in studying the lives of children and youth. Recent studies in human geography, anthropology and sociology have challenged the conventional Western ideals of childhood by illustrating the way children contest threats to their well-being and actively shape their own lives (Jeffrey and Dyson 2008; Liebel 2004).

In particular, academic work specifically on the global South has uncovered the extent to which children are able to negotiate and contest their marginalisation through spatial (Beazley 2000; 2002), political (Skelton 2010), economic (Boyden and Levison 2000) and social (Dyson 2008) constructions and negotiations. A few brief examples serve to illustrate this point. Harriott Beazley (2002) in her study of children living on

the streets in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, identifies 'geographies of resistance', where street girls actively subvert culturally dominant patriarchal attitudes and related abuses around their use of public space, through their construction of particular spaces of belonging within the city. She writes, 'these tactics of resistance which street girls have adopted in the face of their multifaceted marginalisation can be recognised as a production of their own separate culture' (Beazley 2002, 1679). Similarly, Jensen (2013) in her study of young female domestic workers in Bangladesh exposes how the young girls carve out temporary spaces of belonging and association despite their occupational isolation and spatial restrictions, through the use of apartment rooftops as a way of temporarily relieving 'the rigid personal hierarchy and the controlling gaze in the home of their employers' (13). Dyson (2010), in her study of girls' work in the high Himalayas, identifies ways in which girls negotiate work-related responsibilities and resist cultural stereotypes through social alliances and friendship. These studies illustrate the 'socially constructed, context specific and false nature of Western notions of innocence and passivity in childhood' (Evans 2008, 1668). In this study, I adopt a similar approach to childhood. At the core of my analysis of working children and their socio-spatial relations, is the understanding that children are neither passive victims, nor unaware of their circumstances, and instead, actively engage with the everyday processes within which they are embedded.

There remains, however, an explicit concern by scholars about the way childhood continues to be framed in contemporary policy, media, and through NGO programmes as a protected stage in the life course (Ruddick 2003; Swanson 2010; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004; Hollos 2002; Boyden 1997). As Diduck (1999) argues 'the power of the *idea* of childhood... remains strong, so that the paramountcy of their welfare is asserted over their rights legally. Moreover, the protection of that welfare becomes a legal, political and moral imperative' (130-131). In spite of advances providing children with agency,

public, and to an extent, academic discourse on children today is still marked by a 'high moral tone' (Liebel 2004, 5). Childhood continues to be framed in contemporary policy within a Western framework that condemns the child who is in violation of the 'boundaries between childhood and adulthood' (Aitken 2001a, 123). Diduck (1999) identifies children in breach of their childhood as those who participate in market activities and engage with the public sphere (127-128). In terms of personal attributes, Aitken (2001a) notes that children who emulate 'qualities admired in adults such as independence, savvy and wariness are frowned upon' (125).

The precise characteristics of children who are considered to have a childhood, however, remain ambiguous. As Hecht (1998) suggests childhood is frequently seen to embody 'readily defined, self-evident characteristics' (71). He argues:

If children live particular experiences, they are said to have a childhood. But rarely are these characteristics or experiences defined. Because childhood is seen as universal, though intangible and evanescent, it defies description and becomes readily apparent only in its absence (Hecht 1998, 71).

In this regard, it is principally in relation to the image of the unhappy or unnatural child – living and working in less than ideal conditions – that childhood is framed today. International policy on children primarily originates from the global North and is still guided by the Apollonian view of childhood as safe, happy and protected (Robson 2001). Furthermore, international policies seek to institute a universal standard of childhood and children despite 'highly differentiated global contexts' (Aitken 2001a 124). At the policy level, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was adopted in 1989, and served as the first piece of international policy that situated the child as a social actor with rights to be protected. Still, the policy is driven by the traditional Western perspective on childhood, as a 'stage' that might be 'lost'. Olga Nieuwenhuys (1998, 270) argues that the UNCRC:

...is not culturally neutral but is grounded in the assumption both of the superiority of the North and of the need to impose this model on a global scale. As

this global project denies the possibility of diverse childhoods, it not only underscores the superiority of the Northern ideal but also condemns “other” styles of upbringing as a “lack,” or, to use the popular expression, of being “outside childhood”.

Scholars engaged in studies of young people in the global South are highly critical of this process, which is commonly deemed ‘the global export of childhood’ (Swanson 2005, 64). They have highlighted the way in which Western ideals of childhood are being propagandised into non-Western contexts, where the conditions to foster such ideals are simply not present. Ruddick (2003) notes, for example, the problematic exportation of modern Western ideals of childhood to non-Western contexts, in which the resources needed to reproduce these ideals are lacking (341-342):

If I sift back through the countless images of the Third World that have confronted me through the media—television, magazines and fliers sent to my house—one persistent iconography dominates. This is the tight-shot close-up photograph of a single child—usually (apparently) not older than ten or eleven, looking, wide-eyed, directly into the camera. This photo is not a portrait: it does not communicate distinctive characteristics of the child. This “Child” comes to stand as the universal child of developing nations, disconnected from context, with few clues as to his or her culture or background. To the extent it is included, context simply signifies excessive and incessant labour and/or poverty. What I am asked to consider is this child’s aloneness — his/her absolute dependence upon me as funder, political supporter, volunteer for his/her welfare. Support mechanisms—kinship structures, village context—are absent. This absence intrigues me: it makes invisible a context that might be disrupted by my intervention, and it allows me to fill the emptied space with fantasies of my own idealized interpretation of childhood. (Ruddick 2003, 341)

Ruddick’s claim gives credence to Hecht’s argument outlined earlier, where childhood or lack of childhood is assumed according to what is missing, rather than defined within its particular context. In this sense, the need for a grounded cultural and spatial theoretical understanding of childhood forms a key critique of the global export of childhood, for the ‘imposition of one homogenous idea of childhood is clearly problematic when faced with the multiple realities of children and young people’s lives globally’ (Evans 2008, 1668).

Participation of children in waged work, in particular, continues to be seen as inappropriate and exploitative, hence my focus on working children. It is my intention in

this study to interrogate the Western-centric view that working children are in breach of their childhood. Furthermore, I contend that the Western and non-Western dichotomy, itself, must be abandoned, for the non-Western childhood as a homogenous category is inherently deemed to be 'poor'. For example, Sue Ruddick's (2003) argument around the global export of childhood, where Western childhoods cannot be extrapolated to non-Western contexts because of a lack of resources, is flawed, for it is only relevant when explored from a class position. Childhood in this regard, varies in both time and place, but is also contingent on their social (gender, ethnicity) and structural (class) identities.

The concept of 'multiple childhoods' (cf. Balagopalan 2011; Young and Barrett 2001) is used to tackle the homogenous depiction of childhood in academic discourse. Conceived as a way of recognising the 'complex and multiple realities of children's lives', the theory of 'multiple childhoods' seeks to engage with 'who the child is (as with class, gender and even personality) and where the child comes from (both in terms of place and time) in order to define important situations (or positions)' from which to understand children (Matthews and Limb 1999, 65). This theory remains rather under-utilised in the literature; however, it is a useful way of approaching the nuances of non-Western childhoods, for childhood and children in the majority world³ deserve to be understood in a spatially and culturally independent manner, particularly within the local framework of class, ethnicity, gender, and religion (and caste, in the case of India), which cuts across childhood. Recognising childhood and everyday experiences of children as a function of these social structures and processes, therefore, informs my approach to childhood in this study. While the children involved in my study are from similar socio-economic backgrounds, their everyday experiences with work are often

³ The term, 'majority world' is largely associated with Samantha Punch (2003), who has contributed widely to research on childhoods in rural Bolivia. She relies on this term, instead of on the 'first world'/'third world' dichotomy, to emphasise that First world children are the minority, while Third world children are the majority of the world's child population. In this study, I do not rely on this term, however, use it when I wish to represent the extent of the quantitative population difference between children in the minority world and majority world.

contingent on their specific social characteristics. Therefore, I operationalise the concept of multiple childhoods by treating childhood from a cultural, spatial, and identity- based perspective, incorporating the variables of ethnicity, culture, class, and caste, rather than essentialising children in India as a homogenous category.

2.2.3 SPATIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

In addition to the discursive constructions of childhood outlined above, children have also tended to be constructed, and thus, regulated in relation to geographical spaces. Childhood and space are intricately and inextricably intertwined, for childhood is as much a spatial construction as it is a temporal construction. Space has appeared in literature in recent years as a defining feature of the concept of childhood. According to scholars such as Aitken (2001a; 2001b), Valentine (2003), and Gagen (2004), several studies in the 1970s such as Bunge and Bordessa's (1975) work on children's spatial oppression in Toronto and Detroit, and Hart's (1979) study of children's experiences of space and place in a small New England town, set the stage for subsequent geographical research on children – in particular, their lived experiences in relation to their use of, and access to, space. Valentine (2003) argues, 'from these roots children's geographies have subsequently flourished and diversified' (37).

The basic notion of childhood, as discussed so far, is markedly connected to ideas around children's spaces of belonging, specifically, concerns over protection, purity, and play (Jones 2000). Nieuwenhuys (2003), for example, expresses the fundamental connection between space and perceptions of childhood, particularly the role of space as the defining variable between what is considered as a pure, secure, and protected childhood, versus an insecure or 'non-childhood'. She writes:

Children should at all times be in safe, supervised, controlled spaces. Outside these spaces their safety, and with it their very experience of childhood, is deemed to be at risk. Children who spend too much of their time outside the

safe spaces of childhood are not only deemed to be out of place, they are also perceived to as being outside childhood (Nieuwenhuys 2003, 99)

Space, in this context, is conceived of as an absolute – a physical and fixed ‘container’ in which things happen (Harvey 2004, 3), and children are considered a reflection of the spaces they inhabit. Children have essentially been constructed through a spatial discourse that has produced norms, which continue to be to significant today, around childlike and un-childlike spaces. In this regard, childhood is discursively co-constructed alongside space (Ansell 2009, 190). The home, school and playground, in particular, have come to represent sites of childhood, while the street and other public spaces – predominantly urban public spaces – are characterised as sites of non-childhood (James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Jones 2000). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there exists a perception that young people’s engagement with public space is unchild-like and a violation in the moral structure of society (Aitken 2001b, 156). This is in stark contrast to the space of the home, often depicted as a haven ‘where parents can ensure their children’s upbringing’ (Christensen and O’Brien 2003, 5). The private and ‘idyllic’ rural (Jones 2000), and the public and urban, therefore, have been synonymised with childhood and loss of childhood, respectively.

Geographer, Elizabeth Gagen (2004) suggests that the designation of children to the private realm, particularly the home, is a consequence of the nineteenth century reallocation of ‘women and family to the private sphere and men and work to the public’ (407). James, Jenks and Prout (1998) observe that the home was constituted as a ‘space of childhood through its binding of the concepts of “family” and “home” into the “modern domestic ideal”’ (53; quotations in original). According to scholars, during the twentieth century, two parallel forces played out across North America and Europe that influenced ideas around the right and wrong spaces of childhood (Gagen 2004). The first was the emergence of a moral tension between the ‘private virtue of the family’ and a new ‘public

youth culture' driven by a 'commercialised leisure industry' in the city (Gagen 2004, 408). Second, was a rising anxiety over children's susceptibility to dangers and threats in public space, through media-driven notions such as 'stranger danger' and the 'corrupting public' (Aitken 2001a, 124). This reinforced the notion of home as a sanctuary and a space of morality, and the street as dangerous and immoral. Gagen (2004) suggests that these processes also revived the dual conception of childhood as a time of innocence and wickedness, where, in the Dionysian tradition, children in the public realm are vilified and viewed as deviants, while in the Apollonian tradition, children in public space are assumed to be in physical danger and unable to protect themselves (cf. Jones (2000)). In this regard, children's identities are constructed by their spatial contexts. Adopting the example of the 'juvenile delinquent' and 'youth gangs', Gagen (2004) asserts that 'abnormality has been defined by children's occupation of the wrong space' (408).

In recent years, geographers have sought to examine these notions of space and childhood through the study of children's micro-geographies – the way they interact with their immediate environments – to uncover how children observe and engage with the world around them (Ansell 2009, 190), and show how childhood is discursively constructed and regulated through space (Holloway and Valentine 2000b, 776). Scholars have interrogated the notion that childhood is located in particular spaces, and argue that space is not a discrete and bounded entity (Gagen 2004, 407). Instead, it has been suggested that spaces operate in and through one another, as well as, are influenced by social processes (Gagen 2004). Scholars such as James et al (1998) and Holloway and Valentine (2000a), have further argued that control and power are pivotal to the spatiality of childhood. James et al (1998), looking at the home, the school and the city, write that 'each [site] is dedicated to the control and regulation of the child's body and mind through regimes of discipline, learning, development, maturation and skill' (38). I would argue to include exclusion, fear and abuse. The home, for example, has most often

been characterised in 'benign' terms, as a 'refuge, a source of comfort in a world otherwise replete with tension and conflict and the only environment in which individuals can function as autonomous agents' (Sibley 1995, 93). Yet, as scholars such as Duncan and Lambert (2013) have argued, the home can also be a site of 'fear and danger' (384). Sibley (1995), similarly, critiques the 'house as a haven' thesis and suggests that the home is a sphere of power relations – it 'provides a context for violence, child abuse, depression...' (94). Case studies such as Jensen's (2013) of child workers in the space of the home, provide evidence of the extent to which the home is far from a 'safe haven', arguing instead that it is a locus of unequal and exclusionary power relations, which are exercised through verbal and physical abuse, and a further spatial segregation within the home, for example, hidden from view in the kitchen or a child's play room. In this regard, there has been some academic interest in children's everyday spaces, and the way children's identities are made and remade through their socio-spatial encounters (Beazley 2002; Gough and Franch 2006) and movements (van Blerk 2005; Skelton 2000). This study builds upon these works by examining the topic of working childhoods through the lens of the workplace. I interrogate the social and power relations at play in the perceived safe and unsafe spaces of childhood, from the private space of the home, and the semi-public factories and shops, to the public street.

The conceptualisation of childhood through associations with legitimate and illegitimate spaces has been of key significance in studies of children who are socially marginalised including homeless and street children (Ruddick 1995), working children (Hecht 1998; de Oliveira 2000; Jensen 2013), girls (Beazley 2002; Skelton 2000), and indigenous children (Swanson 2010). Van Blerk (2005) argues that children suffer exclusion and marginalisation as a result of the globalised image of an 'appropriate' or 'desired' childhood in which children are located within the arenas of the 'home and family' (9). Beazley (2000; 2002) for example, in her work on street children in

Indonesia, shows how street children's socio-spatial marginalisation by public institutions and mainstream society in Indonesia are reflected in the 'marginality of spaces that they occupy on the street' (2002, 1666). Moreover, she argues that street girls' face a further marginalisation as a result of their subordination in male dominated street life, and must further negotiate social and personal spaces in the city that are different from boys' (2002, 1665). Bey (2003), in this regard, broadly suggests that child labour is largely condemned because it places children outside the home and family. Childhood is regulated in relation to the way children are spatially conceived.

Drawing on these arguments, in my study of working children, I recognise childhood as spatially constructed, and thus approach children's everyday lived experiences, social and power relations, and negotiations as spatially contingent. It should be noted that Western constructions of childhood, as the literature has shown, have sought to uncover the extent to which children are capable social agents in their own right by examining their social and spatial capacity and their negotiations with hegemonic social and institutional structures in order to carve out their own identities. Non-Western childhoods, however, have not been constructed theoretically in the same way as Western childhoods. Rather, the literature has largely aimed at disassembling Western constructions of childhood as a universal concept through micro-scale studies of children in the global South.

Overall, this chapter has presented the range of ways in which childhood has been constructed since it was first conceived of as a stage distinct from adulthood. This discussion serves as a useful framework from which to examine the links between discursive constructions of childhood and the power relations, both in relation to adults, as well as in terms of social structures such as class, gender and ethnicity that children negotiate. Within the larger framework of this study, children's working lives are fundamentally linked to the way they navigate and negotiate the everyday social and

power relations, and structural processes that occur within the spaces in which they work. I also suggest that childhood cannot be essentialised and children must be considered within their local contexts through class, gender, culture, religion, race (and caste, in India). I demonstrate these arguments in the empirical chapters that follow.

2.2.4 THINKING ABOUT SPACE

So far in this chapter, I have outlined the ways in which childhood has been spatially constructed. The significance of space in this study, however, is not only in relation to constructions of childhood, but is essential to children's social interactions, power relations, and everyday experiences of work. 'Locations provide a power-laden setting for the performances of children's work, in that children's location – their spatial positions, access to resources and their bodily comportment – shape how they seek to negotiate or make sense of their work' (Dyson 2008, 162). In this context, I present here, as another point from which this study departs, a brief outline of how space has been theorised, and the way in which I conceptualise space in this thesis.

The concept of space is at the centre of geographical scholarship. According to Halford (2008), Geographers are widely viewed in scholarship as the 'custodians' of space and have contributed significantly to theorising space. Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1994; 1998; 2005), and Harvey (1989) are among the most influential of these scholars. In its original conception, space was understood in two distinct forms: absolute space, and relative space (Blaut 1961). Absolute space was conceived of as fixed – a distinct and physical 'frame' in which things happen (Harvey 2004, 3). Relative space, alternatively, was understood as metaphysical and inherently bound to time (Harvey 2004). Lefebvre (1991), conversely, argued for a spatial triad composed of: a) spatial practice, where action produces space; b) representations of space, in which space is imagined and

abstract; and c) representational space, where space is produced through everyday social interactions (Harvey 2004). Lefebvre (1991, 46) writes:

[S]patial practice, representations of space and representational spaces contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period. Relations between the three moments of the perceived, the conceived and the lived are never either simple or stable[...]

Lefebvre's notion of space is highly influential and useful in the context of this study – particularly his notion of representational space. This study relies most significantly, however, on Doreen Massey's (1994) explorations and theorisations of space. She suggests that space is a relational construct and argues that space should be thought of as: a) a product of interrelations; b) the sphere of a multiplicity of relations; and c) as continually constructed ('always being made') (Massey 2005, 9). She writes:

...the spatial can be constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales from the global [...] to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace (Massey 1994, 2; 4).

My approach to childhood and children's everyday experiences of work are framed within this view of space, defined by Massey, as organised through a vast 'complexity of interacting social relations' at different scales (Massey 1998, 127). This conceptualisation of space demands an examination of space beyond the *absolute* or the simple mapping of things in space. Rather, it requires a look into how particular spaces are made and remade, which in the context of this study, I argue to be through social relations of age, class, caste, and gender, power hierarchies, and relations of kin. The relational nature of space is particularly relevant to my investigation because the 'social implications of children's work can be construed as radically different in various spaces' (Jennings et al 232).

2.3 THE GEOGRAPHIES OF CHILDREN'S WORK

In the Western bourgeois ideal of childhood, children and work are seen as 'mutually exclusive contraries' (Liebel 2004, 77). Despite the recent assertion that children are active social agents, their participation in work remains acceptable only when it serves the purpose of learning or to generate discipline or a sense of responsibility (Liebel 2004). In fact, the very question of where childhood begins and where it ends is markedly linked to the practice of 'work'. The process through which children make the transition from childhood to adulthood has been a subject of concern among scholars in recent years (cf. Valentine 2003; Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006; Jeffrey and McDowell 2004). In the 1980s, the 'life course' theory emerged among Western scholars, particularly sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and psychologists, which challenged the previously accepted 'life cycle' theory that conceptualised the process of aging as through a series of distinct successive stages that all individuals moved between from birth to death (Jeffrey 2010; Gagen 2013, 252). The 'life course', alternatively, was envisaged as a process of aging that is 'fluid and contingent...whereby changes are dependent on socio-spatial context and transitions themselves are understood to be variable' (Gagen 2013, 252). Focusing specifically on the process between childhood and adulthood (theorised to be through a brief period of youth) Heinz (2009) suggests that the core transitions concern the 'matching of education and employment which is the backbone for implementing one's aspirations and to coordinate participation in the spheres of family life, consumption and citizenship' (4). Essentially, in the Western tradition, engagement with employment is depicted as a pivotal moment signalling the shift from childhood to adulthood.

In the majority world, in particular among the dispossessed and marginalised classes, children often move back and forth between 'child and adult-centred worlds' through the integration of work, play and school (Punch 2003). Liebel (2004) writing

about his work in parts of Africa, argues that, '[i]n these [societies], work has an important place' (77). The perception that there exists a boundary between childhood and adulthood, whose beginning and end is marked by education, work, family life and consumption (Heinz 2009), is notably a Western construction. This is evidenced by a significant body of literature that has emerged from studies of children in the non-West and the importance of work in their lives. As will be illustrated later in this chapter, many children are engaged in work. The transitions model, however, neglects the multiple and nuanced ways in which children engage with work, and diminishes the significance of the work children do by using it as a mere marker for the transition to adulthood. My approach to work in this study, therefore, is not as a marker for the graduation from childhood to adulthood, but rather as an important component of the lives of the children in this study. In the section that follows, I provide an overview of the literature that informs my approach toward children's work, uncovering the definition of work and providing an understanding of why and how children participate in work.

2.3.1 CHILDREN'S GEOGRAPHIES OF WORK

DEFINING WORK

There is little consensus among scholars about the definitions of children's work. Through a reading of the literature and within policy by international institutions on working children, *work* is considered in a range of contradictory ways. The ILO for example, considers work as contributing to the gross national product (GNP) (Liebel 2004). This view of work, however, excludes income-generating activities such as domestic work, which according to Chen (2011) does not contribute directly to the GNP, but might enable others to work outside the home. It also excludes work that does not take the form of market transactions, such as 'household production', 'reproductive work', and 'non-monetised market exchange' (Harriss-White 2003a, 4). Alternatively,

Liebel (2004) highlights the way in which UNICEF's definition of children's work is constructed along moral lines, by incorporating activities in some frameworks, and not in others. For example, begging is not considered work, yet is considered 'illegal work' within certain programmes (43).

In a general sense, work can be defined as encompassing all activities that sustain our daily lives (McDowell 2009, 26). Work can involve the 'application of labour' or an exchange of goods, services, and ideas (McDowell 2009, 26). It can be secure or insecure, waged or unwaged, easy and organized, or dirty and violent; it can be conducted in a variety of spaces and under a range of conditions (McDowell 2009, 26; Castel 2000). Furthermore,

[w]ork is what makes life possible, it is a way of producing things to eat, to wear, to shelter in and to sustain not only ourselves but also all those people who are considered too young, too old, too weak or incapable of working for themselves. Work involves human effort...in order to transform material resources into goods for the use of individual workers, their households and other dependents and for exchange with others' (McDowell 2009, 26).

Liebel (2004), in the same broad sense, proposes that children's work comprises 'all activities carried out by children – of any age – that result from an objective and/or subjectively felt necessity of individual and social reproduction' (46). Invernizzi's (2003) definition of work fits within Liebel's definition, as well as extends it; she defines work through a social lens, rejecting the notion that it is exclusively for material benefit. Instead, she considers children's work, in addition to sustaining daily life, as a way of establishing social relations, fostering belonging, and as identity-building (321). Together, McDowell (2009) and Liebel's (2004) definitions, along with Invernizzi's notion of work is particularly useful in understanding children's working lives in the context of my study, for they, with equal importance, pay heed to the life-sustaining necessity of work, the inherently plural nature of child work, as well as the social relevance of work in terms of, both, its influence over participation, and its wider social bearing.

WHY DO CHILDREN WORK?

Geographers and other social scientists (e.g. Dyson 2008; 2010, Beazley 2000; 2002, and Aitken et al 2006), have contributed significantly to research on childhood and work at various scales, in different spaces and in connection to a range of actors. As illustrated earlier, in the modern era children's participation in work has generally been viewed as an aberration. Liebel (2004) observes that the dominant perspective of children's work is as 'burdensome, a strain and a sacrifice...involving dangers and risks which are bound to hinder children's development and rob them of their freedom (4). Aitken (2001a) similarly argues:

a child as part of the market economy is seen in the global North as a child without childhood, a child who is robbed of the proper experiences and categories of children; in short, a subject defined by a 'lack' (124).

Yet the bulk of the evidence on children's participation in work has emerged out of research in the global South. In this regard, children in the global South are perceived to lack childhood. 'Their economic savvy disrupts ideas of children as innocents and so they transgress boundaries between constructions of adults and children' as discussed earlier (Aitken 2001a, 124). Rather, scholars have shown that children may pursue work as a vehicle for establishing social relations, producing spaces of belonging, and resisting unfavourable conditions. It can also serve as a way in which children are able to create opportunities to carry out activities that are considered childlike, such as play (Katz 2004). Liebel (2004), for example, who has written on working children in a range of global North and South contexts, perceives children's work not merely as a burden or a necessity, but as a means of education and a source of pride and agency. He writes,

The working children in the south remind us that we cannot understand and evaluate children's work without considering the specific conditions under which children live. Many work not only because there is no other solution for them or because they feel responsible for their families, but also because, by means of working, they can overcome their impotence and gain a new self-confidence (Liebel 2004, 2).

Most significantly, children's work has been regarded as a symptom of poverty. Abebe (2007) for example, suggests that families facing economic instability often pursue alternative avenues for income generation.

[P]arents must engage with alternative livelihood strategies, partly by transferring the burden of work [...] to children. Moreover, the sustainability of household livelihoods is dependent on the labor [sic] and money children contribute by engaging in income generating activities' (83).

The employment of children, correspondingly, can occasionally be advantageous for employers from an economic perspective. Aitken et al (2006), for example, draws on the work of Marx (1976), who argued that children's labour 'is part of incipient capitalism in any particular place because it is flexible, cheap and undermines men's labour' (367). Similarly, Jeffrey (2010) suggests that economic transformations at the global scale have 'catapulted' children into forms of paid employment (500). Drawing again on Abebe's (2007) work, children's engagement in work and other 'adult roles' may be driven by a range of globalising processes, such as unfair trade, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and Structural Adjustment Programmes (78).

While economic constraints largely drive children into paid and unpaid (in the home) forms of work, scholars such as Invernizzi (2003) have also defined work through a social lens, rejecting the notion that work is exclusively for material benefit. She notes, based on her research with street working children in Lima, that in addition to sustaining daily life, children's work also serves as a way of establishing social relations, fostering belonging, and identity building. Amin, Quayes, and Rives (2004), also argue that culture can serve as an explanation for children's work, such as in the context of Bangladesh, where their study is situated. They suggest that a key factor motivating families to include their children in work is the cultural ideology against idleness, particularly for boys. Illustrative of the old English saying, 'the Devil makes mischief for idle hands', they write, 'idleness [is] deemed especially harmful to urban boys, whom

parents [fear will] become involved in criminal activities' (Amin, Quayes and Rives 2004, 877). They observe, in particular, a strong cultural belief that working children are more prepared to be productive adults.

In addition to arguments about sustaining daily life, current research has also drawn attention to the way work might also be approached and pursued as a social activity. Liebel (2004) and others (Katz 2004) have illustrated the inseparable link between children's work and play. Liebel (2004), for instance, draws on the example of indigenous societies of the South American Andes to argue that work is practised as a 'playful competition between groups' (182). He insists that 'play is not regarded as the opposite of or compensation for work, but as a part of daily life' (Liebel 2004, 182). Katz (2004), similarly, observed among the children in her study, that '[p]lay overlapped with, punctuated, and enveloped work in ways that often made the two indistinguishable in children's lives' (95). Activities considered to be 'play', often had a 'work-like aspect or outcome', such as 'building projects', going on 'food expeditions', and 'making charcoal kilns' (95). Scholars have also shown the way in which children undertake work as a form of resistance. Jensen (2013), through her study of young domestic workers in Bangladesh, notes the way in which some girls pursue domestic work as a means of stopping or postponing an unwanted marriage. Jensen argues that the girls subvert cultural norms by participating in work, and therefore, exercise a form of 'thick agency'.

Vàsconez and Proaño (2002)⁴ have developed a useful way of presenting the determinants of children's work in the space of the street. Based on their research in six cities in Ecuador, and taking into account 'children's age of entry into the workforce, types of work, reasons for working, perceptions of work, socio-economic conditions, and education', they suggest four categories of children's work. In the first category, 'work

⁴ The study by Vàsconez and Proaño (2002) is written in Spanish. Their typology and other relevant sections of their study were translated to English for my understanding by an acquaintance who is a professional translator.

that provides skills and training', they suggest, like Liebel (2004) and Amin, Quayes and Rives (2004), that work can be a means of education or the production of skills. In the second category, 'work that gradually displaces school', they describe this group as children who increasingly resist education in favour of work as a result of poor performance in school, or an increased need to supplement the household income. The third category, 'adultization' of work through 'early entry into the adult labour force' involves children who began working at an early age, only achieving a few years of education, as a result of poverty. In the last category, 'work that detaches children from childhood', the authors suggest that children are engaged in work that meets their daily needs, independently from their families. Each category of child is also considered in relation to their familial structure. Vàsconez and Proaño (2002), however, fail to engage with social structures of identity such as gender, race and ethnicity. Furthermore, each category is distinct and separate from the others, essentially glossing over children's particular experiences and instead, boxing them into specific identities. Moreover, they ignore the importance of work as a social activity, as mentioned above. Nonetheless, the authors' typology is useful in understanding some of the ways in which children's participation in work might be considered. The various illustrations of work pay heed to the life-sustaining necessity of children's work, as well as the social relevance of work in terms of both, its influence over participation, and its wider social bearing. These, taken together, form my definitional approach to children's work in chapters 4 to 7.

HOW DO CHILDREN WORK?

As has been reiterated throughout this chapter, recent geographies building upon the new social studies of childhood have emphasised the ways in which working children are able to exercise agency and negotiate their marginality. Working children are being re-considered in scholarly work as social and economic agents able to negotiate their

labour and exercise agency over their working lives (Edmonds and Pavcnik 2005; Abebe 2008; Nieuwenhuys 1994; Jennings, et al 2006). In this vein, a range of research has emerged to show how children are able to negotiate their labour. One way in which children achieve this is by establishing social relations and cultivating spaces of belonging. Heissler (2013), for example, illustrates the way that child workers in Bangladesh who had migrated for work became involved with social networks – in some cases, initiating the networks themselves – to access resources and resist or escape unsuitable working conditions. Heissler argues that children's social ties serve as important economic and social resources. Jensen (2013) similarly shows how young domestic workers cultivate spaces of belonging, and occasionally find moments of freedom and support amid a restrictive work environment, through the use of rooftop terraces.

The rooftop acted as a heterotopia or a real-and-imagined space for them, an empowering space that they could daydream about and go to for a temporary escape from the hierarchical personal relations of their employers' homes and seemingly never-ending work tasks (Jensen 2013, 10).

Drawing on one of Dyson's (2008) points regarding children's agency and work, another way in which children exercise agency and negotiate employment is by finding meaning in their work. For example, Abebe (2008) tells the story of two brothers who occasionally beg to supplement their family's income, which is often depleted by their unstable alcoholic father. He shows how they approach their begging activities as a way of helping their mother and themselves, and gaining her appreciation. Abebe reveals that the children felt 'proud and worthy' and their 'participation in family livelihoods restores their sense of confidence and self-reliance' (276). In addition to imbuing their work with a sense of duty and fulfilment, another way in which children find meaning in their work is by engaging in work as a form of self-preservation or escape from other restrictive institutions and structures. It is necessary to point out that while children's agency has

been argued through studies like the ones above, it is an attribute that cannot be generalised and must be considered within its appropriate context. Not doing so runs the risk of ignoring the plight of children who are engaged in exploitative work contexts such as bonded labour. For example, despite Jensen's (2013) observations, she also notes some examples of child workers in her study who were forbidden from visiting the rooftop terrace.

This discussion, thus far, illustrates a range of reasons and ways that young people approach work. The studies above have demonstrated the extent to which children are resilient and capable, and are able of negotiating their everyday activities and engaging in forms of resistance. To reiterate the point made earlier, young people are not passive victims of broader processes. Yet, despite their agency and capacity, as Dyson (2008) notes young people are not 'heroic subjects freely choosing their futures' (162). While some might engage in work consciously and willingly, such as in the examples above, it is important to note that children's work may still be burdensome and even exploitative. Returning to Jensen's (2013) case study on domestic workers, for example, she notes that despite undertaking work as a way to subvert unfavourable cultural norms, they must often contend with restrictive workspaces, demanding work schedules, and harsh, even abusive, behaviour by employers. According to Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) and others (Jha 2009), children tend to have lower wages, few benefits, and limited legal and social protections than 'adult' workers, for their work essentially lies outside the regulative reach of the state (Jha 2009). As Bequele and Boyden (1988) assert, most child workers are found in unregistered enterprises, and 'cost less...have no rights as workers, and cannot join trade unions' (153). They are prone to the decisions and regulations set out by others, including parents, employers, community members, and institutional actors, such as police, NGOs, and policy. Despite the proliferation of studies of children as social agents, they remain bound to scalar and spatial constraints

and power imbalances. It is within this context that I am concerned with the everyday social relations of children in work and space, and particularly, the ways in which children's work is regulated, a topic that has been overlooked in scholarship. I aim to address the question of how children work, particularly the social and spatial constraints with which they contend.

2.3.2 CHILD LABOUR AND CHILDREN'S WORK

The work that children do, as demonstrated thus far, is wide ranging and takes place within varying structural and social contexts. One of the most significant areas of research around children's work today is driven by the move to distinguish between the two principal forms of work outlined above – work that is beneficial, where children demonstrate agency, and which contributes to their social and psychological development, and work that is restrictive and potentially exploitative. Until recently, the policies of international organisations such as UNICEF and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) – guided by Western perceptions of childhood – aimed at completely abolishing children's labour. Children's work was perceived to be a 'relic of past times and...an indicator of cultural backwardness' (Liebel 2004, 42). Research, particularly by NGOs, promoted a differentiated view of children's work by taking into account their cultural context, as well as the effects of children's work on the socialisation process (Invernizzi 2005; Liebel 2004). Here, there has been a move to differentiate between forms of work that are harmful to the development of children, and work that contributes to 'improving their living conditions or are even beneficial to the development of their personalities' (Liebel 2004, 43). Over the past two decades, Western international agencies, alongside scholars, have embarked on a quest to distinguish between work that is positive, valuable, and encourages children's social and psychological development, and work that is exploitative and deprives children of

‘childhood’ in its Western construction. The use of the terms *child work* and *child labour*, respectively, were adopted by the ILO to reflect this distinction. This distinction, as well as the new social studies of childhood, have steered contemporary research on working children toward uncovering the significance of children’s work in promoting their development, the capacity for children to exercise agency and negotiate their working lives, and the ways in which children instil their work with meaning.

Prior to the differentiation of children’s work, all economically active children below fourteen years of age were considered as child labourers, and all children’s work was deemed exploitative (Burra 2005, 5199). The ILO now considers child labour as work that ‘deprives children of their childhood and their dignity, which hampers their access to education and the acquisition of skills, and which is performed under deplorable conditions harmful to their health and their development’ (Burra 2005, 5199). The ILO’s Convention 182, which has been ratified by most countries, seeks the abolition of the ‘worst forms of child labour’, which include ‘slavery, forced labour, trafficking, prostitution, pornography and illicit activities’, as well as work that, ‘by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety and morals of children’ (International Labour Organisation 1999, C182, Article 3). These prohibitions apply to all children under the age of 18 (ILO 1999, C182, Article 1). Children’s work, in this sense is then ambiguously considered to be all work that is not exploitative and that should be tolerated (Burra 2005).

In the academic literature, children’s work and child labour has been viewed from four key perspectives (cf. Invernizzi 2005; Ennew et al. 2003; Haider 2008). First is the ‘labour market regulation’ (Ennew et al. 2003; 4) approach, which the ILO convention can be considered under. In this discourse, child labour is considered as exploitation and children who engage in work exist outside the conventional boundaries of childhood. The objective, thus, is to eliminate child labour ‘by enlisting the power of

the state through child labour legislation such as minimum age laws, through workplace inspection by government agents, through prosecution of law violations and through providing compulsory public education' (Ennew et al. 2003, 4). Second, the 'human capital discourse', children's involvement in work is viewed to 'undermine the development of health, knowledge and skills, which children require to contribute later as adults to national economic development and their own prosperity' (Ennew et al. 2003, 4). Within this discourse, significant importance is placed on children's participation in formal education, and is an approach most popular with children's development and education organisations (Invernizzi 2005). The third discourse views child labour as 'a problem of social exclusion leading to work that exploits, alienates and oppresses children and separates them from society's normal protections and opportunities' (Ennew et al. 2003, 5). This discourse, which is subscribed to by non-government organisations, emphasises that 'exploitation' is a factor of 'isolation' and 'prohibition from work'. In this sense, 'mobilisation' and 'inclusion' in work are considered to be the most appropriate approach to diminishing exploitative work (Invernizzi 2005, 199). Finally, the 'child-rights oriented discourse' (Ennew et al. 2003, 5) is 'child centred' and distinguishes child labour as 'work that is detrimental for children involved' (Ennew et al. 2003, 5). The definition of work, in this sense, 'should ideally take into account views and experiences of children in order to assess "conditions that impair children's growth and well-being and violate their rights" with reference to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child' (Invernizzi 2005, 199)⁵. Invernizzi (2005), notes that the approaches do not 'always focus on the best interests of the child' and may be disassociated from the complex realities by essentialising children's engagement with, and experiences of, work (Invernizzi 2005, 198-199).

⁵ For a critique of each discourse, see Invernizzi (2005), 214-215.

Returning to the notion of the ‘global export of childhood’, the policies of the ILO, as well as other social policy approaches to the issue of child labour (perhaps excepting the third, ‘social responsibility discourse’), are derived from Western constructions of childhood, and neglect the nuanced nature of childhood in the non-west – particularly poor childhoods. Two interrelated observations, however, arise from my reading of the literature on institutional policies around children’s work: first, the regulation approach is ineffective since the majority of children involved in both waged and unwaged work exist ‘beyond the control and comprehension’ of national and international regulation (Haider 2008, 49); and second, policies that criminalise children’s work can be detrimental to the actual interests of children and often push them into hidden forms of work within the informal economy (Haider 2008; Aitken 2001a).

Children’s work, particularly in the global South is inevitably informal – that is, it falls outside the realm of *formal* labour regulations and social protections. For example, in India, the majority of children’s work falls within the informal economy – in small-scale trade, home industries alongside parents, domestic servitude, and in various forms of street work (Bhukuth 2008, 389). Nieuwehuys (1994) explains that recognition of working children in official statistics remains surprisingly small. In India, for example, official data show that only 11.28 million children serve as ‘child labourers’, in clear contrast with the almost 100 million children between ages 5-14 years who are not in the school system (Burra 2005, 5199). It is evident that a significant section of children involved in work in India remain invisible, and thus, are outside the regulative reach of national and international governance and action. The criminalisation of child labour by governments around the world that have ratified ILO Convention 182, has prompted children to engage further with work in the informal economy, in order to find hidden sources of work, allowing them to evade legislative action. Liebel (2004) writes:

The picture of the child as a 'state-protected creature' that is dominant and laid down in legislation, and the legal non-recognition of the working child as a worker and citizen with rights of his own, prevent the 'lived reality' of the working children from being visible and perceived. Working children 'live in a position of double illegality'; on the one hand, because of their age they are described as minors, and on the other they are pushed into the so-called 'informal market', in which they can only carry out activities 'not recognised by the law'. Thus, they are subjected doubly to a power model that falsifies their lived reality and their experience (Liebel 2004, 53).

Essentially, children's exclusion from the sphere of work 'simply changes the way in which children are subordinated, rather than ending that subordination' (Liebel 2004, 207).

The informal economy, thus, represents a source of livelihood for many children. It also, however, contributes to regulating their work encounters, which will be discussed in more detail following an overview of theories of informal economy and informality. As the following discussion will show, despite the inherent position of the informal economy in children's everyday lives, as well as the important contribution that children make to the informal economy, they have almost entirely been excluded from theories and studies on informal economy and regulation. It is within this gap that my study on working children emerges, for it is my intention to address the regulatory structures around children's work, which is largely invisible and within the informal sector.

2.4 THEORISING INFORMAL ECONOMY AND INFORMAL WORK

The children whose working lives are at the centre of chapters 4 to 7 principally work in the informal sector or on the basis of casual contracts. The literature on informal work in the South, therefore, provides a framework for conceptualising and distinguishing between different forms of labour market attachment. The informal economy in its widest sense is the realm of economic activity that is not registered for the 'purpose of taxation and/or regulation by the State' (Harriss-White 2003a, 4). While its exact

magnitude in the context of India is unknown, Harriss-White (2003a) suggests that up to 88 per cent of the workforce is involved in informal or casual labour (2).

The informal economy has been a subject of interest among scholars for decades, and has been interpreted in multiple and often contradictory ways. Four schools of thought dominate the literature on informal economy. In the first school of thought, the 'dualist school' (Chen 2011, 174), informality and its primary feature of non-wage employment was assumed to be a transitory phase – a 'stepping stone' for a labour force waiting to be integrated into the formal wage economy (Sanyal 1988, 67). Prior to the 1970s, Marxist scholars along with Neo-liberal economists shared the view that the informal sector was comprised of 'marginal and survivalist activities – distinct from and not related to, the formal sector – that provide income for the poor and a safety net in times of crisis' (Chen 2011, 174). Although there was disagreement between the two camps about the cause and effect relationship of poverty in the informal sector with regards to modern capitalist production, neither perspective saw the potential for informal sector growth (Meagher 1995). The common assumption guiding both perspectives was that the informal sector would disappear with the advancement of capitalist development, and the formal sector would eventually absorb all marginal workers (Sudarshan and Unni 2003). These ideas drew heavily on the work of Harris and Todaro (1970), who suggested that the informal sector was simply a 'holding ground for a new urban labour force waiting to be integrated into the formal, wage economy of the city' (Sanyal 1988, 67).

In the late 1970s and 1980s, marginalist interpretations of informality began to be reconsidered, predominantly within the 'structuralist school' of thought popularized by Caroline Moser and Alejandro Portes (Sanyal 1988 67-68; Chen 2008, 22). Kate Meagher attributes this to two interrelated developments: first, the failure in many third world countries to generate an efficient formal sector, and second, to the increase of

informal sector activities, which have generally been viewed as unique to the third world, in many industrialized nations (1995, 261). The structuralist approach, as Meagher (1995) writes, 'shifts focus from informality, represented as a marginalized sector to informalisation, conceived as a wider economic response to crisis' (261). This approach criticizes the conventional Marxist views of informality as failing to recognize the range of socio-economic and political processes that shape the development of the informal sector. Portes, Castells and Benton (1989) assert that the while some activities of the informal sector 'may derive from the desperate need of a worker to obtain the means of subsistence for his or her family ... a similar motivation could lead to a worker to accept lower wages in the formal sector' (12). Thus, the informal economy is not simply an effect of the lack of formal economic growth, but results from the nature of 'capitalist development' (Chen 2011, 174) and 'changing global economic ideologies' (Portes, Castells and Benton 1989, 12).

The 'legalist school', attributed to free-market advocates such as Hernando de Soto, subscribes to the neoliberal doctrine and perceives informalisation as a process of de-regulation from below resulting from excessive state regulation (de Soto 1989; Chen 2011; Meagher 1995). De Soto (1989) suggests that the informal sector is comprised of 'plucky micro-entrepreneurs' who choose to operate informally in order to avoid state regulation, which is 'designed to limit enterprise' (de Soto 1989, 15). In this regard, informalisation is considered as a product of market forces in relation to the state, and views the occupations and actors within the informal sector as socially and economically homogenous. It neglects to differentiate between job type, social structures such as class, gender or ethnicity, and income levels, and essentially regards all informal actors as the same.

Similar to the neoliberal theory, in recent years, a small section of literature has emerged to argue that informalisation is a calculated choice by entrepreneurs based on

the relative costs and benefits of remaining formal, versus joining the informal sector (Gerxhani 2004, 278; Chen 2008, 22). This school of thought, known as the 'voluntarist school', similar to de Soto's theories treats informalisation as a choice, but with both economic and non-economic⁶ motives for participation (Gerxhani 2004, 278). Chen (2011) suggests that entrepreneurs intentionally avoid state regulations and taxation by choosing, instead, to operate 'illegally – or even criminally – in order to enjoy the benefits of avoiding taxation, commercial regulations, electricity and rental fees, and other costs of operating formally' (Chen 2011, 175). This form of informal economy is often referred to as the 'underground or black economy' (Chen 2011, 175).

The reality of children's work does not fit neatly into any of the dominant theories. In fact, only the structuralist school approaches the informal economy as a function of socio-economic and political processes, as opposed to a market-based response to economic crisis. In this regard, all the theories neglect to directly deal with the ways in which labour (waged and unwaged) fit into the informal economy (Chen 2011, 175). Moreover, individually, each approach is simplistic and considers only a particular aspect of the complex and heterogeneous informal economy. A range of scholars have rejected the dualistic interpretations of the informal activity, revealing, instead, the extent to which informal and formal economic activities are interconnected and heterogeneous (cf. Lloyds-Evans 2008; Cross 1998). Harriss-white (2003a), for example, in her definition of informal activity, combines structuralist, legalist and voluntarist theories, and distinguishes two kinds of informal economic activity. The first is unregistered and unregulated activity and involves workers inside and around large registered organisations such as firms, public sector enterprises, and the state itself

⁶ According to Gerxhani, the economic reasons could be related to unemployment, inflexible formal labour market; and high cost of formal production. Non-economic motives include greater flexibility and greater satisfaction in work, complete use of professional qualifications, increased leisure time. Furthermore, there are state-related variables, including tax payments and licensing requirements. (2004, 278)

(Harriss-White 2010, 171). This includes economic activity practiced by formal economy firms, organisations, and even the State, which is not recorded or covered by the State for purposes of taxation or regulation. The second type kind of informal activity, which this study is particularly concerned with, is 'self-employment' or waged work in 'unregistered or unincorporated small-sector enterprises', and consists of 'production or exchange' (Harriss-White 2010, 171) that are: a) below the size thresholds for taxation or labour regulation; b) do not take the form of market transactions, for example, 'non-capitalist production, household production, reproductive work, [and] non-monetised market exchange...' (Harriss-White 2003a, 4); c) 'involves exchanges or production that concern untaxed products', for example, the activities of ragpickers; and d) 'is criminal business activity (for example, adulteration, forged brands and labels and so on)' (Harriss-White 2003a, 5). Harriss-White (2010) further explains,

This kind of informal activity uses low levels of capital, technology, and skills. The productive enterprise is often not legally or practically distinguishable from the household controlling it. Production, consumption, investment and reproduction are interrelated such that "net income" or "profit" cannot be calculated. The sector is highly heterogeneous, involving self-employed and wage workers, some acting entrepreneurially and making savings while other eke out survival under conditions euphemized as "distress".

Harriss-White (2010), quoting Subhahmanya and Jhabvala (2000, 17), adds that it includes:

Agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, forest workers, fisherfolk, cigarette rollers, garment stitchers, construction workers, rag pickers – people involved in an innumerable variety of tasks and employment. Having no fixed employer, these workers are casual, contractual, migrant, home-based, own-account workers who attempt to earn a living from whatever skills they possess (171).

My study engages most significantly with the second meaning of informal activity characterised by Harriss-White as small scale informality. I argue, however, that both her definitions of informality are not mutually exclusive, for informal sector workers are not entirely invisible, and must negotiate State-based policies such as around the occupation

of space. In this sense, they can also become victims of 'institutionalised informality', such as 'pay-offs' to police and corrupt officials. One example of this, among many, is Cross's (1998) work with street traders in Mexico, who he suggests, operate in collusion with local politicians – a partnership generated through informal exchanges and payments.

Collectively, these theoretical approaches suggest that in light of ideological and structural changes to the global economy over the past several decades, the informal economy is not a symptom solely of poverty and marginality, a transitional 'holding ground' (Sanyal 1988, 67) for workers straddling the border between subsistence self-employment and urban wage employment, or a product of inefficient state policy. It represents forced and voluntary entrepreneurialism resulting from low wages, high unemployment, and jobless growth, as well as an attempt by formal sector capital to reduce wage costs, bypass regulatory structures of the state, and improve flexibility by making use of the surplus of unprotected workers in the informal sector (Meagher 1995, 261; Donovan 2008, 32). It is an income generating sector that functions, both, alongside the formal economy, and as an extension to formal sector capital accumulation through the informal means (Bromley 1978). Moreover, informal sector activity has become a means through which individuals, firms and even the State, according to Harriss-White (2003a), circumvent the rigid and restrictive structures of the formal sector. What is important to recognise from the literature is that informality is simultaneously an outcome, and a process (Roy 2003, 140).

Informality as it relates to children is significantly absent at a theoretical level. As I argued earlier, most work in which children are involved can be classified within the informal economy. Reading studies of children's work alongside Harriss-White's definition of informal economy, it is evident that children's work is located outside the boundaries of state regulation – in subsistence activities such as begging (Swanson

2010), hidden domestic workers (Jensen 2013), contributing to familial households (Katz 2003; Nieuwenhuys 1994; Dyson 2008), as informal workers within the formal sector (Jennings et al. 2006) and in hazardous industrial work (Burra 1995), among many more. Empirical work by scholars has principally dealt with the presence of children in the realm of work. They have sought to understand the nature of children's work, why they work, and the ways in which they participate in work and understand and negotiate their working identities. The point of the informal economy for the purpose of this discussion, however, is not simply as a source of employment and livelihood for children, but also as a framework under which to uncover the social processes and relations of power that influence the everyday lives of young workers. There has been relatively little engagement, however, with the way their work is monitored, regulated, and governed. In the next section of this chapter, I explore the informal economy in terms of regulation, to draw out the different forms of regulation that exist around the realm of informal work, in order to understand better, the way children's work in the informal economy is regulated.

2.5 REGULATING INFORMAL WORK(ERS): SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS OF IDENTITY AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

The common feature of all the approaches to the informal economy is that it is economic activity that exists outside the institutions of state regulation. The terms 'unorganised', 'unregulated', and 'informal' have tended to be used interchangeably within scholarship and policy frameworks around the informal economy. In this regard, informal activity is defined according to standards of regulation. Against the 'conventional' formal and regulated sector which functions through state social security provisions, lack of regulation by the state has produced the assumption that the informal sector is altogether unregulated (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2009, 90; Roy 2009, 83). According to

the International Labour Organisation (ILO), this means that workers within the informal economy suffer ‘decent work deficits’⁷ – that is, ‘deficits in employment opportunities, legal rights, social protections, as well as organisation and representation’ (Chen 2011, 168).

In the past decade, there has been a renewed interest by scholars in the informal economy, specifically, around the nature of regulation. Studies have sought to dispel the assumption that it is completely unregulated, and instead, suggest that the informal economy is governed through alternative structures and techniques of power, rather than by the regulatory regime of the State. Roy (2003), for example, in her detailed study of poverty in Calcutta, shows the way in which informal systems of power emerge to organise and regulate, as well as, discipline workers who operate at the margins. She insists that the informal sector is ‘not a sphere of unregulated activities, but instead a realm of regulation where ownership of user rights are established, maintained and overturned through elaborate “extra-legal systems”’ (140). Roy (2003) defines extra-legality as ‘techniques of discipline and power exercised by non-state actors, groups, and networks...’⁸ (Roy 2003, 140). Harriss-White’s (2010) research on informality in India,

⁷ In 2002 the ILO set a target to achieve ‘decent work’ among all men and women in the informal economy. Through a micro-level survey known as the People’s Security Survey (PSS), the ILO identified seven work-based insecurities (in addition to the basic insecurities around food, housing, and healthcare): labour market security, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security, representation security (Kantor, Rani and Uni 2006).

⁸ Scholars in political economy have attributed this to the decline of the Keynesian state model, which was a highly bureaucratic political framework that promoted economic growth through aggressive intervention by the state, and the corresponding emergence of the non-interventionist ideology of neoliberalism, which promotes limited state involvement and an ‘unfettered market’ for economic growth (Jessop 1991, 82, 137; Hackworth 2007, 9; Segbers 2005, 7). The decline of Keynesianism has transformed the state significantly to what Bob Jessop (1994) calls the ‘hollowed out’ nation state. Jessop explains that the states capacities are being reorganized territorially and functionally, and that nation-states are ‘being limited through complex displacement of powers upward, downward, and outward’ (Jessop 1994, 24). The consequence of the new fragmented government is that the importance of the national institutional level has been diminished (MacLeod and Goodwin 1999, 505). This can be exemplified by the devolution of responsibilities and power to various other regional levels, from municipalities to the primary scale of the body. In the context of this study, it has also contributed to the informalisation of labour markets and expansion of informal activity, in the sense of the legalist and voluntarist schools of thought discussed above (Meagher 1995). Decentralization and the dispersal of power and authority to non-state agencies have, essentially, produced new ‘geographies of governance’ (Roy 2003, 142)

similarly suggests that 'out of the formal reach of the state, economic behaviour cannot avoid the influence of social institutions' (171). She writes:

Social regulation...governs entry into the labour force, and into other markets ... Social regulation determines the acquisition of skills, contacts, information and technology, and starting capital and credit; ... the definition of a range of contracts considered 'proper' and the settlement of disputes about transactions; certain kinds of collective insurance and representation; the organization of space and territory; ... entitlements to help in times of need; hygiene in marketplaces; and physical security, from the night watch to protection mafias. (Harriss-White 2003b, 460)

In this sense, the informal economy has, both, generated, and functions through alternative geographies of governance⁹. Through a reading of literature on the nature of the informal economy, two interrelated approaches to social regulation and governance can be identified: social institutions of identity, and social networks.

2.5.1 SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS OF IDENTITY

In the first approach to social regulation, popularised by Harriss-White (2003a; 2003b; 2010), regulation of economic behaviour and labour arrangements are considered through social institutions such as class, gender, religion, age, caste, ethnicity, language, and location (Harriss-White 2010). These institutions have typically been thought to be 'rooted in, or relegated to, aspects of social life *outside* the economy and conceived in terms of constructs of *identity*' (Harriss-White 2010, 171). She suggests, however, that social structures control labour in the informal economy in multiple ways. First, they provide the conditions for capital accumulation (2003a, 14). For example, religious affiliation can 'govern the creation and protection of rents, the acquisition of skills and contacts, the rationing of finance...the circulation of information [and] the norms that regulate the inheritance and management of property' (Harriss-White 2005, 9). Brown et al. (2010), in her work on street traders in Senegal, similarly highlights the way Muslim vendors are offered support by the Islamic Senegalese Brotherhood,

⁹ This is not to say that non-state institutions of governance are not at play within the formal economy.

including security, credit, space and infrastructure, to carry out their work. Non-Muslim vendors, however, are more likely to face obstacles to find suppliers, consumers, and access to public space. It is evident – and will become clearer through the next sections – that social regulation is inevitably exclusionary. In my interviews, therefore, I collected information about different aspects of social identity, including religious affiliation.

Social structures of identity also determine entry into particular forms of employment and labour, payment structures, contracts, work regimes, and the division of labour. In this respect, labour is controlled ‘through the segmentation and fragmentation of labour markets’ according to social identities (Harriss-White 2003a, 21). Chen’s (2008) overview of the informal economy provides a useful base from which to understand the way the informal economy is segmented, as well as differentiated through social institutions such as gender. She suggests that employment within the informal sector is exceedingly hierarchical – this means that earnings, security and rights vary between segments of workers. Figure 2.3, developed by Chen (2008), illustrates an example of the multi-segmented structure of the informal labour force with particular attention paid to earnings and gender. By identifying five segments of the informal economy – employers who own informal businesses and hire labour; informal employees; ‘own account workers’ who are self-employed but do not hire others; casual wage workers; and ‘unpaid contributing family workers’ – Chen (2008) shows the trend of earnings, alongside gender differentiation (20-21). A similar pattern can be applied to race, religion, caste, or ethnicity. Chen’s conceptualisation of the segmented nature of the informal economy is rather simplistic and ignores the interconnections between different institutions of identity, for instance, the position of lower caste women

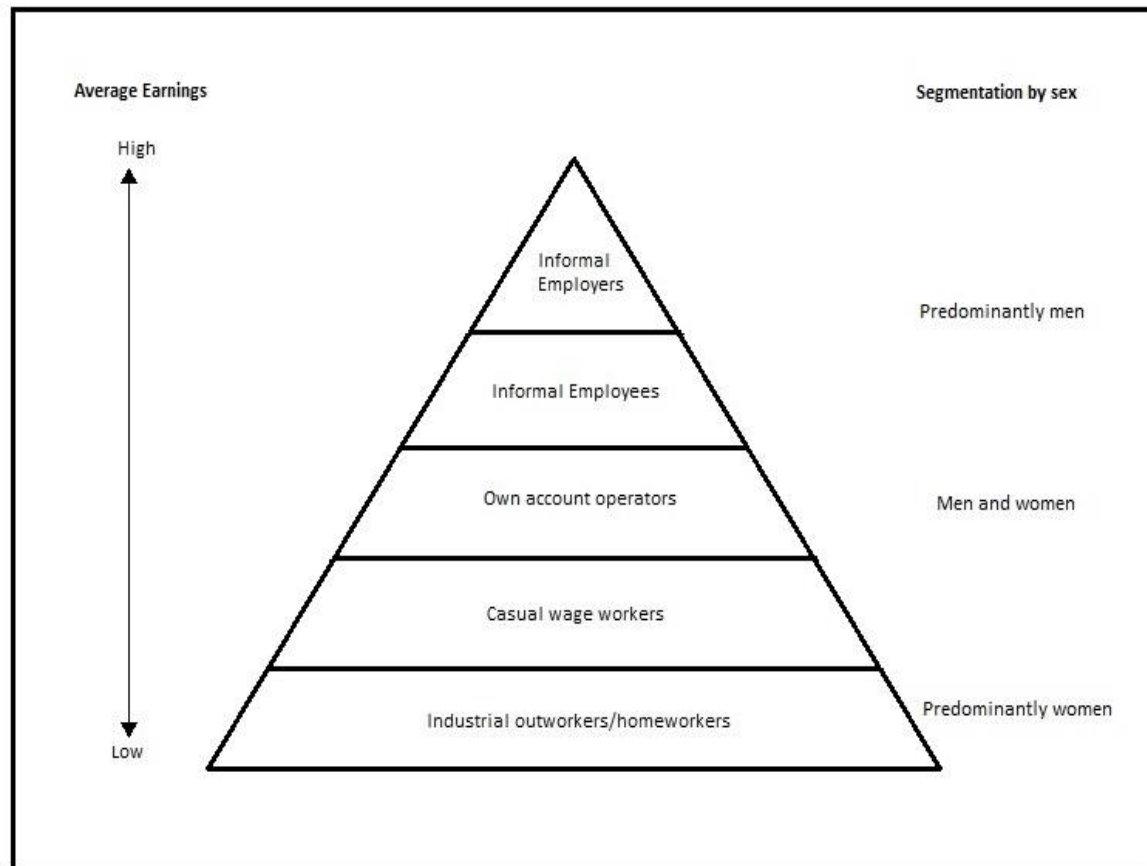
compared to upper caste women¹⁰. Harriss-White (2010), in her study of work and wellbeing in the informal economy, however, builds on Chen's illustration by suggesting, based on her study of India, that gender is used to 'reduce costs of production [and] to reduce the probabilities of organisation or unionisation...' (173). She explains that '[w]omen's informal employment and their access to credit are more restricted and insecure than that of men. Women are disproportionately poorer. When the task of both genders can be strictly compared, women's pay is lower...' (173). These studies exemplify the way gender and caste are used to hierarchically organise, regulate, and control labour in the informal economy.

De Haan (1997), in his study of the migrant workers and the urban labour market in Calcutta, notes some instances of segmentation along the lines of religion and ethnicity: 'Bengalis [do] not work in the jute mills, Muslims from Bihar [are] concentrated in the weaving sections of the mills, while people from Orissa [are] in the least-skilled occupations' (934). De Neve (2005), in his study of the textile industry in Gujarat, suggests that social identities, specifically caste membership in the case of his findings, regulate and differentiate access to opportunities for occupational mobility and increased wages (39). It should be noted that this point refutes the assumption made by numerous scholars, including Harriss-White (2003a), that all informal labour is casual, flexible and unskilled. As de Neve (2005) points out, there is a diversity of occupations, skills and knowledge in the informal economy. Furthermore, he notes, through a discussion of three industries, a wide range of class positions, including 'merchants, middlemen, manufacturers, job workers, sub-contractors, and labourers' (39). Nonetheless, these examples from the literature serve to illustrate the extent to which social institutions of identity organise, regulate, and discipline informal labour. It is

¹⁰ De Neve (2005) points out that 'women experience the labour relations in which they are involved very differently from men, and higher caste women and men may experience similar work relations very differently from their lower caste counterparts' (30).

necessary to point out that studies have tended to neglect age as a social structure of accumulation – a gap that my study on working children seeks to address.

FIGURE 2.2: SEGMENTATION OF INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT: EARNINGS AND SEX



Source: Chen 2008, 21

A final way in which social institutions of identity regulate labour in the informal economy is in terms of the provision of social protections. Social protection is a combination of social security, social insurance, social assistance, and social safety nets, which operate in times of uncertainty to provide support around 'healthcare, incapacity to work due to illness, disability through work, unemployment, maternity, child maintenance, invalidity, old age, and death of the breadwinner' (Lund and Srinivas 2000, 15-16). Lund and Srinivas (2000) note that access to formal social security has typically been through 'tripartite arrangements between governments, employers, and workers themselves' (15). As discussed earlier, poor workers in the informal economy are more

prone to a host of insecurities and vulnerabilities than formal sector workers, who have access to State forms of regulation and protection. Drawing on the work of Harriss-White (2010, 172), four risks that confront workers in the informal economy have been identified. First, 'insecurity' in terms of general workplace and employment rights, as well as employment security, employment conditions, health and safety regulation and organisation and representation. Second, poverty, for most poor workers are involved in informal work. Third, 'risk and vulnerability', which is linked to market fluctuations, for example, increased food prices; economic shocks such as sudden unemployment, added responsibilities due to births of children or death, and workplace hazards. Fourth, 'coercion', for 'many workers are tied by debt and by site'. The work of Anjaria (2006) on street vendors in Mumbai, illustrates this aspect of informal work through a look at the way police, municipal officials and shopkeepers extract daily 'payoffs' to *allow* vendors to operate in specific sites. Harriss-White (2003a) suggests that in the informal economy, kinship relations and religious-based arrangements constructed through institutions of identity 'regulate and distribute' livelihoods by providing insurance and 'last resort social security' (243). These networks, which are established through structures such as caste, religion and ethnicity, can be defined as social networks. The nature of social networks and their contribution to regulating informal workers and facilitating economic activity in the informal economy will be discussed in the next section. Some key questions that arise from the discussion thus far, which guide my study, are whether child workers contend with the same insecurities as the work outlined above suggests; what their particular means of 'last resort security' are; as well as, how they are able to access these structures and networks, and negotiate the 'informal' contracts that may exist to receive social protections.

This section has illustrated through a reading of the literature, that a given social attribute (e.g. gender, class, caste, etc.), may serve a range of 'social roles, which are

contradictory and have contradictory outcomes' (Harriss-White 2010, 171). Relatively few scholars, however, have directly engaged with social structures of identity as a form of regulation in the same way as Harriss-White (2003a; 2003b; 2010). Through her studies on informal workers in India, she has explored the nature of work in the informal economy, and the way institutions of identity function as economic regulators as well as regulators of well-being. However, research on the informal economy has recognised the extent to which it is heterogeneous and segmented, as well as differentiated through gender, religion and class (Chen 2008). In this regard, scholars such as Chen (2008; 2011), de Neve (2005), and Jhabvala (1998) have made a significant contribution in the way workers are positioned within the informal economy, according to their identities. The ways in which children's work in India is controlled and regulated is relatively absent from studies on the informal economy, however. In this study, I seek to bridge this gap by exploring social regulation in regards to working children. I seek to contribute to and build upon the body of work outlined above by looking specifically at child workers and the way their working lives are organised, regulated, or disciplined by the social institutions of identity.

2.5.2 SOCIAL NETWORKS

The second form of social regulation within the informal economy, social networks, are a broad category and have received more attention in academic research than the social institutions of identity discussed above. According to Hirst (2000), governance can be defined as 'practices of coordinating activities through networks, partnerships, and deliberative forums' (18). Social networks, in this regard, are an important form of governance in both formal and informal settings. Meagher (1995), who has written widely on the role of social networks in the informal economy in Nigeria, suggests that social networks are vital to the development of a dynamic informal

sector (264). In the section above, I discussed the extent to which informal activities are facilitated by non-economic institutions, paying particular attention to the ways in which they regulate children's lives. Informal activities, however, are also facilitated by reciprocal social relations and ties between members of these non-economic institutions, through kinship, friendship, neighbourhood and community networks, collective networks, informal associations (religious, cultural, ethnic) and grassroots organisations (Meagher 2006; Turner 2009). Turner (2009) suggests that 'production, consumption, and exchange in informal economies are...deeply entangled by noneconomic relationships of trust and solidarity' (Turner 2009, 370). But do children operate within such relationships I wonder?

Scholarship has shown that social networks form a source of social capital through supportive strategies and the provision of resources, skills and services (Meagher 2006). They provide an organizational structure for production, access to credit schemes, non-state welfare services, and training programs by informal sector entrepreneurs and workers (Meagher 2006, 553; Meagher 1995, 265, 272). Meagher (1995) notes that informal social networks also provide a 'framework for the recruitment and use of informal labour' (265). This assertion is evident through the work of Punch (2007) on young Bolivian migrants. She reveals the extent to which social networks assist in finding them work and accommodation. She argues that ties of ethnicity among migrants produce an extensive network that young migrants access, which facilitate their entry into new spaces of work and life. Furthermore, she observes that 'this makes a potentially overwhelming experience more enjoyable' (102). Research on street traders has been particularly significant in assessing the role of social networks. Bromley (1978), for example, in his early study of the informal sector in the global South, suggests that many adult street traders are absorbed into social networks automatically as a result of their visibility in public space, according to ethnicity, kinship

and religion. Such networks often provide social capital for new traders to enter the market and adapt to the vending environment. They are active in managing and providing vendors with services such as security, infrastructure, welfare and credit, among others (Brown et al 2010, 673). A useful example is the Senegalese Brotherhood, referred to earlier in this section, which is described by Alison Brown and her colleagues (2010) as a majority Muslim association that dominates street and market trading in Dakar (674). The brotherhood provides an associational base for trade, and has strong political ties to the government. They not only act as a pressure group, but also provide basic training for vendors (Brown et al 2010, 675).

Social networks also control entry into informal sector occupations and spaces for economic activity (Meagher 1995, 272). In this regard, they may contribute to the exclusion of certain individuals or groups, by privileging access to informal employers and jobs for specific members of the 'informal proletariat' (Meagher 1995, 274). For example, they might control entry into the more profitable informal sector occupations (Meagher 1995, 265). Returning to the example of Senegalese traders, Brown et al. (2010) observes that those who were not involved with the brotherhood often found it difficult to access resources, find consumers and operate in some public spaces. Thus, in certain contexts, organizations based on social networks have the potential to become dictatorial and restrictive. As a whole, studies on social regulation have indicated that it is, by its very nature is exclusive and discriminatory, thus it promotes strongly segmented labour markets based on social characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and religion (Harriss-White 2003b, 461; De Haan 1997, 934).

What is significantly absent from the work on informal economy and social regulation is the place of children. There are a handful of studies that have looked at the way working children work alongside family networks or friendships. For example,

Dyson (2008; 2010) has observed that friendship is a useful network through which children negotiate daily work life, expectations, and responsibilities. Invernizzi (2005) has also briefly touched on the importance of networks and family relationships in constructing children's working lives. This work, however, is limited. Moreover, there has not been a conscious examination of the way children's participation in informal work and informal work-spaces, are socially regulated, or the way children navigate and negotiate social forms of regulation. Along similar lines, while gender in relation to children's working lives, has been dealt with to an extent, other social institutions of identity, particularly religion, ethnicity, and caste, have been absent from scholarship on children, as a whole. A final, related, gap in the literature is the way these regulatory structures are mapped onto space, particularly in relation to children and the varying spaces in which they work. My research is a partial corrective to this absence.

If Harriss-White (2003a; 2010), Meagher (1995; 2006), and Chen (2008; 2011), among others, are correct that the informal economy is organised and regulated through extralegal social and power relations and social processes, and children's participation in work is inherently informal, then the question guiding this research is the way children navigate or negotiate social modes of regulation in constructing and maintaining their livelihoods. More specifically, what are the social networks and social institutions that influence their entry into the workforce? What are the relations of power they contend with? How do they exercise agency, capacity and imbue their work with meaning, when it lies hidden in the realm of the informal? In this study, I build upon the work of Harriss-White and Meagher, in particular, to examine the way in which children's engagement with economic activities in the informal economy is organised, and the relations of power they contend with.

CONTEXT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis builds on ten months of intensive fieldwork conducted over two periods in Kolkata, India – the first from November 2010 to June 2011 and the second from January to March 2012. Using a case study approach, I designed my qualitative study to be flexible enough to capture and understand the day-to-day negotiations that define the livelihoods of child workers within Kolkata’s vast and complex informal economy. The methods for data collection included a combination of semi and un-structured individual and group interviews, as well as observation and participant observation. In this chapter, I present and justify my research methods, and critically discuss the strategies I engaged with to gain entry into and create relationships within the complex sphere of informal work. I assess my role as researcher and the ethical issues and challenges that I continue to struggle with and reflect on as I write this dissertation. To begin, however, I place this study in its geographical context by locating the city of Kolkata and introducing its particular geographies linked to migration and labour that made it an ideal setting for my case study on working children.

3.2 KOLKATA: LABOUR, POLITICS AND SOCIETY

If Paris has been narrated through the figure of the flâneur, and Los Angeles through post-modern fragmentation, then Calcutta has most often been narrated as the “City of the Dreadful Night,” Kipling’s (1920) unshakable epithet for the city.

Ananya Roy 2003, 5

The city of Kolkata, formerly Calcutta¹¹, has persistently been represented as a city in crisis – filthy, festering, and deeply impoverished. For almost two-hundred years, novelists, historians, travellers, and administrators have depicted Calcutta as ill-fated, casting it into the depths of a metaphorical ‘black hole’ – the ominous term for the city inspired by the name of an 18th century Calcutta prison (Roy 2010, 93). As the epigram by Ananya Roy suggests, Calcutta has most often been written off with reference to Rudyard Kipling’s 1920 *Letters of Travel*, in which he deemed it ‘the city of dreadful night – a city of unspeakable poverty, of famine, riot and disease...where the cholera, the cyclone the crow come and go, by the sewerage rendered fetid, the sewer made impure’ (Kipling 1920). In the years since Kipling wrote of Calcutta, others (cf. Thomas 1997, 1-4) have reiterated his ‘epithet for the city’. Viewed to be in ‘constant crisis [and] timeless in its poverty’ (Roy 2003, 6), the contemporary image of the city continues to be represented and defined through similar historical narratives. Anthropologist Frederic Thomas (1997), for example, wrote his recent book on Calcutta as an “elegy” to the city, in which he adopts Kipling’s narrative of Calcutta as a city ‘above pretense’ (1920), suggesting that it is a city so debilitated by its conditions, that ‘Calcuttans seem to accept conditions as they are. They have lower expectations. They see problems as beyond their control’ (7). Calcutta is represented by contemporary authors as ‘a model of what a proper city ought not to be’ (Ginsburg 1977, 779); ‘the worst possibility of urbanism’ (Chattopadhyay 2005, 1-2).

In reality, Calcutta is as dilapidated and decrepit as reflected in these impressions; however, according to Ginsburg (1977) the ‘miracle’ of Calcutta is that it ‘functions as well as it does’ (780). Instead of falling victim to these dreariest of

¹¹ The city of Calcutta was renamed Kolkata in 2001, as a part of a nation-wide campaign by the former ruling party of India, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), to rename several Indian cities to reflect their Indian, rather than colonial names. In this thesis I primarily refer to the city of Kolkata. In this section, however, I use the name, Calcutta to represent the era prior to 2001, and Kolkata for discussions of the city post-2001.

designations, Kolkata has endured. Though the dominant perceptions of the city continue to mirror academic study and public discourse, recent scholarly work (cf. Hutnyk 1996; Chattopadhyay 2005; Gooptu 2007; Sanyal 2014; and Roy 2003) has sought to interrogate these representations through an exploration of the city's intense poverty, geographies of inequality, deep divisions of religion and ethnicity, contested history, and unique political climate. Through an examination of these texts, it is evident that contemporary Kolkata is a function of its physical location, its long and complex history defined by British Colonialism, the rise and fall of industry, mass migration, deeply rooted ethnic, religious and class divisions, and a state political system, that until recently prioritized the West Bengal countryside over its cities (Ray and Qayum 2009, 34), as well as India's changing position in the global economy. Moreover, through most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Calcutta has been the 'cultural and intellectual' centre of social reform and labour politics (Qayum and Ray 2009, 6). Kolkata, through its particular constellation of geographies, serves as an intriguing site in which to explore the themes of poverty and inequality, labour relations and the politics of informality that underlie the interests of this research.

3.2.1 KOLKATA IN SPACE AND TIME

Kolkata lies on the Eastern bank of the Hugli River, a distributary of the River Ganges that flows into the Bay of Bengal. The boundaries of the City of Kolkata and its wider Kolkata Metropolitan Area (KMA) are somewhat ambiguous and have shifted significantly over the past several decades, particularly with the urban agglomeration of surrounding districts in 2006. The Kolkata Metropolitan Area (Map 3.2) is spread over 1886.67km² and incorporates thirty-nine local municipalities, 24 *panchayat samitis* (local government bodies), and three municipal corporations, including the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC). The City of Kolkata lies under the jurisdiction of the

Kolkata Municipal Corporation, occupying an area of 185 km² and composed of 141 wards (Map 3.3: Wards of Kolkata with Salt Lake). The research for this study was primarily conducted within the boundaries of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, with the exception of Salt Lake, which is a relatively new middle and upper class planned residential suburb of the city. Located in 24 North Parganas district of West Bengal, Salt Lake is situated on the jurisdictional boundary of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, within the boundaries of the Kolkata Metropolitan Area (See 'Salt Lake' in Map 3.3).

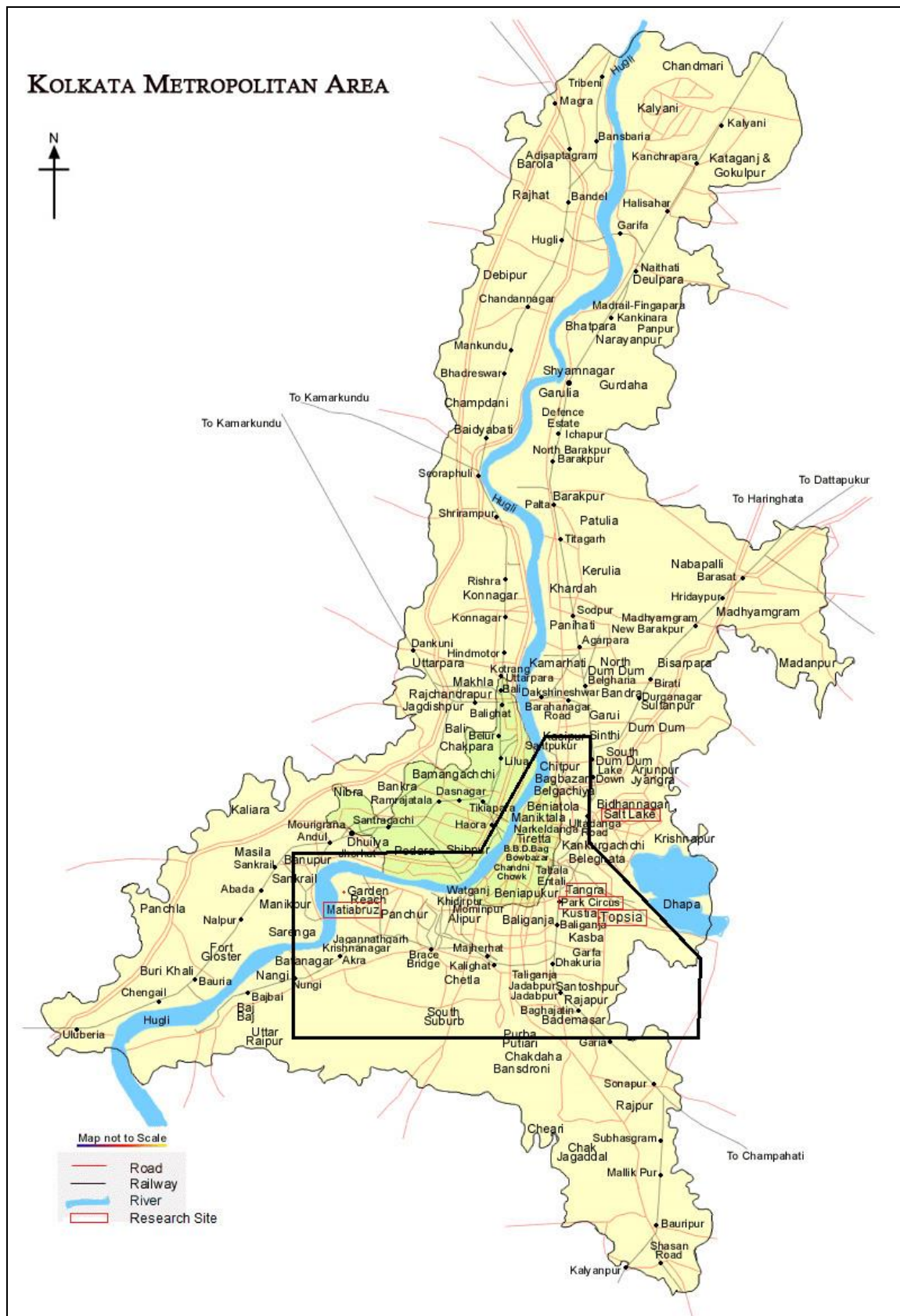
The population of KMA based on data provided in the 2001 census was approximately 13.2 million. The Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority (KMDA), in its annual reports, has projected a stunning rate of growth, suggesting that the population increased to over 15 million people in 2005, 17 million in 2011, and will reach 20 million by 2021 (KMDA Annual Report 2011). The population of Kolkata City varies from approximately five million according to data available from the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, to over 11 million, according to Chakravorty (2000), while the density at the central business district (CBD) is estimated to be approximately 95,000 persons/km². This is reputedly among the highest in the world (United Nations 1993). The significant variation in population figures is a function of the continual stream of migrants into the city each day, primarily into Kolkata's vast slums. As a 'primate' city for Eastern India, Kolkata has a hinterland of almost 220 million – 'mostly poor', from Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Assam (See Map 3.1) (Chakravorty 2000, 58).

MAP 3.1: WEST BENGAL AND KOLKATA IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIA: DISTRICTS AND NEIGHBOURING STATES



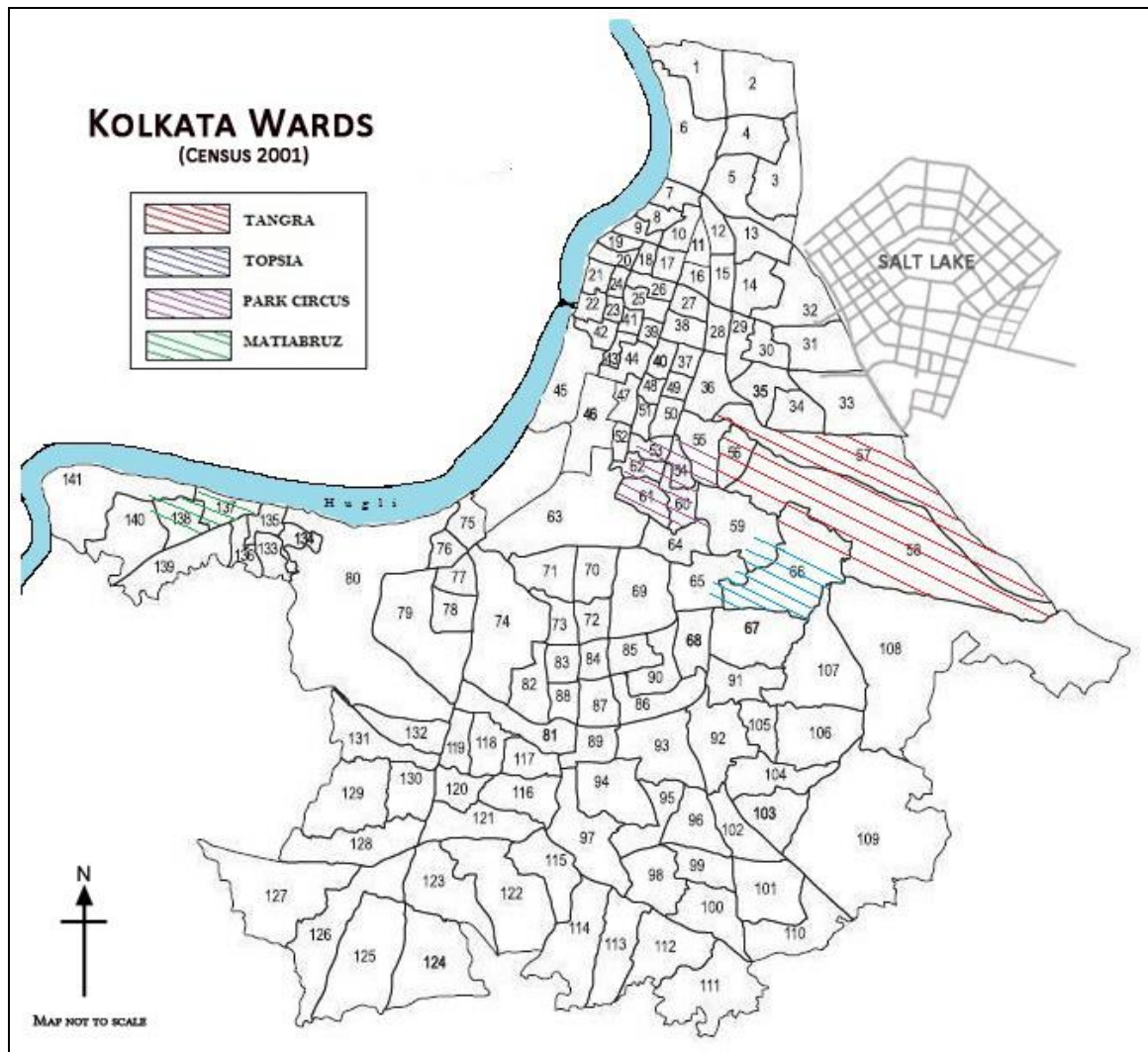
Source: West Bengal Map, highlighting individual districts and surrounding states. Ret. and adapted from <commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_West_Bengal_location_map.svg>, 11 June 2014. Map of India ret. from <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Calcutta_in_India.png>, 16 June 2014.

MAP 3.2: KOLKATA METROPOLITAN AREA



Source: Data from Government of West Bengal, 2013. Kolkata Metropolitan Area, highlighting Kolkata Municipality and research sites.

MAP 3.3: KOLKATA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION WARD MAP AND SALT LAKE



Source: Kolkata Development Authority. Ward Map for Kolkata Municipal Area (2001) and suburb of Salt Lake, highlighting research sites. Incorporating data from Kolkata Municipal Corporation, 2013.

In locating Calcutta's historical beginnings, municipal records reference Job Charnok, an English merchant who, in 1690, leased three villages along the River Hugli to set up a trading post (Kolkata Municipal Corporation 2013). Calcutta port was established explicitly for 'colonial extraction' with its primary links to the international economy rather than to the regional economy (Qayum and Ray 2003, 33). In the subsequent decade, Fort William was erected to protect against anti-British sentiment, and with it the core of the city of Calcutta was formed. Following several years of conflict over Fort William between local elites and the troops of the East India Company the

British consolidated their rule over Calcutta in 1757 (Qayum and Ray 2003, 33). In the years that followed, the city was transformed into a major 'commercial, manufacturing, and administrative centre' (Qayum and Ray 2003, 33). By 1763, Bengal, including much of present day Bangladesh and the neighbouring states of Bihar¹² and Orissa, were placed under the control of Fort William, and in 1772 Calcutta was established as the first capital of British India. It remained so until the capital was moved to New Delhi in 1912.

The formation of Calcutta as a colonial capital was not unlike other colonial cities of the global South. The European administration established systems of communication and transportation to expand mercantile activities; connectivity between Calcutta and its growing hinterland was significantly developed through the establishment of the railways and the expansion of Calcutta port for transporting goods (Kundu 2003). In the latter part of the nineteenth century, industry in Calcutta was established with the construction of jute and cotton mills to process raw materials from the surrounding districts. Moreover, there was a rapid development of the coal industry, which became a key export commodity along with manganese and iron ore (Kundu 2003, 2).

Scholars (cf. Ray and Qayum 2003; Chattopadhyay 2005), however, agree that there is a peculiarity to Calcutta's colonial and post-colonial history that is rooted in the division of the city under the British, its significant links to its vast hinterland, and its distinction as the only major urban centre serving the entire east and north-east of the subcontinent (Qayum and Ray 2003). Some scholars (cf. Chakravorty 2000; Lubell 1974; Thomas 1997) suggest that the city's stagnation and subsequent decline, which continues today, is rooted in the loss of its status as the capital of British India.

¹² In November 2000, the state of Bihar was divided and the new state of Jharkhand was created. I refer to the region as Bihar when discussing processes (trade and migration) related to the region prior to 2000. Jharkhand will be used to denote the region post-2000. Map 3.1, although a contemporary map of the region, provides a useful geographical representation of the region.

In the years following 1912, Calcutta was affected by a series of interrelated political, economic, and social crises that altered its development and that continue to shape its geographies. India's independence from the British in 1947 was especially 'traumatic' for Calcutta (Chakravorty 2000, 61). A considerable area of Calcutta's hinterland – particularly its jute growing region that contributed significantly to the city's economy – abruptly became a part of another 'hostile country', Pakistan (Chakravorty 2000, 61). Partition as a whole displaced over 15 million people across India and Pakistan (Sanyal 2014). On the Eastern – Bengal – side of the country, partition and the related religious strife lead to mass migration of Hindus into Calcutta, as well as instigated a circular migration mainly among Muslims, who migrated away from Calcutta during partition, returning shortly afterward (Sanyal 2014). This migration produced a significant religious divide that is still evident both socially, and spatially in the city.

West Bengal remained the 'leading industrial State in India' until the mid-1950s due to its existing economic and industrial infrastructure (Chakravorty 2000, 61). It had the highest per capita income levels in the country, which Chakravorty (2000) notes, declined to rank seventh in India by the end of the twentieth century. The economy of the state, however, had been in a steady decline since the 1940s as a result of environmental calamities that led to the famine of 1943, and the geopolitics of the region, including the loss of productive hinterland during partition. Post-colonial economic policies further contributed to this trend, particularly the Freight Equalization policy of 1956, which equalized the price of 'essential' commodities nationwide, such as steel and coal, which were primarily produced in Eastern India (Chakravorty 2000, 61-62). The declining economy was exacerbated by volatile State politics throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and between 1967 and 1972, West Bengal experienced a succession of coalition governments, unable to stabilise the State politically or economically (Chakravorty 2000). The period between 1970 to 1972 also witnessed a third major

wave of migrants into Calcutta in just under three decades as a result of the wars between India and West Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh. In 1977 the Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPM) began a thirty-four year reign over West Bengal. Calcutta has faced 'benign neglect' as a result of CPM's focus on rural development; '[t]he city and metropolis have seen capital flight to the west and north, the degradation of ageing infrastructure[...] and increasing corruption and inefficiency at all levels of municipal authority' (Chakravorty 2000, 62). In 2011 CPM was defeated by a coalition led by the All India Trinamool Congress Party.

3.2.2 THE URBAN LABOUR MARKET: MIGRATION, INFORMAL ECONOMY AND LABOUR MARKET SEGMENTATION

Apparent from the discussion above, migration has been a fundamental component of Kolkata's colonial and post-colonial history; it has also been instrumental in shaping the nature and distribution of labour and employment in the city. A former minister of Kolkata under the rule of the Left Front¹³, Buddhadeb Chattarjee (1991) in Roy (2003) writes, 'Calcutta has always had the onerous task of having to act as the urban centre, having to absorb the continuing stream of migration from the vast hinterland that it was made to serve' (iii). Under the colonial state, migration was severely regulated (Breman 1990). The administration established specific patterns of migration linked to key segments of the urban labour market through an 'ethnic division of labour' (Roy 2003, 30). Roy (2003) writes, 'such forms of migration [were] characterised by intricate systems of kin and village networks that regulate entry into the urban labour markets. Indeed, it is estimated that such preferential practices were "locked in" by the early twentieth century' (30). Roy's research has shown the continued difficulties of certain ethnic groups (particularly Bengali's) in accessing Calcutta's urban labour markets (30).

¹³ The Left Front, formally known as the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was in power in Calcutta for over thirty years – from 1977 to 2011.

“Unsolicited” migration was often dealt with through ‘forcible return’ (Roy 2003, 29). As a result of increased colonial interventions, increasing rural impoverishment and landlessness, such forms of ‘distress migration’ increased (Roy 2003, 30). Exacerbated by the 1943 famine, Calcutta experienced a significant influx of poor migrants from its hinterland. Colonial police, under the ‘Bengal Destitute Persons Ordinance’ policy, were permitted to round up and evict migrants from Calcutta (Roy 2003, 30). Many, however, remained along the fringes of the city and rebuilt their lives on public land beside the railway lines and along open sewerage and water lines (Roy 2003). Some of the children involved in this research are, in fact, descendents of migrants who settled these lands; they continue to eke¹⁴ out a living in the densely populated slum settlements that have expanded along the same drainage lines and train tracks.

Partition in 1947, as discussed above, witnessed a massive arrival of refugees into Calcutta. Almost 3.1 million refugees entered West Bengal by 1956, while 258,117 Muslims who had left for East Pakistan, returned by 1952 (Sanyal 2014, 40). Unlike on the Western side of the country, refugee movement along the eastern border continued with over 6 million refugees entering the state by 1971 (Sanyal 2014, 40). This migration, according to Sanyal (2014), continues to today. The influx of refugees as a result of the geopolitics of the region was amplified by a continuous stream of migrants from the city’s hinterland as an effect of rural economic crises. Qayum and Ray (2003) note that migrants ‘outnumbered the “indigenous” population of Calcutta throughout much of the 20th century’ (525). There was, however, no simultaneous growth of civic facilities to cope with this influx. Nonetheless, migrants have comprised a ‘steady supply of labour for the industrial, commercial, and service sectors’ (e.g. domestic servitude) (Qayum and Ray 2003, 525).

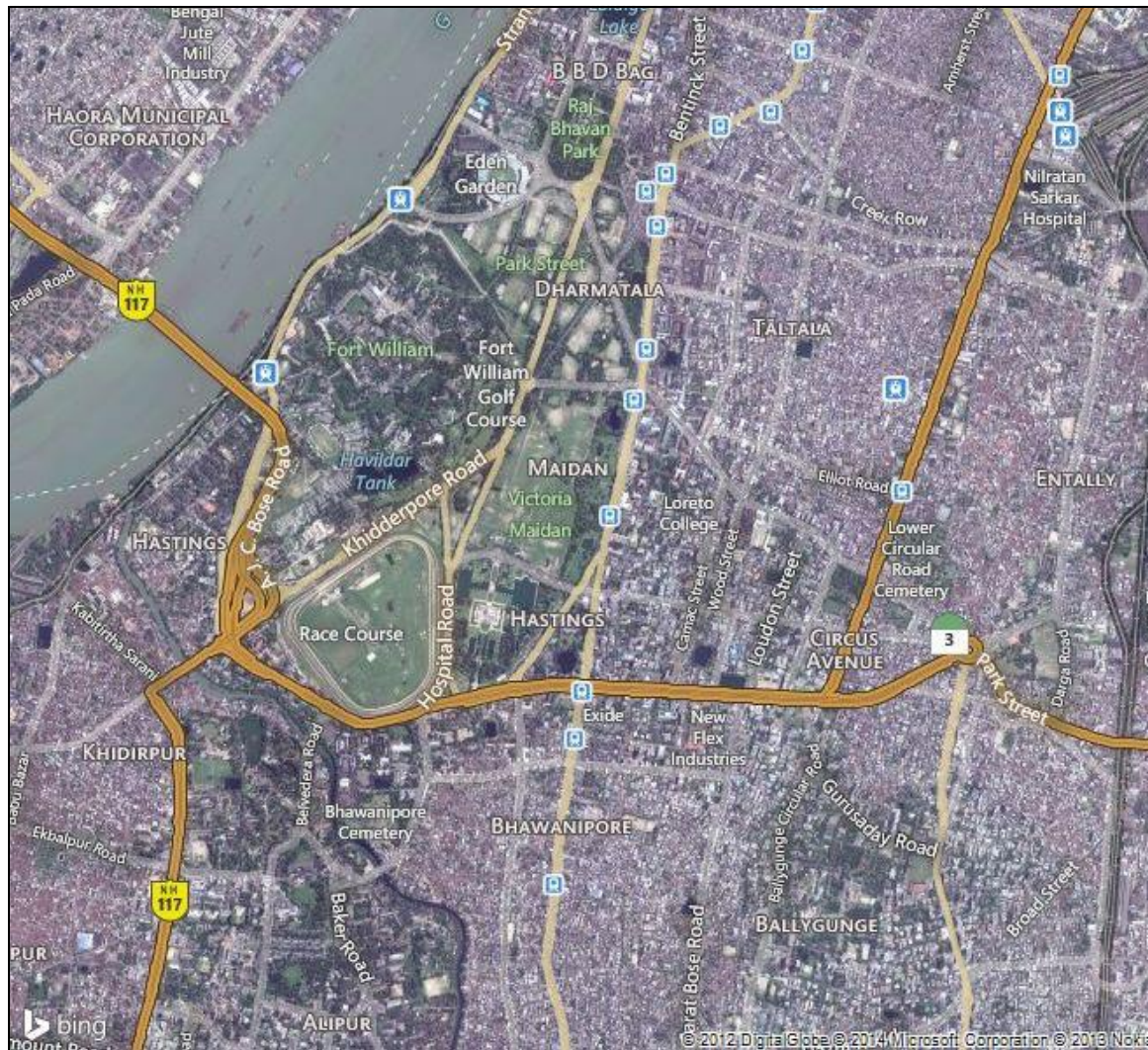
¹⁴ I deliberately use the phrase ‘eke out a living’, as Calcutta’s economy is extremely fragmented, and many migrants and the subsequent generations have been ‘locked in’ to specific labour roles and categories for decades. This will be discussed further in this chapter, and is an underlying theme in much of this thesis.

Scholars studying Kolkata (cf. Roy 2003; Gooptu 2007; Qayum and Ray 2003) agree that the spatial and social distribution of labour owes its underlying nature to colonial and post-colonial geographies. A notable remnant of Calcutta's colonial history is the socially and spatially fragmented nature of the urban landscape and economy. Under colonialism, Calcutta was divided between the relatively "urban" European zone and the neglected and rudimentary "native" one' (Das Gupta et al. 1991, iii). Described in historical texts as the "white" and "black" towns, respectively, the former was developed in and around Fort William and characterised by 'sparsely distributed neo-classical and Georgian buildings' (Chattopadhyay 2005, 9). The "black" native town was built on the surrounding lower lying marshland, and consisted of densely packed houses and shanties, predominantly organized along ethnic, religious, caste and occupational lines (Chattopadhyay 2005). Battacharjee (1991) in Roy (2003) writes, '[t]he historic city...was a world cleft in two. Such was the depth of the cleavage that it has not yet been possible to completely integrate the locale lagging behind infrastructurally with the 'other half' (iii).

As evident from the satellite image of present-day Kolkata (Map 3.4), the spatial divisions of the city have been retained. With partition and the departure of the British, racial divisions have essentially been replaced by class and caste divisions, and today, the upper class capital and land owners, and government officials, occupy the former European neighbourhoods (Chakravorty 2000, 67). With the influx of migrants into the city, however the ethnic, religious and linguistic divisions of the city have been intensified, and are reflected in the existence of strong regional identities and local economies, within the city (De Haan 1997, 934). While the vast majority of Bengali's reside in the northern and southern suburbs, Muslims tend to be concentrated in low-income areas with basic facilities and infrastructure such as Topsia, Tangra, Matiabruz,

and Rajabazar. Hindu migrants have settled around the densely populated central business district (Sanyal 2014).

MAP 3.4: ARIEL VIEW OF KOLKATA AT FORT WILLIAM AND PARK STREET



Source: Bing Maps, retrieved 10th March 2014. Ariel view of present-day Kolkata illustrating the uneven landscape between the former 'white' (Fort William, Alipur, Park Street, Ballygunge) and surrounding 'black' towns.

Kolkata's labour market structure, as a result, is highly segmented along the lines of ethnicity, religion and caste. While other cities in India struggle with similar social divisions, scholars have widely singled out Kolkata. According to De Haan (1997), who is one of a handful of scholars who has written about Calcutta's segmented labour market, 'people from certain regions have concentrated in certain jobs at specific places' (934).

In this regard, specific sectors of the market are linked with particular 'labour catchment areas', while distinct social groups dominate certain occupations (De Haan 1997, 922).

Such patterns of labour and employment are particularly evident in the informal sector, which has largely absorbed the overflow of labour that Kolkata inherited from the disruptions outlined above (Roy 2003; Chakrovarty 2000). Kolkata's informal economy comprises of between forty to sixty percent of the city's overall labour force, according to different sources (Chakravorty 2000; Shaw and Pandit 2001, 183). As discussed in the previous chapter, urban workforces are not clearly differentiated between the formal and informal sector, and workers straddle the line between the two, for example, operating through informal modes of employment and unregulated structures, within a formalized arena. Shaw and Pandit (2001) categorise the labour market in Calcutta as consisting of three distinct types of employment: a) 'permanent employment in the modern large- and medium-scale factory or service establishments'; b) regular employment in small-scale establishments; and c) 'all kinds of casual and non-permanent employment' (183). While the first category is primarily linked to the formal sector, the latter two fall largely within the realm of 'unregulated' employment, and thus, are informal in nature.

Access and participation in sectors and occupations of the labour market is essentially organised according to social identity. Moreover, the labour market is characterized by a lack of mobility, both within and between sectors. Essentially, Calcutta is divided into numerous 'self-contained labour compartments', created and maintained through religion, caste, ethnicity and gender (Shaw and Pandit 2001, 182). According to De Haan, these 'factors constrain people's actions' (De Haan 1997, 923). Chakravorty (2000) provides a few key examples of the occupational divisions within the city, explaining that Bengalis are concentrated within clerical professions, Biharis tend to work as transporters and factory labour, while Oriyas (from Orissa) work in

domestic service, and as electricians and plumbers. Muslims specialize in artisan work and serve as labour in the production of soap, leather, and other animal-based products. Linking the social to the spatial, again, the neighbourhoods in which informal workers in Kolkata reside tend to also 'retain occupational and linguistic identities'. Kolkata, as a result, is essentially composed of an amalgamation of highly localised labour markets (Chakrovarty 2000, 66). While only a limited body of literature has sought to uncover and understand the segmented nature of Kolkata's labour force, the few studies that do exist emphasise the way in which these divisions are reinforced by particularistic hiring practices rooted in 'ideas or myths about what groups of people are good at', as well as what is considered 'acceptable' work (De Haan 1997, 934; Shaw and Pandit 2001, 182).

In the context of India's current labour economy where it is estimated that anywhere from 12 million to 100 million¹⁵ young people are engaged in some form of work (waged, unwaged, formal, informal) (Burra 2005, 5199), there is an urgent need to interrogate the ways in which children access work and maintain their livelihoods, specifically, the power relationships that underlie their working lives. I selected Kolkata as the site of my research for the numerous reasons outlined in this section: Kolkata's unique geographies linked to colonialism and mass migration, its fragmented labour economy and particular spatial and social distribution of labour, and the size and scope of the city's informal sector which largely operates through social structures of identity and kinship networks. Kolkata's deeply entrenched social divisions and uniquely fragmented labour market serve as an interesting lens through which I have sought to study young people's involvement in informal sector work and the informal modes of

¹⁵ As discussed in the introducer chapter, official figures estimate that approximately 12 million children are involved in some form of labour, however, over 100 million young people between 5-14 years unregistered in the school system. Scholars (Burra 2004, 5199), therefore, suggest that the participation by children in the labour force is much greater than official figures portray.

governance that influence children's working lives within the informal economy (Bajpai 2003).

My own personal identity and relationship to India and Kolkata has also contributed to my decision to locate my study in Kolkata. My roots lie in India, and I am unavoidably linked to the nation through my ethnicity, culture, and my ancestry. Yet, I remain a stranger in the country and to its people. I exist in the confusing space between insider and outsider – embedded within the cultural nuances that inform discourse and action at all scales, from the body (race, caste and ethnicity) to the nation, yet unable fully to comprehend them. I am simultaneously too close and too far from the city and the nation. My ambiguous identity and dubious relationship with India have long directed my curiosity in studying the country. Kolkata proved to be the ideal location for this research, and my decision to feature the city as my research site gave me the opportunity to learn about, experience, and build a connection with my Indian identity while also pursuing my academic interests and research objectives. As this chapter will illustrate, my dual identity played a significant role in my approach to the field and my interactions with the range of actors who have contributed to this work.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

My goal in pursuing this research was to uncover the multiple and interrelated social relations that influence work in the informal economy; to examine the interplay between the socially and spatially embedded institutions of age, class, ethnicity, caste, religion and gender, with an overall aim of constructing an understanding of how children build and sustain their livelihoods in Kolkata. I designed and executed my study of working children as a case study in order to investigate comprehensively and collect data on children's everyday interactions and negotiations in sustaining their livelihoods. A case study can be understood as a form of social inquiry involving the rigorous analysis of a single unit, event or system bounded by time or place (Berg 2007; Stake 2008; Flyvbjerg 2011; Yin 1981a). The aim of a case study is to produce an in-depth analysis of the case based on 'detail, richness, completeness, and within-case variance' (Flyvbjerg 2011, 314). The case study approach was appropriate because of the complexity of my topic and the nature of data necessary to address the research objectives.

Case studies have become widely used in recent years, particularly in disciplines based on social research (Yin 1981a, 97; Gomm, Hammersley, and Foster 2000). While a common and misguided stereotype of case study research is that it is used solely for exploratory purposes, in actuality, the approach may be used to describe, explain, or even test explanations, and therefore, has the capacity to directly influence further research and theory (Yin 1981a, 97-98). The following definition by Merriam appropriately incorporates the meaning and aims of the case study design, to broadly define and convey its appeal.

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and further research. (Merriam 1998, 19 Quoted in Bloomberg and Volpe 2008, 80)

I chose to approach this study as a case study, as the subject of children is highly sensitive and encompasses multiple and interrelated questions around childhoods, rights, vulnerability, and protection. The objectives driving this research not only demanded an understanding of these factors, but of the real-life context within which working children exist. My study is specifically interested in social processes and therefore, was defined by the need for detailed and rich data achieved through an in-depth interrogation of a single region and issue, from multiple perspectives and using a qualitative research design. The case study approach gave me, as the researcher, this methodological freedom to explore the interrelated aspects around the politics of working childhoods through qualitative research techniques. I was able to ask the “why” and “how” questions that Yin (2003) highlights as a defining feature of the case study approach, which social surveys and experiments often ignore.

Qualitative research strategies have various advantages that were significant for this research. They produce in-depth and descriptive data from which researchers may extract multiple meanings and interpretations. In addition, the participants’ responses are not restricted to one dominant interpretation of the question, or a single non-explanatory answer (Winchester 2005, 6). Instead, qualitative strategies enable a researcher to collect and interpret information about informants in order to understand their personal experiences, which often necessitate the elaboration and explanation of events, processes, issues, and personal viewpoints. Thus, a qualitative case study of a small number of children and their social and economic networks enabled a close engagement with participants within their own environments, and allowed them the opportunity to tell their own experiences (Baxter and Jack 2008, 545). Consequently, I was able to delve into the lives of Kolkata’s young and poor workers, and identify complex economic, social and political processes, alliances, and constraints that define their everyday working lives.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

My study in Kolkata was conducted over two separate field visits. During the first, from November 2010 to June 2011, I sought to enter the field, find participants and gather data. In the initial two months, I adopted the technique of 'hanging out' to seek an entry point into the "field" to gather general data on the city of Kolkata and the diverse waged and non-waged activities of children, as well as to identify participants and build a rapport with them in order to carry out interviews and observation. My methodology during this stage of the research is discussed in detail in the next section of the chapter. During this initial period, I also approached organisations and individuals to learn more about the prevalence of working children, which contributed to the second stage of this field visit, marked by my close alignment with the Kolkata-based non-government organization, Child in Need Institute (CINI), who, several weeks into my fieldwork in Kolkata, gave me permission to work alongside them. CINI served as an entry point into the field and through which I sought to gather data to identify key economic activities in which children in Kolkata are involved, the factors that contribute to their involvement, and their patterns of participation in different types of work. In this first period of research, I identified two groups of participants: a) children 16 years and below who are actively involved in one or more forms of paid or unpaid work; b) institutional actors involved with working children, particularly NGO administrators, government officials, and labour union organizers. The latter group of "institutional actors" were particularly relevant to understanding the wider prevalence of working children in the context of Kolkata, and exploring the links between extra-legal actors and working children.

My decision to focus on children below the age of 16 years was guided by two key factors: first, I found that very few children I observed and interviewed knew their exact ages, however most of them identified within this age category; second, children are legally allowed to work in India from the age of 14 years old, therefore, it was revealed to

me by individuals involved in this research that some children exaggerate their ages, representing themselves as older than they actually are. The upper limit of 16 years old was, therefore, used to capture children who might over-estimate their ages. Furthermore, the age of 16 in some contexts is considered to be the limit for 'childhood'. For example, some NGOs and child-based charitable organisations (such as CINI) regard this age to be a cut off for support and provisions for child beneficiaries.

The second part of this research carried out from January to March 2012, was marked by my re-entry into the field through several independent and local contacts such as acquaintances, community leaders, and my research assistant/translator. These contacts gave me entry into homes, communities and organisations to speak with activists, administrators, and child workers, particularly domestic, small-scale factory, and shop workers. My investigation here focused on children involved in five key paid and unpaid work-related activities that were identified from my analysis of the data collected during the first research period: ragpicking (along with bottle collection, scavenging and sorting), begging, domestic work, small-scale factory work and shop work. I identified particular localities within the city in which these activities were especially prominent and conducted an in-depth examination of the ways children navigate and negotiate their everyday working lives. I focused particularly on the influences of political structures, familial and community links, and social networks, using structured methodological techniques – specifically semi-structured one-on-one interviews and community interviews. The participants in this section of the research were: a) children ages 8 to 16 actively involved in one or more of the indicated work-related activities; b) Adult participants involved with working children, including parents/guardians, neighbours, community members, employers and individuals associated with community based organizations who have an insight into the daily activities of the child participants. I felt it necessary to include adults in this study, for

they have the capacity to contextualise and justify the social processes under study. Therefore, they offer a more nuanced view of the topic.

Overall, my research combined multiple methodological approaches in order to produce a more precise representation of the activities I sought to explore (Berg 2007, 5) including observation (observing children's daily activities) and participant observation (engaging with children in some of their daily activities – e.g. playing, eating, walking, collecting bottles), semi-structured one-on-one and group interviews with children, and semi-structured and un-structured individual and group interviews with institutional actors. In total, 44 children between 4 and 16 years old participated in this research. I carried out individual and/or group semi-structured interviews with 38 children between ages 8 to 16 employed as domestic, factory and shop workers, and involved in street work, such as begging, scavenging and vending. In addition, I interviewed nine administrators involved with various 'child protection' NGOs in Kolkata, three child rights activists and three former child workers now involved as administrators and child-rights activists with other working children. I also collected interview and observational data from thirteen parents, relatives, employers and religious and community workers connected to the children in this research. Appendix 1 includes a set of comprehensive lists of the participants involved in this research, separated into categories of participants outlined above, as well as the spaces in which children were engaged in work activities.

In the section that follows I provide a detailed overview of the methodologies adopted in both phases of my fieldwork, separately. The first phase is categorized through six stages: 1) entering the field and gatekeepers; 2) building trust; 3) selecting participants; 4) observation and participant observation; 5) interviewing children; 6) interviewing institutional actors. The stages were not exclusive or independent, but overlapping.

3.5 PHASE I: METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

3.5.1 NEGOTIATING ENTRY

My entry into the field marked the important shift from the imagined to the material. Until the point I stepped foot onto Kolkata pavements, my thesis topic and research design – albeit informed through concentrated and rigorous analyses of methodological texts, case studies, literature reviews, and in-depth secondary data – were artificial, abstract, ambitious, and somewhat naïve and hopeful. It was an ideal plan as yet to be set in motion, tested, and challenged by the realities of fieldwork, working with children, and in the chaos of contemporary urban Kolkata. My research plan was neat and categorized. In my mind and on paper, it was based on a well-researched six-stage process that would allow me to explore the world of informal work and impoverished childhoods through gatekeepers, and using semi-structured one-on-one interviews and participant observation to collect data. I anticipated bumps and obstacles in the research process; perhaps even one or two of my stages would not pan out as I envisioned. I knew that there was a chance that some of my research questions would change, and I was well aware that I would have to adjust and re-adjust my research methods throughout my fieldwork. Retrospectively, I realize that I should have been ready to abandon all of my well-informed strategies, for in the field that is exactly what I had to do.

My aim upon landing in Kolkata was to establish a point of entry into the sphere of informal work. Prior to entering the field, I contacted numerous organizations, researchers and academics associated with street and working children, and informal sector research, programs and unions. I was hopeful that I would find my way “in” through one of these sources. My emails, however, went unanswered. During my first few weeks in the city, I persisted through phone calls, and to no avail, I finally began approaching individuals in person, showing up at their offices and requesting face-to-face meetings. Some of my attempts resulted in brief interview-style meetings where I

was interrogated about my intentions in pursuing research on my chosen topic with my motives picked apart and scrutinized. In other cases, the meetings provided a platform from which the individual or organization spoke of the poverty and hardship in the city, yet framed to evoke admiration and praise for the charity that they were providing. While none of these turned into anything more, I was given a glimpse into some of the complexities that define Kolkata, particularly the socially segregated nature of the city, and the deeply embedded distrust woven into its social fabric.

These early days of fieldwork also consisted of spending hours roaming the old part of the city. I knew very little about Kolkata, and as my potential portals into the field began to close, I resolved to experience the city and find my data myself, without depending on gatekeepers to facilitate access to the children I planned to study. In meetings with researchers who had also explored the lives of children in Indian cities before leaving Oxford, I was advised that if all else fails my best shot would be to adopt the “hanging out” research technique to get to know children who participate in varying forms of work on the streets and in shops¹⁶. Hence, this is what I did – I spent countless days hanging out. I hung out around the old buildings in Kolkata’s first district, observing the city as it came to life in the morning hours, and becoming familiarized with its social and economic landscapes; I walked around the chaotic Burra Bazaar, mapping the labour activities of this famous market-place; I ate lunch on the benches and beneath the trees of Kolkata’s famous Maidan, watching street children playing on the grass as they took a break from hawking in front of Victoria Memorial; I drank countless cups of tea made and sold by young children on Park Street, while talking with them about their hometowns in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh; and I chatted with children and their parents who came to me begging for money.

¹⁶ I was introduced to this term by Barbara Harriss-White prior to my first round of fieldwork in October 2010.

‘Hanging out’, which Dingwall (1997) asserts, is, in addition to ‘asking questions’, a ‘basic method of social research’, proved to be the most useful strategy to learn about the city of Kolkata, the informal economy, work, and labour (52-53). The countless hours that I spent on the streets discovering the flow of the city and the occupations in which children are involved offered a rich context upon which I could re-build my project. As outlined in the next section, I eventually found entry points into the field through children’s organisations and child-protection activists, however the ‘hanging out’ technique remained an important instrument in my fieldwork, and one to which I frequently returned to build relationships, develop trust and rapport with participants, and in locating new and potential participants in the research.

3.5.2 GATEKEEPERS: CINI AND SEALDAH STATION

In January 2011, a little over two months after I landed in Kolkata, my relentless phone calls and emails finally paid off and I was given the opportunity to work alongside Child in Need Institute (CINI), a large non-government organization (NGO) based in West Bengal. CINI works with poor and vulnerable women and children in numerous social and economic capacities. The organization was established in the 1970s and has been active in Kolkata and various satellite towns and villages within the borders of the South 24 Parganas¹⁷. The head of the Urban Unit of CINI, located in Central Kolkata, permitted me to become involved with two youth drop-in centres¹⁸ established by CINI in the 1980s in order to get to know children involved in informal sector activities and the street trade. The drop-in centres, located within the boundaries of Sealdah Station – one of two major train stations servicing Kolkata and the surrounding districts, is one of the

¹⁷ This is one of the 4 districts that makes up the entire Metropolitan of Kolkata, explained in the first part of this chapter on Kolkata. See Map 3.1.

¹⁸ During our initial meeting to discuss my project, we concluded that the drop-in centres were the most appropriate sites to set up my study, as they specifically target young people.

longest running programmes by CINI, and provides shelter and support to homeless and working children.

Sealdah station facilitates the flow of millions of passengers and billions of rupees worth of cargo each day, which has produced a vibrant and productive informal economy centred around the station and composed of street and platform vendors, a strong coolie service, one of the largest vegetable and wholesale markets in the city, and essential maintenance jobs¹⁹. As a result, the station is a hub for economic activities in which a large proportion of children are involved. Sealdah, furthermore, serves as a gateway to hundreds of thousands of migrants each year, for Kolkata, as the largest and most economically developed city in Eastern and North Eastern India, is a primary destination for economic migrants from many parts of Northern India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Consequently, the children who frequent the CINI drop in centres in Sealdah station tend to be independent migrants or children of migrants, and live in and around the station. Sealdah, for many of them, represents a “convenient” space to live. It is where they found refuge upon arrival in the city, for unlike many of the migrants who settle in the slums, shanties and villages in Kolkata, these families and individuals – particularly the children – have few, if any, familial or community ties to the city. The station and its surrounding areas, consequently, serve as an immediate space of refuge. The intent for most new migrants to the city, as I learned through informal conversations, was for the station to be a short-term acclimation point. Many, however, remain in this space for many months and even years, as a result of the social and economic conveniences that it affords, as well as the limited options to move elsewhere²⁰.

A large majority of the children I became acquainted with around the station grew up on the platforms and nearby streets and pavements, sleeping, eating, playing,

¹⁹ These figures are based on an internal document produced by CINI in 2010.

²⁰ This was explained to me by Bhaskar, an administrator at the centre who grew up on the rails.

and working within the boundaries of the station. CINI's drop-in centres serve as a sanctuary for these children; they are given basic shelter from the elements, food, resources, and while in the centre, are protected from the daily influences, dangers, and insecurities of life in public space. The centres, named *Udaan* and *Uttaraan* primarily assist boys aged 4 to 12 and 13 to 16, respectively. The centres' staff, not only offers food and temporary shelter to the boys of Sealdah, but also distributes information and provides support to children (both boys and girls), young adults, and families living on the platforms, tracks, and pavements who cannot or choose not to attend programmes at the drop-in centre. The activities of CINI at the station for the past twenty or so years have given them a keen insight into the lives of street and working children, and the centre provided a safe gateway through which I was able to observe, interact with and identify children and secondary informants for my research.

3.5.3 BUILDING TRUST

The participants I sought to be involved in this research were primarily children from economically and socially marginalized backgrounds, most of whom participate in work-related activities under extremely insecure conditions. A large majority of the children live and work informally and have little access to structures of help, safety or protection²¹. In many cases, their livelihoods are dependent on their ability to evade authority, particularly children under the age of 14, who are restricted from formal employment due to labour policies, which often leaves them vulnerable to precarious forms of work and working conditions. As a result, children, and those in their social and economic networks, tend to be suspicious and to distrust outsiders. Thus, establishing a strong relationship with them and their social networks was one of my primary goals to

²¹ CINI has no influence over children's welfare and security outside the walls of the centres.

assure them that I would protect their identities and try to maintain a safe and tolerant space within which they could speak to me. I did this by becoming familiar with the CINI-Sealdah community through my daily presence at the centres and station. Prior to identifying and selecting my primary group of participants, I spent a significant amount of time at the drop-in centres, on the train station platforms, and accompanying children, when they permitted me, to watch them at work and play. My observations and interactions with them were casual and informal in which I aimed to get to know the children, their relatives, social and economic networks, and to become familiar with their day-to-day schedules in order to better understand the environment and activities in which they were involved. This provided me, as a researcher, with an enhanced understanding of the field and subject, and gave potential participants the opportunity to get to know me and decide whether they were interested in taking part in my research, which I was deliberately open and transparent about from the beginning. These informal interactions served, as well, as a crucial avenue through which I was able to build a trusting relationship and establish rapport with the children and their networks.

3.5.4 SELECTING PARTICIPANTS

The first set of participants was identified from the larger community of working children in Sealdah station using a combination of three purposive sampling techniques: criterion, convenience, and snowball sampling. This category of sampling, according to Berg (2007), is undertaken by researchers based on their specialized knowledge of the group(s) or field under study, for it relies on the selection of information-rich cases for data collection (Berg 2007, 44; Patton 2002, 230). The specific criteria guiding my selection of child participants was that they were actively involved in one or more forms

of waged and/or unwaged work²², and were under 16 years old. The participants initially selected were identified from those who regularly visit the CINI drop-in centres²³. Thus, the selection of these participants was also based on the convenience of their availability and willingness to participate. According to Bradshaw and Stratford (2005), convenience sampling provides a low level of dependability and can yield information-poor cases (72). Within the context of my research, however, children selected through convenience sampling represented the “ideal” participant based on the previously indicated criteria. Therefore, they still yielded crucial data for the research. In order to diversify my participant group and incorporate children who were not affiliated with CINI and the drop in centres, I sought other participants using snowball (chain) sampling. This technique relies on recommendations for other informants, typically child workers themselves, who have useful insights into the research topic. In total, I identified 15 children involved in various forms of informal employment to participate in this section of my research.

The institutional actors involved in the first phase of this research were recommended by CINI, based on their availability and knowledge of the subject at hand, to participate in my research. The exceptions were three child rights activists with whom I established contact through an acquaintance for their keen insights into the inner workings of Kolkata and the informal economy. I was initially wary of involving individuals appointed by the organisation in this research, for the data they provided might have been rehearsed or skewed. CINI directors, however, provided me with the freedom to ask questions, participate in casual conversations with, and approach and observe any of the available staff.

²² Defined in the introductory chapter.

²³ At any given time, there are between approximately 17 to 30 children in the drop-in centres. Seventeen boys live in the centres on a permanent basis (9 in *Udaan* and 8 in *Uttaraan*), and eight boys visit the centre for rest, play, food or relief from the elements, on a regular basis.

3.5.5 DATA COLLECTION

I undertook data collection as a means of producing a 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) to appropriately represent the complex and multiple facets that are essential to understanding the experiences, feelings, and actions of participants. In the passage below Denzin (1989) provides an appropriate explanation of the concept:

A thick description ... does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. ... In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (Denzin 1989, 83).

In order to pursue the objectives of this research, it was necessary to produce an in-depth record of the intricate features that contribute to and define the lives and livelihoods of working children. The principal methods through which I gathered primary data for this research project were observation, participant observation, and semi-structured individual and group interviews.

OBSERVATION AND PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Observation in the context of my fieldwork can be related to the technique I identified earlier as 'hanging out'. Children, in particular, working children represent a difficult group to research. Their time is often a major constraint, and as a result, I spent a large amount of my time simply watching and waiting for them to become available. This proved, however, to be one of the most important ways of collecting data about their daily routines, interactions and relationships with others, and the way they performed their tasks. In describing this research method, I have tended to shy away from using the term 'non-participant' observation, for it is argued (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994) that we cannot study the social world without being a part of it. Consequently, all observation can be construed as participant observation. In this vein, I argue that participant observation can be practised in various ways, ranging from total

participation, which is based on established intention and active engagement as a participant in the scene studied, to basic observation, whereby the researcher is involved in participant activities insofar as collecting data based on observation alone.

In this research, I combined both basic observation and participant observation to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the case study. The use of observation as a method of data collection involved watching, listening, and mapping with a keen and critical eye and ear to the broader social, cultural, economic and political engagements and relationships that define the way working children perform their daily lives. In order to keep a record of these activities, I maintained a comprehensive field diary, detailing as much information as possible on verbal and non-verbal interactions. The information generated through observation was essential in constructing and organizing my other data collection strategies, and encouraged the formulation of new lines of questioning.

Participant observation, on the other hand, relied on taking an active role alongside my participants in some of their day-to-day activities, such as playing cricket and carom²⁴, drawing, and walking. During these basic activities, we engaged in casual conversations with each other, as well as other people, such as friends, educators, employers, and family members. As a twenty-six-year-old “semi-Indian”, there was some amount of scepticism from others, particularly adults, regarding my motives in befriending and working with some of the children, however, the children themselves, often explained my presence and encouraged interaction. During moments when I felt I was intruding, such as in some of their conversations with family or friends, they would persuade me to stay and join in. I became privy to these relationships, and their roles with respect to each other. Moreover, I was given the opportunity to engage with my

²⁴ Carom is a popular board game in India.

participants in a variety of settings and ways, which influenced my interpretation of the data I collected through other methodologies.

INTERVIEWING

Interviewing represented the most important method through which I collected primary data. The interviews I conducted were primarily semi-structured in order to both provide a sequence and structure to the interview while still allowing for more information and detail through explanations and diversions by the interviewee. For the purposes of my research, structured interviews would have proven to be too rigid and standardized, as I sought information based on experiences, personal opinions and insights, and differing meanings of events and issues. On occasion, particularly with older child participants and institutional actors, interviews took the form of an unstructured interview, where a single starting question guided the entire interview. Unstructured interviews, however, tended to be too open and were not effective in gathering information about a single topic or specific process (Dunn 2005, 80). As a primary method of interviewing, unstructured interviews were inappropriate for the scope of this project, for they would have created unnecessary ambiguity for both researcher and participant, particularly the child with whom research was conducted. Semi-structured interviews, rather, proved to be the most useful and relevant interviewing style. They afforded the opportunity to gather information, general meanings, opinions, and insights into relevant issues, while remaining on topic (Dunn 2005, 80). Overall, the interview process itself, offered me as a researcher, the chance to re-establish rapport with participants and to cultivate an atmosphere whereby the informants' views and experiences were valued (Dunn 2005, 80; Leech 2002, 665).

The interview structure and the key questions that were posed differed between the groups of participants (working children, institutional actors, and social networks).

Each participant group had specific experiences and forms of knowledge, thus, the interview questions reflected those variations. The majority of interviews were conducted with other people around – a choice made by the participants themselves, despite my suggestions to have one-on-one interviews. In most cases, participants chose group interviews for their own comfort, and felt secure revealing details around those they chose to accompany them. I always offered follow-up interviews, and at times, requested them. On occasion I found participants requesting one-on-one personal follow-up interviews, which revealed more personal details about their circumstances and was a valuable indication that I had established a relationship of trust.

Altogether, in this section of my research, I interviewed fifteen children and nine administrators, activists and educators. All interviews were conducted in locations and at times most convenient to the participants. The interviews with children, their parents and relatives were conducted in Hindi and Bengali, while the interviews with institutional actors and administrators were conducted in either Hindi or English. I am fluent in Hindi, and understand basic Bengali, however, a translator was present during all interviews with participants who spoke Bengali and were not fluent in English or Hindi. During these interviews, the participants spoke in Bengali, which was then translated into Hindi for my understanding. The translator, Pritam, a local Bengali youth approximately 20 years old, was recommended to me by an acquaintance with whom I had discussed my research and concerns about translation. Pritam's extensive knowledge of the city and his ability to speak both Hindi and Bengali made him an ideal translator for this study. Pritam's identity as a Bengali produced an, almost instantaneous camaraderie with some participants, particularly adults within children's social networks. As I provided Pritam with a stipend to cover his time and travel, our researcher-translator dynamic was similar to an employer-employee relationship. While I initially attempted to create a more equal dynamic based on mutual respect, Pritam

approached the project as a job, and recognised that his primary tasks were to explain my research objectives, request and receive permission to conduct interviews, and translate the interviews from Hindi to Bengali and vice versa, when necessary. Since we conducted all interviews together, and armed with some knowledge of Bengali, I was able to ensure that the interviews stayed on course and the translations were not embellished.

The data collection methods undertaken in this first section of fieldwork were largely exploratory and focused on producing an understanding of the larger field of child work in the context of Kolkata, and identifying the types of activities in which children are involved. The information collected here was useful in uncovering numerous themes around patterns and conditions of work and labour, authority, trust and mistrust, social networks, and futures. After transcribing and analysing this first set of data in Oxford, it became apparent that it lacked specificity and detail, for the data represented working children as a whole, without the crucial understanding of particular environments and occupations in which children were active. Armed with a better understanding of the city and a substantial network of friends, acquaintances and contacts, I produced a clear plan to focus solely on particular groups of children in several specific occupations in Kolkata.

3.6 PHASE II: RE-ENTERING THE FIELD

My second field research undertaking was employed to generate data to fill this gap through more structured methodological techniques – particularly semi-structured one-on-one interviews and community interviews. My research here investigated children's experiences and relations of work based on the type of work in which they were involved. Upon analyzing my first set of data, I selected five occupations, which I identified from my previous period of research as key economic activities in which most

children were involved: ragpicking and scavenging (including bottle collection and sorting), small-scale and home-based factory work, commercial service work (e.g. tea stalls, food and ration shops), and domestic work in private homes.

Through the “hanging out” technique that was discussed earlier in this chapter, I identified particular localities within the city in which these activities were especially prominent. As discussed in earlier sections of this thesis, large parts of Kolkata are spatially and socially segregated along lines of ethnicity, religion and caste. As a result, the city is made up of localised economies that specialise in specific forms of work, such as ragpicking or small-scale manufacturing. I gained entry into most neighbourhoods and communities through acquaintances that I had made in the city such as social activists and community leaders. The same translator, Pritam, as in my earlier period of fieldwork accompanied me in this section of the study. Entry into some communities, however, had to be negotiated, as I did not have any formal “entry point” or gatekeeper. Pritam, as a local Bengali male was able to easily start up conversations with residents and workers, and integrate into the communities. On my direction, he openly discussed my presence and research with the community members. While it was made evident that I was the primary researcher and his role was as a translator, Pritam’s presence, his ethnic status, linguistic capacity and his gender significantly aided in creating rapport and establishing a positive presence in the communities, particularly Muslim communities, which tend to be patriarchal – a point discussed further in the chapters that follow. Although entry into the communities was facilitated by Pritam’s identity, I, as a woman, was able to establish rapport more easily with women and children. However, apart from one male in the community of Matiabruz, who rebuffed me as a result of my gender, most men were willing to engage with me and discuss my research objectives, answer my questions, and recommend child participants. As I illustrate below, my “outsider” status as a Westerner likely played a significant part in this. Through frequent

visits to the sites that I identified, we became acquainted with child workers, their families, neighbours, and general communities, as well as civil society groups active in the area, and established confidence in my project, and my position as researcher. This enabled me to pursue data collection through one-on-one and group interviews, similar to those employed in the first section.

Participants in this section of the research were selected using the same purposeful sampling techniques that were adopted in the previous section, with one additional criterion – children’s involvement in work must be in one of the five occupations that I had identified. This proved to be a convenient method for identifying participants, for each community that I selected tended to be immersed in only a few specific economic activities. Table 3.1 identifies the five occupations and the location of data collection. The child participants themselves identified the secondary participants, made up of family members, neighbours, informed community members, and ‘do gooders’ in the community. Employers of some of the children occasionally offered to speak with me. In these cases, I spoke with the children first regarding my intention to pursue these interviews. My principal concern was that interviewing employers might produce a sense of distrust or may be perceived as a conflict of interest among the children. I attempted to ensure child participants that our conversations were private and their revelations would not be disclosed. To my surprise, none of my interviews with employers created a barrier to further interviews with the children, and as far as I can tell, they did not censor their responses to my questions.

TABLE 3.1: OCCUPATIONS AND LOCATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

Occupation	Location
Ragpicking and Bottle collecting	• Sealdah Station • Number 4 bridge • Tangra
Small-scale factory work	• Topsia • Tangra • Park Circus • Matiabruz
Home-based commercial work	• Topsia • Park Circus • Matiabruz
Begging and Vending	• Sealdah Market • Burra Bazaar • Jaan Bazaar • Howrah Market • Park Circus
Service (shops and stall boys, load carriers)	• Sealdah Station • Park Street • New Market • Burra Bazaar
Domestic Servitude	• Salt Lake • Rajarhat

3.7 ANALYSING THE DATA

My approach to data analysis was guided by the objectives of my case study, and the type and form of qualitative data that I gathered through my interviews and observations. As evidenced in this thesis so far, my emphasis has not been on theory building, but rather on exploring and uncovering social processes and patterns, and their related social meanings (Castles 2012, 21). Consequently, drawing on the recommendations of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), I approached data analysis by immersing myself in the data and then ‘searching for patterns, identifying surprising phenomena, and being sensitive to inconsistencies, such as divergent views offered by different groups of individuals’ (Bryman and Burgess 1994, 6-7).

As will be discussed in the ethics section below, despite my early attempts at recording interviews using a tape recorder, this proved to be unwieldy in the context of interview sites, and instead, I sought to record all interviews through note-taking. To record observations and casual conversations, I maintained a comprehensive field diary detailing as much information as possible on verbal and non-verbal interactions. As a result of my lack of electronically recorded data and the importance of observation (e.g. observing power dynamics through body language) as a form of data collection, word-for-word transcriptions were difficult to produce. Data analysis programmes such as NVivo to code my data, therefore, proved redundant. Instead, after transcribing my field notes I relied on organising and reducing my data from interviews with the children according to the key occupations in which they were involved, and categorised the data gathered from adults and institutional actors, in relation to the children with whom they were affiliated or spoke of. A second tier of organisation consisted of categorising my reduced data according to the spaces in which participants carried out their activities of work, and cross-referencing with data generated through observation. Referred to by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) as the 'building of typologies and taxonomies', my aim was to delineate categories, within my broader participant group, in order to find patterns and/or inconsistencies. In this regard, I identified the home for domestic workers and some small-scale factory workers; semi-public spaces, for other small-scale factory workers and children employed in shops, and the street, for children involved in scavenging, itinerant vending, and begging.

In order to further analyse children's experiences of work, I immersed myself in the data through a reading and re-reading of my transcriptions and diary entries (simplified through the categorisation into spaces and forms of work), and identified general themes relevant to my research questions, including: space, identity, activities (work, leisure and other – family, responsibilities), participation (type and form of

involvement in activities under study); and relationships (to different actors and space, including power, trust, protection, security and insecurity). I chose not to code using specific key words, as I felt that I would be distanced from my overall data. By focusing on broader themes, instead, I was able to discursively analyse the data and extract general patterns and meanings, as well as important moments to highlight.

It should be noted that the data used in this study are principally based on my findings in the field through the data techniques discussed in this chapter. While I engaged with some official documents by CINI, as well as Indian labour legislation, and census data they have largely been used to inform the context of this study, rather than contributing to the actual research design, implementation, or analysis.

3.8 ETHICS: INFORMED CONSENT AND MAKING EVERYDAY DECISIONS IN RESEARCH

Ethical tensions are an inherent part of the research process, especially when it involves human subjects (Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Warin 2011). Research, particularly within the social sciences, requires a constant evaluation of the potential implications of involvement for participants through an understanding of the researcher's responsibilities toward participants, and a continual reflection of the relationships involved in the research. In this section, I critically consider and discuss some of the dilemmas, conflicts, and concerns that I experienced throughout my field research.

Ethical dilemmas were part and parcel of this study throughout its duration, particularly since a significant proportion of my participant population were children below the age of 16. According to Warin (2011), working with children requires researchers to be exceptionally sensitive to 'ethical anxieties due to the potential for exploitative relationships' (805). Compounded by the additional social and economic vulnerabilities of my participants as marginalized, homeless and/or parentless, I spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on these issues, and thinking about the

implications of my research on my participant groups, including for example, their safety and security, time constraints and the potential loss of income, and possible consequences from employers, unions and related organisations, and the wider community.

There are two major dimensions of ethics in qualitative research, according to Guillemin and Gillam (2004, 263): 1) 'procedural ethics', which primarily involves obtaining approval from relevant institutional review boards to undertake research involving humans; and 2) 'ethics in practice', which are the everyday ethical challenges that arise in the process of conducting research. Within the framework of procedural ethics, this research was subject to an ethics review by the University of Oxford Ethics Review Board. The University's principal concern was the risk of social, psychological, physical or emotional risk to the participants involved in the research. According to the review board, the research I proposed to carry out involved little foreseeable risk to my participant group, and passed without issue. From the perspective of procedural ethics, I was offered the relevant permissions to proceed with my fieldwork, however, institutional ethics reviews are generally a formality and do not adequately represent the scope and degree of critical introspection necessary to understand and deal with the day-to-day ethical issues that arise within the field (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). These everyday ethical challenges in all research include consideration of access, privacy and confidentiality, positionality and power relationships between the researcher and their subjects, compensation, and social and economic implications of research but are perhaps particularly significant when the relationships in the field are between an adult Western-educated researcher and children living in a city in the global South, many of whom are poor and several of whom live on the street. Ellis (2007, 4) appropriately defines ethics in practice as 'the kind that deal with often unpredictable, often subtle, yet ethically important moments that come up in the field'. My study depended on managing

and maintaining a positive balance between the academic and the ethical – more specifically – between my desire to achieve my research objectives, and ensuring my participants’ protection from any foreseeable harm linked to their involvement in my work.

3.8.1 ‘DOING’ ETHICAL RESEARCH

INFORMED CONSENT

In order to ensure minimal risk, participants were protected through the process of Informed Consent. This basic tenet in doing ethical research is established through written or verbal consent from participants to be a part of the research upon the researchers’ provision of the objectives of the research and the respective roles of researcher and participant (Dowling 2005, 21).

In order to obtain informed consent, it was necessary to negotiate several challenges, including illiteracy and the potential for participants to understand, read, or sign consent documents, as well as the capacity for children to understand the demands of the research and give consent. In order to overcome these, I sought verbal consent, and spent a significant amount of time during the initial trust-building stage to explain my research objectives, our respective roles as participant and researcher, and to address questions or concerns regarding the study. Gaining informed consent among the adult participants was relatively straightforward. However, it proved to be much more complicated within my group of child participants. In recent years, a considerable body of literature on research with children has debated the capacity of children to be informed – that is, to understand the demands of research – and to give consent, which requires entering into a verbal contract through negotiation about participation (Warin 2011, 807). Procedural ethics codes often require consent on behalf of children to be provided by parents, teachers, gatekeepers, or any other adult figure that children

validate as an authority within their lives (Warin 2011, 807). In cases where adult structures were present and accessible, I sought consent from them. In my research, however, the majority of the children were completely independent and had no reliable adults in their lives. As a result, it was necessary to establish innovative ways of providing information and obtaining permission. This was done by providing all the children involved with as much information as possible about my research project, encouraging them to voice questions and concerns about the research, and appropriately addressing them. Both the translator and myself conducted these conversations in Hindi or Bengali depending on the language requirements of the children.

In large part, consent by children was sought prior to the research, however this was often not enough. I felt it necessary to obtain 'continual consent' (Lindsay 2000), also known as 'ongoing consent' or 'process consent', which Warin (2011, 807) refers to as consent that requires renewal at different stages of the research. I found that some children changed their minds often, and since my research relationship with them spanned a period of time through recurrent interviews and observation, they had to be given the freedom to remove themselves from the research when they saw fit. Two children and one adult declined from participating in the research from the outset, while one young male participant frequently changed his mind regarding his involvement²⁵, however, expressed his desire to be included in the study during our final interview session together.

²⁵ The participant, Ashu, 12, involved in ragpicking and begging near Sealdah station, requested to be involved in the research when I first approached him and explained my research aims. During each subsequent visit to Sealdah station to meet him, I would reiterate my research objectives, to which he would first say that he was no longer in participating and walk away. Within minutes, he would run back toward me and say '*mazak karaha hai! Aap ka saval puhcho.*' – 'just joking! Ask your questions.'

Undertaking social research with children is often filled with diverse ethical anxieties, and I found it necessary to constantly negotiate and establish my own ethical boundaries based on those of my participants. Ethically important moments such as where to interview, photographing, recording interviews, and even asking participants' their names and providing compensation (monetary or in kind), were carefully deliberated at each stage in the research process. In certain circumstances, I opened such decisions to the participants themselves; for example, they chose where our interviews would take place, or whether they wanted others present during the interviews. This, I felt was their decision, for they understood the broader physical and social environment better than I did. It also provided them with a sense of control in the research, which encouraged their involvement, and in a way, gave them ownership of the project.

In other cases, such as whether photography would be appropriate and ways in which to compensate, I looked to other academics and civil society organizations to lead me in the right direction. Based on such recommendations, I chose not to provide any direct compensation to children or adults for participating in this research. Instead, as was suggested to me, once I had built a rapport with the children, I would occasionally distribute fruit or sweets. At the end of the second phase of my fieldwork, I distributed small packets of wheat flour to the individuals from the different communities who participated in my research as a symbol of gratitude. I also chose not to directly²⁶ photograph any of the participants in this research, for many marginalized groups in Kolkata have been exploited through such means, and tend to be hesitant in allowing themselves and their children to be photographed²⁷. Similarly, despite asking personal

²⁶ I did take photographs to depict the settings in which the research was conducted, however, the photos do not include any of my participants.

²⁷ In 2004, Zana Briski created an Academy Award winning documentary on children born and raised in brothels in Kolkata. The film entitled, "Born into Brothels" follows a group of children with cameras provided by Briski, to

questions during interviews, many adult participants were hesitant to give me their names. This reluctance was primarily noticeable through body language. As a result, I stopped asking for names altogether, instead choosing to use particular attributes to identify them. In this regard, I have adopted aliases to protect confidentiality.

Another key negotiation I dealt with in the research field was deciding whether or not I should record my interviews. At the beginning of my research, I felt it necessary to record all my interviews and group discussions in order to transcribe and extract all details, meanings, and representations for analysis. They were, however, distracting to many of the participants who had never seen a recording device, which also seemed to reinforce our class divisions and strengthened power hierarchies. Moreover, there were times when circumstances simply did not allow for the use of the recorder, for example, when the environment around us was too noisy or busy, or when interviews were conducted standing with no place to keep the recorder. After my first few interviews, I completely abandoned taking recordings. I found that conducting interviews without recording them gave my research a different type of authenticity. I interacted more with participants – asked them to clarify if something they said was unclear, instead of assuming that I could return to the recording and make sense of it. I felt more of an equal with participants, for they saw me writing about their lives – not simply recording what they said. At times they stopped or paused to allow me time to catch up, and pointed out when something was particularly important so I could put a star beside it. They were often more open and organic without feeling the pressure that they were being recorded and monitored. This constant back and forth negotiation between what worked for my

photograph their everyday lives. This documentary has been highly criticized for exploiting children and women, exposing members involved in this highly sensitive and insecure environment without providing provisions for safety, and producing un-consented images of women and children. As a result, photography in many parts of Kolkata stirs scepticism and apprehension.

participants and what was useful to me was an important way that I kept myself in check during the process of research.

3.9 REFLEXIVITY, REPRESENTATION, AND BEING AND 'INSIDER' AND AN 'OUTSIDER'

One of the most crucial aspects of ethical research is maintaining a simultaneous and interdependent awareness and negotiation between how I, as a researcher, influenced my research participants' and how they influence me. This process, termed reflexivity was one of my greatest concerns and challenges throughout the course of my research (Warin 2011, 809). Reflexivity, according to Sultana (2007) involves 'reflection on self, process, and representation, and critically examining power relations and politics in the research process, and researcher accountability in data collection and interpretation' (376). Being reflexive meant acknowledging my position within the research – a point that I was particularly conscious of throughout the research process, for in addition to being a researcher, I was ascribed the roles of authority figure, friend, confidant, outsider, insider, both, and neither.

My position with participants evolved over the course of my research, which was reflected in their conduct during interviews and in observation settings. Entering the field through an NGO determined the way participants behaved around me from the start. As a result of my relationship with the NGO, I, like many of the administrators, was not to be fully trusted, yet was considered the authority with the capacity to provide resources, support, and protection. CINI drop-in centres are primarily run by former residents of the centre (I refer to them as support staff) – essentially street and working children who found a safe space at the centre, grew up there, and still work there. Part-time educators and the programme manager (referred to as managerial staff) were the only 'outsiders', and there existed a visible division between the way children and community members associated with them versus the permanent support staff. During

my initial visits to the centre, I recognised this distinction, however, found that I was initially cast into the category of managerial staff. The division between the two groups was marked by a clear power dynamic, with the managerial staff representing the educated, salaried authorities, while the support staff came from poorer and less educated backgrounds. Despite my closer relationship between the children and the support staff, there remained a power hierarchy as a result of the age-based norms that define many institutions that work with children (McDowell 2001a, 91). I put considerable effort into recognizing my position with participants, which was often reflected in their conduct during interviews and in observation settings and depending on the environment in which we participated. I attempted to overcome some of the ascribed roles by consciously adjusting my own behaviour. For example, I sat on the floor with the children, instead of on the chairs and benches; I did not shy away from basic physical contact such as shaking hands; my child participants and I walked, laughed, and played cricket together; I helped with homework, while I asked them to teach me Bengali and they helped me understand the broader social and economic environment. Most of all, I treated them with respect by asking for help and saying please and thank you. As a result, I was able to build a completely different relationship with the children, which was based on mutual understanding rather than authority. Nonetheless, their approach toward my role as researcher, friend, and confidant varied depending on the environment in which we participated. Essentially, when in the presence of other 'authority figures' such as the administrators of the drop in centre, children approached me in the same way – as someone they had to show respect to, and someone essentially with authority. In these situations, I was referred to simply as *didi* (older sister) as a sign of respect. During times where the administrators were not around, the same children viewed my presence in a very different way – as a friend and an ally - I became Tanya *didi*, which subtly indicated to me that our relationship was not

as abstract and formal. Upon reflection of myself, I realized that I, too, approached the children in different ways based on context. Within a setting where I felt that I would be judged on my intellect, such as in cases where other adults were present, I tended to represent myself in a formal manner, while when alone with the children, I reflected a much more casual, easy going and playful facade. Despite my attempts to alter this and present one single persona, both representations contributed to developing trust, building rapport, and gathering data with child and adult groups of participants.

One of the most challenging aspects of my research and my time in Kolkata was negotiating my 'in-between status' as an insider and an outsider, and dealing with perceptions of others based on these categories (Sultana 2007, 377). Ethnically, I am an Indian. My parents are Indian – my father from the South and my mother from the North. As the daughter of an Indian couple and having worked and done research in other parts of the country over the past decade, I am well acquainted with the etiquette and the norms of Indian culture. However, I was born, raised and educated in Canada and many people who meet me find it difficult to pinpoint exactly where my heritage lies because of my accent, social-conduct, and my language. My dual identity as Indian and 'other' put into play different dynamics in terms of how I related to people and how they related to me; however, early in my fieldwork, my lack of a single identity seemed to overshadow my positionality, particularly among the adult, educated, and the middle-upper class demographic through which I aimed to gain entry into the field. I essentially felt like an outsider through my ethnicity – as an Indian. I had a persistent feeling that it was my Indian-ness, yet failure to be completely Indian that kept me 'out'. If I were a 'complete outsider' through birth, residence, ethnicity, and race, I do not think I would have been perceived in the same way. In fact, based on hearing and seeing others' experiences I believe that I, along with my efforts to learn about and contribute to the intellectual culture of the city, would have been welcomed and appreciated. Perhaps the same would

have been true had I been a 'complete Insider' – born and raised Indian and Calcuttan and Bengali. I found that the children involved in this research, were less critical and sceptical of my presence based on my identity.

Once access had been negotiated, my respective positions as an insider, outsider, neither, and both, ironically provided me a form of freedom to choose how I represented myself in order to produce results that were more desirable. This means, instead of allowing my Indian-ness, non-Indian-ness, or Canadian-ness to dictate the way I could do research, I chose to take ownership of my own identity and emphasize certain aspects of my character when I saw fit. Beverley Mullings, a British-born Canadian academic of Caribbean origins, represents this most appropriately, by explaining her own experience.

the process of procuring information became an intricate process of identifying spaces and times when it was desirable for me to be an 'insider' and situations when it was more desirable to be an 'outsider' to the social group under inquiry. (Mullings 1999, 343)

Mullings points out that this practice has been subject to much debate, for it can be perceived as a form of 'deception' in research (1999, 344). To maintain an ethical standard, prior to entering the field, I was resolved to be as open with my participants as possible and to provide them with any information that they requested. I upheld this decision, however, felt it useful to position my identity and emphasize certain characteristics in order to attract the participants and data I sought. An example of this can be found in my research with some child participants. I found that it was more useful to be an outsider and to represent myself as such, for they were inquisitive and more receptive to my presence as a foreigner. While all were aware of my Indian heritage, the emphasis was on my non-Indian characteristics. As a result, our relationship was built on our mutual interest in one another's backgrounds and experiences. While I conducted interviews for my research, they were determined to teach me about all things Indian – the language, the culture, and even the different types of clothing worn (beyond the

simple Indian *churidar kurti* – long tunic and leggings – that I wore). Some of the boys even attempted to take on the role of my protector – walking me to the rickshaw stand if they felt it was getting too late in the day, and advising me on how I should travel, which areas of the city to avoid, and who I should not trust.

3.10 CONCLUSION

The research conducted for this study was far from straightforward. The ambivalences, tensions, and instabilities within the field meant that my research design had to be constantly reworked and negotiated to effectively engage with my participants and collect relevant data. I try to capture some of this ambivalence in the chapters (4 -7) that present my empirical findings.

WORKING CHILDREN IN KOLKATA: CULTURE AND COMPLEXITIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 2009 I visited Kolkata for the first time to get a sense of the city and gauge the potential for pursuing my doctoral research there. During this preliminary trip I was kindly given a place to stay by a couple I had recently come to know. During my visit, my new friends were in the midst of searching for round-the-clock help in childcare and cleaning. Their previous domestic help, a girl in her early teens who worked for them for two years, had just eloped with a nearby vegetable vendor and could no longer fulfil her employers' needs. The couple were desperate to find another "girl"²⁸ who could manage household duties, their two-year old daughter and other odd jobs around the home. It was in their home that I caught my first glimpses into the realm of childhood and work in the context of Kolkata.

The profile of the type of employee they were seeking was basic: a *young* girl with no plans of marriage in the near future who could live in their home. No references were required, nor proof of age or permanent address. I questioned my friends on the responsibility and ethics of their quest, both towards their own child and the young girl they were keen to hire. I questioned the capacity of a child to work and to understand her work, especially her responsibility towards another child, and I lamented about the childhood and education that this girl would miss. Finally, I raised the issue of legality, and the lack of adherence to Indian labour laws that place restrictions on hiring children below the age of 14. In response to this last question I was simply told that this is how it works in India. The girl, most likely encouraged by her family, is looking for a job and

²⁸ I intentionally use the term "girl", for this was precisely the term used for the type of worker sought to take on the position.

would end up working somewhere, perhaps in worse conditions. Moreover, it is principally her age that makes her an ideal employee – someone who can be trained, moulded, and is flexible with time and responsibilities. I was told by the couple that most working children would be anything they were needed to be in order to work.

This glimpse into the market of children's work draws attention to work, both waged and non-waged, among children in Kolkata²⁹ as an everyday reality; one that, although demonstrated against by activists and marked undesirable in official government policy³⁰, remains a salient feature of work in the regional context. It indicates key points around the way poor children are perceived and their identities are imagined and constructed, and the way they negotiate and manage their responsibilities and 'childhoods'. It points to the different forms that children's work can take and the social relations that determine in which work tasks they are more desirable employees. Furthermore, it suggests the participation by others – often adults in the children's lives – in encouraging and in some instances coercing, them to become economically active.

This chapter explores these ideas with the intention of addressing the following research questions: i) how do children gain entry and navigate employment within Kolkata's labour market, and ii) what are the patterns of work and employment in which children are involved. My examination, grounded in the literature on the geographies of work and childhood, will first explore the ways in which overlapping familial and community arrangements and identities of caste, kinship and religion facilitate children's entry into, and engagement with, waged work in Kolkata. Next, I suggest a typology of work to grasp the spectrum of experiences of working children in Kolkata by taking into account their reasons for work, including the agents who facilitate their entry into

²⁹ This is not unique to Kolkata. Scholars such as Nieuwenhuys 1994, Dyson 2008, Liebel 2004, and others discuss this in other contexts within India and globally.

³⁰ As discussed in the Introductory chapter, India's Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 prohibits employment of children below the age of 14 years in hazardous occupations. The Act specifies the occupations that fall under this category, which have been expanded upon in 2006 and 2008 (Bajpai 2003).

employment, types of work, socio-economic and educational conditions, and their perceptions of work. I present and discuss the ways the children involved in my research negotiate and reconcile their place within the socio-economic landscape of work and employment. This chapter incorporates observational data and interviews with children and their social networks who work as domestic labour, ragpickers and beggars, peons in informal shops, and who engage in small scale and home-based factory work.

4.2 NEGOTIATING ENTRY

Over the course of my research, I found that many children in Kolkata engage in a variety of activities that may be classified as work, from ragpicking and bottle collecting, to domestic servitude, factory work, household chores, manufacturing, service apprenticeships, and even begging. The basic definition of work, as discussed in chapter two, remains contested among scholars who continue to re-write the concept's definitional boundaries by incorporating new meanings of what work involves. Work, in this study, encompasses all activities that sustain our daily lives: it involves the 'application of labour'; it can be secure or insecure, waged (i.e. regulated and controlled) or unwaged, easy and organized or dirty and violent; it can be conducted in a variety of spaces and under a range of conditions; and it involves an exchange of goods, services and ideas for personal benefit (McDowell 2009, 26; Castel 2000). Yet, work is not exclusively for material benefit, and can also be considered a way of establishing social relations, fostering belonging, and as identity-building (Invernizzi 2003).

When children are factored into the definitional equation of work, however, the complexities around what characterizes work have tended to take on a legal and moral tone attached to age and number of working hours, and reinforced by an inquiry into the relationship between child workers and home, childhood, family, poverty and ethics (Liebel 2004, 5). Like my reaction to the choice of my friends in hiring a young girl to

care for their household and child, media-driven mainstream Western perceptions of children's work, especially in economies in the South, have tended to regard it as inappropriate, cruel, and in conflict with ideas explored in chapter two about the ideal nature of childhood as 'carefree, safe, secure and [a] happy phase of human existence' (Boyden 1990 quoted in Levison 2000, 26). In an interview with Lopa Dey, a social worker involved with the non-profit organisation Child In Need Institute (CINI) and working children at Sealdah Train station in Kolkata, she explains that the question should not be why children are working, or if they understand their work, but rather, should examine the conditions under which they work. She opposes the dominant perception of children working as "cruel" by noting that work "takes many forms". She explains that there is a range of reasons why children work and it is not always out of necessity or force. "These children [motioning to a nearby group of young boys] feel that they must work. We [the administrators] see that even when they have food and shelter here [in the CINI drop in centres] they still work...they will work. This is not the problem...but there must be a system to monitor their treatment"³¹.

The view that children's work in Kolkata is acceptable may be understood through Balogopalan (2011) who argues that in the case of poor childhoods 'biological immaturity has seldom implied a passive role for children or signalled a denial of their agency' (295). In other words, perceptions of childhood in India, specifically growing up in poor families, do not necessarily equate young age with lack of capacity or ability. While this poses significant questions concerning children's potential to understand and engage in decision-making and their degree of autonomy, it suggests that within specific cultural contexts, poor children are perceived to be capable economic actors. Based on my findings, children's participation in the workforce reinforces this idea, for children's

³¹ IA1 (See footnote code in Appendix 1 – A.4 Research Participants: Institutional Actors).

employment and involvement in work is often controlled or negotiated by overlapping familial and community arrangements and identities of caste, kinship and religion which are often, but not necessarily, exploitative. Thus, despite the perception that children have the capacity to work, they are infrequently the decision makers or authors of their own lives.

Out of the 38 children I interviewed, all but nine revealed that their families or communities played an instrumental role in their working lives. Those who indicated otherwise were either runaways or orphans and had no direct contact with their families nor had returned to their villages and communities since leaving. To this end, the former group of children can be placed into two categories: those who work alongside or under the supervision of their families, generally their mothers or aunts, and in a few cases, fathers; and children who work, earn and live away from family or community-based social networks. The children in the first category largely performed their daily tasks independently from their networks – although on occasion, worked alongside them – however, were monitored through multiple daily interactions between supervising relatives or members of their community, and the child or their employer(s). In most of these cases, employment was found and negotiated by the familial and community networks; furthermore, formal payment schemes, such as salaries in the case of children involved in long-term permanent employment, were remitted directly from employer to the child's adult contact. In the case of temporary workers, daily wage earners, or children involved in begging and trading, income would be passed from child to adult from time-to-time during the period of work.

Children who beg are a prime example of those who fit within this category. Begging on the streets in parts of Kolkata can be viewed as a family affair. My findings from interviews and observation of child beggars and their social networks in Kolkata's commercial district and Sealdah Train Station indicate that children who beg are

constantly monitored by members of their extended family, generally female members. Whether they are playing on the streets, running after passersby with sticks of gum to sell, begging at intersections, or hopping from rail carriage to rail carriage, their activities are closely supervised. My findings closely mirror those of Kate Swanson's (2005) from her study with indigenous children in Quito, Ecuador. She explains that as a result of 'community social control' there is a high level of surveillance, which ensures they are protected from becoming homeless street children (154). There is an argument to be made that surveillance in this manner is also a means to ensuring that earnings are handed over – a practice that I found varied among the different 'communities' of begging children and their social networks. On the platforms in Sealdah station, for example, I observed many of the children directly handing over their earnings to supervising individuals (adults or older siblings and relatives), while during my observation of a group of begging children on Park street, the money was often held onto or divided and distributed by the child among their begging network, made up of other children – often siblings – and the monitoring adult.

Supervision is also a means to ensure that children engage in activities that are culturally appropriate and interact only with 'suitable' individuals. For instance, one evening I encountered a young boy selling balloons outside an office building in the central business district. When he asked me to buy a balloon, I told him I had just bought gum from one of his "friends" at the nearby Russel Street/Park Street intersection. Almost immediately, I was informed by an adult male 'relation' of the boy who was selling the Indian snack *chura* nearby that "those boys are Muslim" and they are not friends – a statement that points to an important form of religious separation present in the streets, which will be explored in a later chapter examining children's work on the streets. *Chura* vendors are recognizable by their all-white attire and are itinerant Hindu

male vendors primarily from Bihar³². In this way, community social control not only ensures children's safety in their activities on the street, but also effectively contains children within their own social groups and in activities that are deemed appropriate by their own communities.



Figure 4.1: *Chura* Vendor on Russel Street, Kolkata

Children in the second category – those who work and live away from their families and communities – can be described as migrant workers, and remain connected to their communities through remittances. The children principally interact with relations from their home villages at the time when they need to transfer part of their income back home. For the most part, however, they may return to their villages only once a year or every few years, perhaps during a festival, as a result of illness or death in the family, or during a marriage. Despite the physical distance, their options for work are

³² N1 (See footnote code in Appendix 1 – A.5 Research Participants: Employers, Family, Kin, and Community Networks).

very often organized and negotiated by community members or someone who is known or "*jaan paichaan*" and has a connection to the city. "*jaan paichaan*" is a Hindi colloquialism that can be translated to refer to a known or recognized person. However, it also carries with it the connotation of an individual who can be trusted, regardless of the extent of the relationship. Moreover, it is usually used as a tool for recommendation or as a testimonial of trustworthiness, as well as functions as a way for parents to supervise their working child remotely. Work for children who serve as migrant workers is often arranged by individuals who are *jaan paichaan*, be it a friend of a family friend or a relative of an acquaintance from the same village. The deciding factor, however, is that they *always* be of the same caste and religion. For instance, a young boy named Chottu³³ employed, at the time I interviewed him in 2012, as a domestic worker for an upper-class family in Kolkata's suburb of Salt Lake revealed that he was given his job through a community connection to one of the drivers of the family for whom he now works. Chottu knew nothing of the man prior to meeting him during a festival in their Bhojpuri-speaking Bihar village, after which they travelled overnight by train to his new job in Salt Lake, with a family also from a Bhojpuri-speaking background. Chottu explained that the driver, his employers, and he are all of the same caste. Upon clarification from the driver, Naresh³⁴, it was revealed that all but three employees at the home are members of the *Bania* caste common to the Bhojpuri-speaking districts of Northern India, primarily in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Chottu's story exemplifies the way that familial and social networks construct the opportunities of work and help children negotiate them. It also, however, sets the context for a discussion on the secondary defining factor of children's work - social categories and characteristics, and structures of identity, specifically caste, religion and ethnic background.

³³ M7. (See footnote code in Appendix 1 – A.1 Research Participants: Children in the Home)

³⁴ N2. (See Appendix 1 – A.5)

In large parts of India, caste, along with other social structures of identity, such as religion and ethnicity, are important in structuring economic life (Harriss-White 2003a). The role of caste as a hierarchical system in the broader context of Indian society has varied in significance during different periods throughout history, often influenced by processes linked to India's electoral politics (Corbridge, Harriss and Jeffrey 2013). Yet caste hierarchies continue to shape ideologies of work in many parts of India.

Caste is best understood as a division of the population into a 'hierarchical order of social groups' linked to a traditional occupation (Thorat and Newman 2007, 4122). Determined by birth and heredity, the word 'caste' is most closely understandable through the terms, *varna* and *jati* (Corbridge, Harriss and Jeffrey 2013, 239). *Varna* refers to the four categories of the traditional Hindu hierarchy, arranged to reflect an innate spiritual purity: the *Brahmin*, who are traditionally the priests among Hindus, represent the purest members, followed by the *Kshtariyas (warriors)*, the *Vaishyas* (merchants), and the *Sudras*, who consist of labourers, servants, and artisans. Each *Varna* is comprised of thousands of endogamous caste groups, or *jatis* that have generally been linked to a 'specialist occupation'. Corbridge, Harriss and Jeffrey (2013) point out that although the relationship between *jati* and *varna* is not fixed, members of each *jati* are relatively aware of their position with respect to the *varna* hierarchy (239).

In contemporary India references to *varna* are uncommon; rather, along with *jati* identities, which remain significant in much of Indian society, including in education, work, and politics, the government of India recognises the use of the terms Forward castes for all *Brahmins*, *Kshtariyas*, and *Vaishyas*, Backwards caste for *Sudras*, and Scheduled Castes (SCs) and 'Dalits' for those who lie outside the *varna* hierarchy altogether (Corbridge, Harriss and Jeffrey 2013, 239-240). It should be noted that SCs and Dalits tend to be confined to work that other castes perceive as demeaning.

Furthermore, these caste hierarchies are not unique to Hindus, but are visible among Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, and Jains in India.

While caste has generally been studied as an exclusionary system, my findings speak to caste as a means through which employment is offered, rather than denied. Religion in India, similarly, is also recognized as having significant bearing on economic life (Das 2010). As a consequence, bound by caste and religious obligations and duties, children are included – arguably even forced – into specific occupational settings.

V. Ramaswamy, a businessman and social activist who I interviewed early in my fieldwork in Kolkata, deconstructed the social makeup of Kolkata by explaining:

Calcutta is deeply divided along religious, ethnic, caste and class lines. [...] The main division is between the Bengalis and the non-Bengalis. But, within each of these there are Hindus and Muslims. This means that we have Hindu Bengalis, Muslim Bengalis, non-Bengali Hindus and non-Bengali Muslims. Within the former two categories, we have the Bengali migrants who came from Bangladesh and within the latter two are a range of other ethnic groups. Each is made up of a range of castes and sub-castes.³⁵

Ramaswamy illustrates the core divisions that exist within Calcutta society. Opportunities for employment, tasks, contractual terms and conditions, payment and access to space are determined and distributed according to these social divisions. Furthermore, irrespective of skill, knowledge and experience, they fundamentally contain workers and control inter and intra occupational mobility. Table 5.1 illustrates the division of labour according to religion, ethnicity, and space of work in Kolkata. The data produced are based on the observations and experiences of research participants, conveyed during interviews on the social divisions of labour in Kolkata.

³⁵ IA6.

FIGURE 4.2: RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC DIVISIONS OF LABOUR³⁶

	Hindu		Muslim	
	Hindu Bengali	Non-Bengali Hindu*	Muslim Bengali	Non-Bengali Muslim*
Home	- Waged daily domestic work - Waged 24 hour domestic work in Hindu households	- Waged 24 hour domestic work in Hindu households	- Small scale (home-based) manufacturing - Waged daily domestic workers	- Small scale (home-based) manufacturing
Street & Platform	- Bottle-collecting - Street vending	- Heavy labour: coolies, load carriers - Street vending - Begging	- Garbage collection - Ragpicking & sorting - Bottle collecting - Begging	- Garbage collection - Ragpicking & sorting - Bottle collecting - Begging
Shop	- Service-based unskilled or semi-skilled work	- Service-based unskilled or semi-skilled work	- Sweeping, washing, cleaning	
Factory	- Large-scale factory based work: load carriers	- Large-scale factory based work: manufacturing - Heavy labour: coolies, load carriers	- Leather industry - Large-scale recycling operations - Factory-based semi-skilled fabricators	- Small-scale and large scale manufacturing - Wholesale market producers and vendors

*Non-Bengali Hindus and Muslims in this study primarily originate from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and newly-formed Jharkhand (which was a part of Bihar prior to 2000)

My findings, which broadly reflect the ethnic and religious divisions of work in the four spaces of work in Kolkata, point toward a link between ethnic background and religion in the labour market. This, I observed, is particularly relevant to occupations within the unorganised labour sector. Furthermore, the majority of my respondents indicated that their employers or economic networks³⁷ largely belong to the same religious and regional background. Some employers, particularly within home-based work such as domestic work and manufacturing, prefer to hire from within their own communities, for work ethic, trust, adaptability and ability are largely assumed based on background. Unfavourable inclusion in the labour market that is tied to identity, however, can reflect in harsh treatment such as ‘overwork, loss of freedom leading to

³⁶ The table does not reflect the ethnic/occupational composition of my own participant group, but is constructed based on data provided by informants and through my observations.

³⁷ An economic network in this context refers to individuals who are economically linked to the individual’s work. For example, in the case of rag pickers and bottle collectors, a person who purchases the picked goods from the primary rag picker is a member of his or her economic network.

bondage' and in 'differential treatment at the place of work' (Thorat and Newman 2010, 9).

Caste, like religion and ethnicity, is an important aspect of children's inclusion in work, according to my findings. The occupations indicated in Table 5.1, however, are not specifically caste-based. Rather, the distribution of caste in occupational settings is spatially-based. Children tend to live and work in neighbourhoods or communities with individuals from similar regional and caste backgrounds. This means that a particular work-related activity can be performed by members of any number of castes, however, in spatially distinct contexts within the city. For example, I found that children engaged in collecting and selling plastic bottles in the city centre are primarily lower caste Muslims, while in the neighbourhood known as Phoolbagaan, other backwards caste (OBC) Hindus who primarily reside there are the primary bottle collectors. Alternatively, in Sealdah station, which can be characterised as an acclimation point for migrant children and their families, children of various caste backgrounds who live on the platforms and in the nearby market area engage in bottle-collecting. Furthermore, my findings point to a division of labour linked to caste based on task, rather than occupation. A child may be made to perform an activity or may be excluded from an activity based on their caste. This was particularly relevant in the case of domestic workers, who, according to my findings, were included or excluded from performing certain tasks within their employment in the home environment, based on their caste. For example, respondents who belong to higher castes within the Hindu denomination specified that they did not clean the bathroom or toilets, despite monetary incentives. Muslim and lower caste Hindus, on the other hand, performed the task without increased salaries. Likewise, some of my respondents whose duties included cleaning toilets indicated that they were not allowed to be involved in cooking or kitchen work apart from washing.

The point of this discussion is to highlight that familial and community arrangements and identities of caste, kinship and religion form a fundamental aspect of children's working lives in Kolkata. Specifically, they are instrumental in shaping where children work, what sorts of work and tasks that they can perform. The next section takes the question of children's entry into the realm of work a step further, by examining the forms that children's work in takes in the context of Kolkata.

4.3 'TYPOLOGIZING' WORK

The question of children's work – why they work, what they do, and how they work – is not as clear-cut as the media, policy, and even some academics suggest. As discussed in chapter two, in recent years scholarly and policy work on children's participation in labour and employment, has suggested that children's work is not always intolerable, and has the potential to be useful (White 1996). Moreover, it has more recently been argued that there exist variations beyond the binary construction of work as either intolerable or tolerable (Liebel 2004). Scholars such as Liebel (2004) and Boyden and Levison (2000), instead, suggest that children's work exists on a spectrum from the worst forms of child labour, such as bonded labour, to work that is 'self-determined' or 'desired' by children themselves (Liebel 2004, 194). I would argue, however, that this construction of a 'spectrum' to illustrate children's work remains simplistic. Instead, the ways in which children work – the reasons for their involvement, their engagement with their work and their employers, and the presence or absence of structures of protection, support, and even exploitation, are key to their personal experiences of work, and essential in defining work as hazardous labour, or necessary and desirable. These designations, therefore, are not solely linked to the work task a child may perform, but also to the broader social and structural environment in which they engage in work.

Drawing on this argument, I suggest a typology of work modelled, to an extent, upon Vàsconez and Proaño's (2002) from their research in six cities in Ecuador. They suggest four categories of children's work: i) work that provides skills and training; ii) work that gradually displaces school; iii) 'adultization' – early entry into the adult labour force; and iv) work that detaches children from childhood. In light of the discussion in the previous section, this typology provides a useful way of thinking about children's involvement in the workforce by incorporating data on why and how children enter work-life, type of work, age of entry, and their educational and socio-economic backgrounds. In the following section, I apply a similar way of thinking about children's work to the children involved in my research; however, I incorporate issues of ethnicity and gender, which become essential when exploring work in the Indian context. In applying any typology, it is necessary to be aware of the tendency to stereotype and the desire to manipulate cases to fit a defined category. Therefore, it is important to note that in the case of this study, children may fit into more than one category, 'graduate' from one to another, or transition between them, based on their daily circumstances or over longer time periods.

Work by children in Kolkata can be captured through the following categories – three of which are adopted from Vàsconez and Proaño's typology for Ecuador: i) 'work that provides skills and training'; ii) work as a social activity; iii) 'work that replaces school'; and iv) 'adultization' of work. I note, here, that although I borrow Vàsconez and Proaño's categories, our approaches toward each category are quite distinct, as the context of the street and working children that our respective researches focus on are extremely different – a difference most clearly observed in the varying geographies of the regional and national contexts of India and Ecuador. I emphasize, therefore, that this is neither an argument in favour of or against their study, nor a comparison between our case studies or the way we, respectively, perceive each category of work. Instead, in the

context of children's work in Kolkata, a typology of work is useful in identifying and clarifying the varying contexts in which children work; including the ways children enter, or are made to enter the workforce, the varying importance that children attribute to their work, as well as the diverse roles that work might take in the lives of different children based on their broader social and economic situations.

4.3.1 WORK THAT PROVIDES SKILLS AND TRAINING

'Work that provides skills and training' is a process embedded in the argument behind the concept 'legitimate peripheral participation' by Lave and Wenger (1991), which argues in favour of 'situated learning' or learning that occurs through social 'co-participation' (14). This is contrary to the commonly held assumption that learning is the receipt of factual knowledge or information (29). Placing the idea of legitimate peripheral participation in the context of children's work as providing skills and training, it sees involvement or 'situatedness' in the process of indicated forms of work as a way to 'learn' and develop skills through increasing participation over time, eventually toward the status of expert. I found that Lave and Wenger's argument could be applied to almost a quarter of the children in my study, who indicated that their involvement in work-related activities was facilitated by, and under the supervision of parents, neighbours, or community organizations, and provided them with relevant skills.

Salim³⁸ and his younger brother 8-year-old Salman³⁹, for example, work⁴⁰ not to earn money to support their family, but rather to become accomplished at a skill and in a trade that their family has been involved in for several decades. Salim and Salman's father operates a shoe-manufacturing unit from a dim single-room in their family home

³⁸ M16.

³⁹ M17.

⁴⁰ Work, here, is defined through the application of labour to produce a good for sale.

in a Park Circus shanty. The small factory relies on orders placed by local sales agents and exporters, and the production process involves creating a template and cutting, gluing, nailing and sewing together pieces to construct the contracted shoes in bulk. Their father also deals with purchasing materials and machinery, finding agents, sales, and paperwork for the business. His sons participate in multiple activities in the production arena of the business. The younger boy primarily spreads glue or wraps pieces of rubber or material together to make straps, while Salim assists with cutting and nailing the soles of the shoes. Several other employees and family members, including their father, participate in other, more complex aspects of the production process.

Echoing Lave and Wenger's theories of the process of learning through co-participation from a stage of limited involvement as a novice toward full expertise, the boys' father explains that the boys will move on to more intricate tasks as they gain experience, understanding and know-how. Salim and Salman's father has been involved in shoe making activities since he was young, and mastered the skills and trade through observation and participation during his own childhood and youth. Similarly, the boys will continue learning through non-wage participation until they develop the skills to work alongside their father and eventually co-run the manufacturing unit.

In addition to the education and skills developed through work, Salim and Salman supplement their learning through formalized education in a school environment during the days. Both boys attend a nearby Muslim school daily, where they are taught the Koran, Urdu, Maths, Geography and History. According to the boys, their father and mother maintain a strict home life and they are made to complete their schoolwork immediately upon arriving home from school around 3 o'clock in the afternoon each day, prior to beginning work in the home factory at 4 o'clock. Both boys indicated that they work every day for several hours after school with the exception of Friday, which is reserved for *Namaz* or Friday prayers. Their father explained his choice to have his older

son, Salim, working alongside him as a way to acquaint his child with this trade that he will carry forward⁴¹.

This is where he lives and will always live...this is his life, now and always. He should do this and learn how to work before his habits become bad. I was younger than him when I started and he will continue living here and doing this business after me. I allow him to go to school and meet friends but this is going to be his life and he must learn.⁴²

Salim and Salman's father explained that in addition to his children learning and developing the skills to carry on the family trade, making them work is also a way to keep them in line. He showed particular concern with the way boys in their "community"⁴³ were engaging in "immoral" activities outside the home and places of work. Upon my request for further clarification he explained, "These boys outside" gesturing in the direction of a group of four or five youth chatting outside another shanty, "don't do work and always do *badhmashi*". *Badhmashi* translates directly to 'mischievous' and can be used in a casual and affectionate way, as connoted in the English translation, or can take a negative form and imply the boys to be vagabonds or bad influences. In the context of this interview the latter connotations are more appropriate. Salim's father emphasized that he is determined to keep his boys from such negative influences. Work in a controlled and monitored environment that provides skills and training, therefore, may at times serve a secondary function as a form of supervision or discipline. This is particularly true for girls, according to Sabir Ahmed⁴⁴, a local youth community leader who assists several Mosques and Islamic centres in educating young

⁴¹ At this point in the interview Salman had wandered off toward the living side of the joint household and factory unit.

⁴² N3.

⁴³ I place "community" in quotations, as this was his word choice. He did not define how he was choosing to use the term; however, based on our discussion I suspect that he is referring to the Muslim population within his neighbourhood (Park Circus).

⁴⁴ IA9.

girls in work-related skills, such as making paper bags, cards, and toys from recycled material for the Mosque's to sell.

Girls are traditionally restricted to the domain of the home in education and work. Based on studies of children's work in various Indian cities, scholars such as Nieuwenhuys (1994) and Jha (2009) suggest that girls' work tends to be 'invisible', for girls have largely been relegated to the 'non-productive, home-based and marginal work sectors' (Jha 2009, 208; see Nieuwenhuys 1994). According to Sabir, girls in India are encouraged to learn skills such as cooking, household care and child-care through participation in the home with other female relatives, and are largely prohibited from participating in economic activities outside the domestic sphere. Girls in public are generally viewed unfavourably as experienced, knowledgeable or "too worldly". The Hindi phrase *sida sada*, which translates to 'simple and plain', denotes the ideal for girls in many Indian families, therefore girls participating in public life contradict this ideal. Dyson (2008), in her study on youth workers in the Northern India, along similar lines, explains that gender is important to the way children and their working identities are constructed. Young women's education and work, in the context of her study, was important in preparing them to be good wives and mothers, rather than as a means to future employment, as was the case for young boys (167).

In recent years, according to Sabir, there has been a surge in Muslim girls' involvement in home-based production activities as a result of increasing living costs, when previously they may not have been involved at all. He explains,

The Muslim communities in Kolkata are beginning to recognize the value of teaching their girls to earn a living. Since the religious centres are showing their support now, even the most conservative of families are beginning to let girls participate in our training programs to work at home.

Take, for example, 14-year-old Ausma⁴⁵, a Muslim girl I met at one of Sabir's workshops in a Mosque on Prince Anwar Shah Road in South Kolkata. During a break from learning how to make paper grocery bags from recycled newspapers, she explained that her parents were reluctant to allow her to do this work.

My mother only let me come here because [the Mosque] said it is good for my future. Many of my friends have also come. Sabir *bhaiya*⁴⁶ told us that we would learn to make these and get paid if we do it at home. Our community no longer restricts us from doing such work at home.

The home is a key location for girls' work, as it offers a private and controlled environment in which girls' activities are less subject to judgement from the greater community, and where families or community-based social networks can closely monitor the activities of their daughters.

Vinita⁴⁷, a 14-year-old female Hindu Bengali domestic worker living with and working for a business-family in Salt Lake, Kolkata, embodies another example of the spatial and gendered division of labour. Vinita, as Ausma, is restricted to working in the domestic sphere, in her case, however, in a household that is not her own. Through her participation in household activities with her employer over the past three years of employment, Vinita explains that she has learned how to sweep, mop and wash clothes and dishes along with other household chores. She is now learning how to cook. When asked her why she became involved in work, she explained that after she completed class 8 of her studies, her parents were keen to get her married. She, with the support of her grandmother and grandfather, requested her parents to hold off on arranging her marriage to allow her to continue her education. Vinita's mother, however, felt that she would not benefit from further formalized education and it would be more effective if she worked to gain skills and experience that would serve more purpose in her role as a

⁴⁵ F18.

⁴⁶ *Bhaiya* means 'big brother' in Hindi and is a respectful way to refer to a slightly older male figure.

⁴⁷ F5.

wife and mother later in life. Vinita's employment was arranged by her grandfather, who is the day security guard in the same household. She, therefore, can be monitored by a trusted family member, while participating in waged work that provides her with skills and training within the controlled environment of a home.

As these examples illustrate, the involvement of children in work that contributes to the market economy is not always driven by need or income generation, but can be a way for parents or relatives to educate children in a productive environment through hands-on experience. There are, however, important issues around surveillance, control and attitudes to gender that shape children's involvement in work, particularly within the home environment. I return to this discussion in chapter five to explore in greater depth the politics of space, work and gender through the experiences of Vinita and Ausma, as well as other children involved in different forms of work in Kolkata, inside the sphere of the home.

4.3.2 WORK AS A SOCIAL ACTIVITY

For young people in Kolkata, work can sometimes serve as an opportunity to create social bonds and relationships with other children. During my study, I encountered numerous examples of young children who consciously chose work over a home-life and education, for it offered not only financial benefits and a sense of independence, but also, the opportunity to 'play'. According to Tapas⁴⁸, a 12 year-old boy I met while playing cricket with a group of children behind Sealdah train station, his work as a bottle collector and sweeper on the train platforms of the station provided him the opportunity to make friends and play during his free time. When asked why he began working, Tapas explained that he used to live at home and attend school, but there was "nowhere to

⁴⁸ M33.

play". Tapas' reason for becoming involved in the labour market is particularly interesting, for it challenges the Western-derived notion of childhood, where 'play', which is considered a defining component, is set in opposition to 'work' (Boyden 1990, 186). Recent studies of children's work have dispelled this view, and rather, similar to Tapas' case, give credence to the argument that childhood should be understood as a context within which 'children socialise one another as well as socialise with each other', as opposed to a 'thing' defined by specific activities (Hecht 1998, 77). In Tapas' case, work and play are almost synonymous, thus, working provides the environment in which he can also 'be a child'.

It is necessary to clarify that I use Tapas' example to illustrate that some children choose to work, as opposed to the common conception that they are forced to. This is not to argue that poverty is not an influence in the home environment from which Tapas sought to escape. I simply wish to assert that in certain cases, children are neither forced, nor driven to work, but choose to do so for a variety of reasons, albeit in circumstances where choices are restricted by poverty.

Tapas' example reflects a conscious decision on his part to become involved in an occupation and space of work that provides him the opportunity to play. Work pursued as a social activity, however, can take several forms. Invernizzi (2003) suggests that work, as a form of play, is a stage in the socialising process among street-working children in Lima. She emphasizes that this third stage, after the initial introduction to work and participation in subsistence work (for survival), is an effect of the production of skills and independence through work. This essentially implies that the child has a 'sufficient grasp of the [work] activity to guarantee income' (Invernizzi 2003, 334). In my study, I found that experience was not necessarily a precursor in the fusion of work and play in children's daily lives, instead for some children work is simply performed as, or transformed into a game.

Ashu⁴⁹, a young boy, who like Tapas, lives and works collecting empty plastic bottles in Sealdah station, described his work as fun and enjoyable using the Hindi phrase “*mazaa ataa hai*”, which directly translates to “fun comes”. On one occasion when I joined Ashu as he performed his work collecting bottles from the trains and the surrounding train tracks and platforms, he illustrated one of his ‘games’ to gather as many bottles as possible, as fast as possible, by entering the very first carriage of a local train and racing to collect all the empty bottles he could find in every compartment until the last carriage, and before the train began moving. Every missed challenge contributed to his perseverance to try again, until he eventually succeeded. Ashu further explained that he usually works alongside his friends – other boys from the station surroundings – and together, they compete in such games and engage all sorts of “*maugh masti*” (fun). Peer groups and friendship, thus, often lie at the centre of children’s experiences of work as a social activity.

Katz (2004) in her study on children in a Sudanese village suggests that work and play are often made indistinguishable in children’s lives. While this view is rather sweeping, it contributes to an alternative perspective on the relationship between work and play, where work is not specifically pursued as a source of fun and entertainment, such as Tapas and Ashu exemplify, but rather, where there exists a daily negotiation to produce opportunities for social activity from work. The majority of children involved in my research can identify with this category, however, the following case of Ria⁵⁰, an 11-year old domestic worker, is particularly revealing. Ria’s primary responsibility in her work is childcare. During an interview, Ria described her work environment as strict and organised. When I pursued the question of play and fun, she explained that she enjoys drawing and colouring – activities that she often does in secret or under the pretence of

⁴⁹ M29.

⁵⁰ F1.

work. Ria reveals that she generally gets the chance to colour when she is supposed to be taking care of and 'playing' with the young toddler she cares for, and will often encourage the child to ask to 'play', so that she can take out the toddlers crayons and colouring books to practice her own drawing. Ria essentially engages in this daily struggle to find or create her own moments of fun in her everyday work life. What is particularly revealing from the preceding narratives of Ria, Tapas and Ashu, is that work undertaken, utilised, or transformed into a social activity, highlights the capacity for children to negotiate with their work occasionally, even in less than ideal conditions.

4.3.3 WORK THAT GRADUALLY REPLACES SCHOOL

Unlike the first category, where work and learning occur simultaneously, children in this category can be identified as those who gradually favour work outside the family home in place of formal education. Within the context of Kolkata, a number of the children I interviewed became involved in work-related activities slowly and increasingly over time, at the cost of a gradual withdrawal from education. Some became tired of their school life, choosing to enter the labour force instead, while others gradually prioritized work over their education, eventually abandoning school altogether. Shardoff⁵¹, a 16-year-old boy living in the inner-city industrial neighbourhood, Tangra, explains in a group interview that he became involved in one of the recycling industries operating in the area during his childhood. During his pre-teenage years, he reveals that he periodically alternated between school and work but "completely stopped going to school when [he] was thirteen" ⁵². In Shardoff's case, his family neither encouraged him

⁵¹ M23.

⁵² In accordance with The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009, all children have the right to free education in a government funded school between the ages of 4-16 (Government of India, ret. April 7, 2013, <<http://mhrd.gov.in/rte>>).

to attend school nor to begin working, and he simply made the transition along with several of his friends.

Tangra, which lies between two major routes connecting Calcutta's suburbs to the centre of the city, Park Circus, has long been the industrial centre of Kolkata. Ten years ago Tangra primarily housed auto repair shops, leather tanneries, bakeries manufacturing cheap confectionaries for the local market, and small-scale manufacturing units⁵³. In the early 2000s the former government of West Bengal created a strict policy against polluting industries in the neighbourhood, and by 2007 all the leather tanneries in Tangra were shifted to a new leather-processing zone approximately 12 km from the city. Athar Ali⁵⁴, an 18-year-old local resident, part time-educator and youth leader in the neighbourhood, explained that most tannery workers lost their jobs, including his own parents, and became involved in ragpicking, locally referred to as "*kagaz kam*"⁵⁵. Athar Ali's parents encouraged him to focus on his education; however, many other young people in the area became involved in *kagaz kam* and "sorting" the garbage initially to help their families. Over time, for many of his peers, it became an afterschool job and eventually turned into daily full-time work⁵⁶.

Masood⁵⁷, an 11-year-old boy I met at a drop in centre in Sealdah Train station represents a similar case to Shardoff, however, unlike Shardoff, Masood made a conscious decision to leave his education and family life, and enter the workforce. Masood's choice to leave home and venture into the world of unorganized labour was fuelled by the shame he endured from his father as a result of his grades in his school

⁵³ N5.

⁵⁴ IA8.

⁵⁵ *Kagaz Kam* directly translates to "paper work", however, refers to work as a ragpicker.

⁵⁶ Athar Ali, Shardoff, Sahadat, Muhammed, Hussein, and Alim. Group interview in Hindi and English. February 25/26th 2012.

⁵⁷ M12.

exams. The following is a short section from one of our interviews shortly after he began frequenting the CINI drop in centre:

Masood: I ran away from home! (*Ghar se bagh gaya!*)

Tanya: Why?

Masood: My class 5 results were very bad and my father hit me. I don't like school so I left. Before, I liked school. I did very well in class 4 but in class 5 I didn't pass Hindi.

Tanya: But why did you leave home? Do your parents miss you?

Masood: My father hit me, so I left. I miss my mother. [Turns to look at the centre supervisor, Soma, nearby] I like it here...Soma Aunty is good.

Tanya: But you don't want to study?

Masood: I like studies...I always wanted to study, but I am not good at it.

Tanya: Do you like working?

Masood: I'm good at working.

Prior to joining the drop in centre at the station, Masood spent several months working as a peon for a wedding *Band Baja*, which is a group of men who play music outside wedding venues as the groom approaches. He became involved with the *Band Baja* through an acquaintance he made on a Kolkata station platform a few days after he ran away from home. Masood explains that both he and the acquaintance worked for the *Band Baja* for several months, and despite having to give a small percentage of his earnings to the acquaintance, Masood earned a salary of between Rs. 1500 to 3000 (£15-30⁵⁸) per month including tips, depending on the number of weddings contracted – a significantly high monthly wage according to the drop-in centre administrators⁵⁹. Masood's only expense was his meals, some of which were occasionally provided during events. In terms of accommodation, he generally spent the nights on the train platforms,

⁵⁸ In this study, I calculate the exchange rate of Indian Rupees (Rs.) to Pound Sterling (£) at Rs. 100 to £1. This is the approximate rate of exchange as of July 2014.

⁵⁹ In order to contextualize this wage, records from Kolkata-based manufacturing and trading companies, J.P. Flour Mills Pvt Ltd and VK Udyog Ltd. indicate that the minimum monthly wage for a peon working 9 hours per day, 6 days weekly in a formal office environment is Rs. 3,000. (Courtesy of V. Gupta, 2012)

which is where CINI administrators found him and introduced him to the drop-in centres. The centre supervisors spent several months locating his family, and he has since left the centre to be reunited with them.

Contrary to Shardoff and Masood's experiences, children are not necessarily always the decision-makers in their pre-mature transitions from school to work. Some children may abandon their education and enter the labour force at the encouragement – and at times, force – by family or other social networks. Such decisions may be a result of a need for an extra income, or based on the belief that further education is no longer necessary, such was the case for Vinita. In other cases financial support and shelter may be withdrawn by family or other support structures that the children depend on, essentially leaving them to fend for themselves. The latter course is exemplified by the current situation of some of the boys I interviewed at the shelters in Sealdah station who were “rescued” from work on the streets and placed into education by the NGO, CINI. Their education and daily needs are supported by the NGO, however when I visited the shelters in early 2012, donors were in the process of withdrawing funding to the programme and the centres will be closed by 2014. The issues and consequences around the withdrawal of social networks and systems of ‘support’ from childrens’ lives are discussed further in chapter six and seven, however, the boys involved in the programme state that their only alternative would be to find employment and leave their education. Chotka⁶⁰ and Burka⁶¹, for example, are 15-year-old twins who have lived at the centre since they were 11 years old. They both reveal that as a result of their inevitable removal from school due to lack of funds, they have considered dropping out at the end of the academic year to search for work. Both boys state that they will seek employment in the market close to the station in order to support themselves and their family who

⁶⁰ M30.

⁶¹ M31.

presently reside on the platforms at Sealdah. The stories of Shardoff, Masood, Burka and Chotka represent the varying degrees of push and pull factors that influence the entry of children into the realm of work at the loss of their education.

4.3.4 'ADULTIZATION' OF WORK

Within the earlier classifications of children's work, family, friends, and supportive⁶² or partially supportive networks play a role to a certain extent in children's lives and at least for a part of their childhoods. The 'adultization' of work, however, incorporates children who have no choice but to work, regardless of engagement with their familial networks. They include those children for whom work is critical for their survival and who are driven to work because they have no other means to feed, clothe and shelter themselves and who simply cannot live without an income. These children have either never or only briefly attended school and typically they began engaging in work-related activities in exchange for money at a young age. Their connections to kinship structures, such as siblings, parents, grandparents or individuals from their villages or communities ranges from non-existent, as in cases where the child may be an orphan, runaway, or homeless, to one where the child's relationship is solely as a financial support through long-distance remittances as a migrant worker, to a physically and emotionally proximate relationship where children work side-by-side and reside with their families. This classification incorporates children who, when asked why they work, pointed to their need for money to live day-to-day.

Despite the wealth of recent literature that has suggested a range of reasons for children's involvement in the labour market, poverty remains the most significant reason why children work outside the home (UNICEF 2012, 32; Jha 2009). As Edmonds

⁶² Supportive to the extent that they provide shelter, money, food, clothes and a sense of security in whole or in part, to the children. While they are supportive in this context, they may not be supportive in another, or may move between supportive and unsupportive depending on the circumstances.

and Pavcnik (2005) argue, 'Fundamentally, child labour is a symptom of poverty' (200). This point, although simplistic, emphasises that poverty remains an essential driving force behind children's involvement in work. Without alternative sources of income through social welfare programs such as those in the West, State-sponsored assistance⁶³, or private capital in the form of bank loans and credit, there are few options that poor people in India have to survive day-to-day (Edmonds and Pavcnik 2005; 200). Children's work is, thus, a means through which many children and families support themselves.

It is difficult to differentiate completely between work that provides skills and training, and the adultization of work, for most work provides some types of skills, whether an individual enters work early or later in life, and whether it is supportive or exploitative. Over eighty per cent of the children in this case study, therefore, can be placed within this section and characterized by their early entry into the labour force for the purpose of income generation. Suresh⁶⁴, a young boy who told me he was 14 years old, although looked to be under the age ten, is a prime example of the 'adultization' of work category. Suresh moved to Kolkata two years earlier with an "uncle"⁶⁵ who helped arrange work for him in a chai shop on Park Street in the city's commercial district. Suresh works full time at the chai shop, which is open for twelve hours every day. He also resides at the shop, sleeping on a bench just inside the doorway. Suresh explains that he was brought to Kolkata to earn money and help his family. He has not returned to his village in Bihar since he arrived; however his employer sends most of his salary

⁶³ The State claims to provide basic commodities, such as cooking gas and food grains at a subsidized rate, however, these provisions are only available for Ration Card holders or to individuals living below the poverty line who hold a BPL card. In order to obtain either of these cards, individuals must cross numerous bureaucratic hurdles, often at the expense of their time and finances. Applications are often simply ignored or denied for failure to obtain all the relevant documents, one of them being proof of address through electricity or water bills. Important to note is that most urban residents surviving below the poverty line reside in makeshift shanties with little or no access to electricity.

⁶⁴ M14.

⁶⁵ The term 'uncle' in India is used to refer to any older male, and not necessarily a relative. It is unclear whether this uncle was a known family relation or an acquaintance arranged to bring Suresh to Kolkata from his village. Suresh did not provide further details on the man.

directly to his family – although Suresh is unsure of the exact amount. He is provided with daily meals and Rs. 30, approximately £0.30 per day for his own needs.

Suresh represents the majority of children in this study, who work because they are required to support their families. The children in this category are seldom provided with an alternative to employment, and education is rarely an option. In most cases, children are unable to escape their working lives without significant adversity, which can at times be violent. For instance, Gautum⁶⁶, a 12-year-old employed in a shop on a train station platform revealed that when he tried to leave his work, he was reprimanded by his mother and sister. Similarly, Rahul⁶⁷, an 11-year-old boy who had previously worked in a sweet shop in the city, explained that until he left his job he constantly felt insecure and was terrified of the consequences if he did something wrong in his work, which was arranged by his elder brother. Rahul, who spoke to me at the CINI drop in centre in Sealdah station, further revealed that since he left his job, he cannot go home or meet his family, as they will place him back into the workforce.

4.4 CONCLUSION

As has been widely argued in literature on children's work and the geographies and sociology of childhood, children who enter or are forced to become involved in the workforce at a young age are generally subject to working long hours under insecure conditions, and in occupations that are potentially harmful to their health (White 1996). Suresh, Gautum and Rahul's experiences exemplify this argument, and illustrate the insecure nature of children's work in many contexts. There is, however, a spatial argument to be made here. Based on my findings, children's experiences of work vary significantly based on the space within which they are employed. The three boys

⁶⁶ M9.

⁶⁷ M10.

discussed above all work within the space of the shop, however, contrary to their experiences I have found that children engaged in activities within other spaces of work, such as in the street, view their working lives as a form of independence or providing them with a sense of agency. In the following chapters, I explore this argument in detail.

The categories in the typology developed in this chapter have been designed to capture and illustrate the way that children's work and children's experiences of work vary based on age of entry, type of work, how children work, and their educational and socio-economic backgrounds. As my findings indicate, children in Kolkata engage in work for multiple reasons and in a range of settings. Although children may be viewed as capable economic actors, they do not always arbitrarily or freely choose their occupations. Their experiences are characterized by family and community engagements and obligations, and are influenced by dynamics of gender, religion, caste, space, and power. There is a high level of community social control that determines how children in particular communities and from specific ethnic groups or religions become involved in work. Furthermore, this research indicates that children become involved in work at various stages in their lives, through numerous avenues, and as a result of a range of circumstances. In the chapters that follow, I seek to understand how children engage with and negotiate the structures of social control and relations of power in order to sustain their livelihoods. I observe this objective through a look at the lives of working children in four distinct spaces of work, moving from the private domain of the home, in which children engage in intimate and embodied forms of service work, to spaces between the private and the public realms, including shops and factories; and finally, to the public street, where children perform their work out in the open.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL: CHILDREN AT WORK IN THE HOME

The spaces in which children work are embedded in relations of gender, religion, class and caste hierarchies, inequalities and power relationships that fundamentally influence their everyday experiences of work. In the previous chapter, I examined the way children in Kolkata become involved in both waged and unwaged work, and presented a typology in order to understand better their reasons for participating in the workforce and the forms of work in which they engage. It is evident from the discussion that there exists a crucial spatial component to the way children construct, negotiate, and experience work. More specifically, children's working lives are shaped by important power relations and everyday interactions tied to the spaces in which they work, and produced and reproduced in their everyday experiences within these often unequal and hierarchical spaces. In the chapters that follow, I place *space* in the sense of the places in which children labour - the home, shops and workshops and the street, centre stage to explore the intricate social and labour relations within specific spaces that children contend with on a daily basis. Here children's work affects with whom they interact as well as the ways in which the social relations of waged work are regulated or not.

The importance of space and the spatial, as I argued in chapter two, have been extensively debated and theorised by scholars from several disciplines over the past several decades. Geographers, however, who are widely viewed in scholarship as the 'custodians' of space, are key theorists in these debates, placing space at the centre of their debates and analyses (Halford 2008). In chapter 2 I discussed the key spatial theories put forward by scholars including Harvey⁶⁸ (1989), Lefebvre⁶⁹ (1991), and

⁶⁸ Space as absolute, relative and relational.

Massey⁷⁰ (2005). In the chapters that follow, I draw on aspects of these theories to explore the way that spaces of work are constructed, lived and challenged, affecting the life chances of the children at the heart of my research. One of the principal arguments of this chapter is that space is constructed and articulated in terms of social relations of gender and other social divisions/categories, including class, caste, and religion (Massey 1994). Doreen Massey (1994), a key proponent of explorations and theorisations of 'space' as a category, has argued that space is a relational construct, arguing that 'the spatial can be constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales from the global [...] to the social relations within the town, the settlement, the household and the workplace' (Massey 1994, 2; 4). This study is framed within this view of space, defined here by Massey, as organised through a vast 'complexity of interacting social relations' (Massey 1998, 127). Drawing on this claim, it is evident that the spaces in which work is conducted are embedded in particular social relations that are a key part of children's experiences of work and employment. Work is situated and performed in space, and working lives are made and lived within these spaces (Halford 2008); and so the spaces of work both reflect and affect social relations.

It is important to note here, however, that while these spatial theories are at the heart of geographical thought and inquiry, the spatialities of waged work, in the sense that the chapters that follow will consider, have been relatively ignored in favour of the 'macro-spatial' processes of urbanisation, globalisation, and economic restructuring, (McDowell 2001b). While these are of high significance, as Halford (2008) suggests, they are different from the smaller spaces of waged work and the 'workspaces or the lives

⁶⁹ Lefebvre has put forward a spatial triad composed of: spatial practices, representations of space, and representational space.

⁷⁰ Space should be thought of as a product of interrelations, the sphere of multiplicity of relations, and as continually constructed ('always being made').

lived within these' (927). Here and in the next three chapters, my aim is to examine the micro-spatial relations of the workplace through the lens of the lives of child workers.

I want to show how the spaces in which children work (and sometimes live) are imbued with social relations of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity and power that are enacted through the construction of hierarchies, divisions of labour, work regimes and payment structures. In this chapter, I aim to uncover the ways in which children negotiate these constructions, by exploring and analysing children's work and working lives in the private realm of the home and through the intimate labour associated with domestic servitude. In the following chapters, I turn to what I have called the 'in-between space' of the shop and factory: between private and the public arena, and then the public space of the street, to reveal the primary social and economic relationships and structures, and related obstacles that children contend with in their working lives. Through this focus on these different spaces of work, I first analyse the key social structures and relations within the specified spaces of work; secondly, I explore the ways in which these social relations are constructed, exercised and negotiated; and thirdly I discuss the ways in which working children understand and construct their working identities within the environment in which they work. Each chapter closes with a discussion of the importance of examining children's daily practices and experiences of labour and work, in the specific spaces in which they occur, unpicking the interrelations between them. Spaces are constructed through the intersection of social practices, but also affect as well as reflect them.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Qayum and Ray (2003) write, 'domestic servitude confuses and complicates the conceptual divide between family and work, custom and contract, affection and duty, the

home and the world' (521). This description, which launches their paper on domestic workers in Kolkata, is not only applicable to the occupation of domestic servitude, as Qayum and Ray suggest, but can also be extended to include all forms of work within the space of the home, for the home as a lived space is built upon the most intimate of human relationships (Ray and Qayum 2009, xvi; Blunt 2005, 506). It is shaped by 'everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories, and emotions' (Blunt 2005, 506) that 'lie at the heart of human life'. It is a space of family, 'belonging', and 'protection', but also one of dissension, 'fear', and 'violence' (Blunt and Varley 2004, 3), as well as gendered power and sometimes exploitation. As a space of work, however, the domestic sphere represents a contradictory, complex, and ambiguous space shaped by inclusions and exclusions inextricably embedded in the social relations and power dynamics that are tied to family, religion, culture, tradition, and sentiment, but also, to contracts, negotiations and exchanges central to the sphere of work and employment (Blunt 2005; Ray and Qayum 2009).

In this chapter I explore the work category of domestic service within the sphere of the home. I draw on information that I collected through interviews and observation with children who participate in waged work in the space of the home, in order to explore the social processes and relations of power that underlie their working experiences in the domestic sphere.

5.2 DOMESTIC WORK

Domestic work is one of the primary forms of waged labour conducted in the space of the home. In India, domestic work occupies a significant place within the informal economy; moreover, it represents a key sector in which children participate in formal paid employment (Bourdillon and Pfigu's 2006). Ray and Qayum (2009, 2) argue that domestic servitude is an 'institution that lies at the bedrock of Indian domestic middle-

and upper-class existence'. Kolkata's 'culture of servitude' has been a significant focus for Rakha Ray, who has written extensively on domestic work in India in both a historical and contemporary context (Ray 2000; Ray and Qayum 2009). I rely on her term 'servitude' to refer to this labour category built around domestic work, for it captures the rhetoric that persists in Kolkatan society about domestic work. Women and children within this sector remain 'servants', as opposed to 'workers' in the larger landscape of domestic work. In Ray's definition, servitude encompasses all paid domestic labour, however, the language of and attitudes toward domestic workers mark an important aspect of their experiences of work. Furthermore, the use of 'servitude' instead of service or work represents a larger ideology and culture around domestic work that informs the persistence of social relations of domination and subordination, and gender, class and caste inequality. The home is central to the occupation of domestic servitude, and thus, is the crucial site where these relations and inequalities are produced and reproduced.

Domestic work is common in most middle-and upper-class homes in India. In a recent policy brief on domestic work by the International Labour Organisation (2010) it was suggested that in 2004-05 there were over 4.2 million domestic workers in India (4). According to the authors, this figure is the most accurate estimate of domestic workers nation-wide, however, they draw attention to contradictory reports and studies that place the number of domestic workers anywhere from 2.5 million to 90 million (ILO 2010, 4). Another article about working women in India places the figure closer to 15 million, of which, it is suggested, women and children make up 90 per cent (Singh and Hoge 2010, 206). The discrepancy between the estimates reflects both the extent of the informal economy in India, and the obscurity and anonymity representative of this unregulated sector. It also, however, brings into question the definition of domestic servitude/work.

According to the ILO brief, domestic work refers to any work performed ‘in or for a private household’ (2010, 2). Domestic workers, as the authors suggest, are not a homogenous group and perform multiple and varied tasks from cleaning and childcare to gardening, cooking, fetching groceries, and even driving (ILO 2010, 2). Here, I expand this definition and consider domestic workers to be any paid or unpaid individual who performs tasks in or for a household and/or family that is not their own. I draw on the categories of domestic servitude suggested by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) to narrow the broad category, and clarify the type of domestic work on which this study is focused. Hondagneu-Sotelo categorizes domestic work into three types. The first is ‘job work’, which is part time and temporary, where payment is task based – usually cash in hand, and therefore unrecorded. Based on my in-depth interviews with and observation of eight domestic workers and their employers in Kolkata, this is often undertaken by adult women, and occasionally men. The second category is ‘day work’, which is full-time and permanent, and wages are paid-in-hand on a monthly basis in most cases. This form of domestic work is primarily undertaken by adult women. The final category is ‘live-in work’, which is full time and primarily relies on child workers, both boys and girls. Payment, here, is usually provided on a monthly basis, and may be paid directly to the worker, or may be remitted to a specified relation of the child. In Kolkata, the latter is referred to as *chau-bis gunta kam* or “24-hour work” and is the principal category of domestic servitude with which this study is concerned.

I turn now to a detailed analysis of children’s involvement in domestic servitude within the space of the home. In the first section, I draw on the data that I collected through periodic interviews with and observation of a small number of children who worked as waged domestic servants in the home over the period of several months. Through these interviews, I explore the primary social processes and relations of power that underlie their working experiences inside the domestic sphere. In the second part, I

show how children in the home perceive, access and negotiate broader scale social and institutional structures of power that influence their working lives.

5.2.1 WHY CHILDREN AND WHY THE HOME? AGE, ETHNICITY AND GENDER

The circumstances under which children become involved in service-based work within the home are crucial to their experiences of work and the micro-scale social relations that they contend with in their everyday lives. The child domestic workers I interviewed were all employed in *chau-bis gunta kam*, and were brought into or introduced to their positions through pre-existing connections to their employer family, either through another worker employed by the family or a known family, or through a village or caste connection. With the exception of just two of the children I interviewed, they may be defined as economic migrants who remit their earnings to their family members in their villages, which were, in some cases, located within West Bengal, and in other cases, in neighbouring states, however, no further than an overnight train journey from Kolkata. They were essentially obliged to work by family or relatives, typically to ensure the survival of their own family who were dependent on their wages. The choice of the home and domestic servitude for their employment at times, however, served a broader social function – a point that will be explored in more detail in this chapter.

One of the key questions that I posed in all my interviews – albeit, phrased based on the respondent – was ‘why do children work?’ To the employers of child domestic workers I specifically asked why they chose to hire children. I always received a variation of the same answer: “they are easy to train” and “they can sleep anywhere”. The latter response shows how child domestic workers might be absorbed into a household without significant demands on familial space.

Qayum and Ray (2003) have written extensively about the connection between the rise of the capitalist mode of production and establishment of contemporary forms of

domestic servitude. In particular, they argue that in India, specifically Kolkata, with the transition from feudal land and labour relations to industrialism and capitalism, there have been simultaneous demographic and spatial pressures that have contributed to the changing character of upper class homes from large mansions to small flats. This, in turn, has produced a corresponding shift in patterns of domestic servitude from a typically male, live-in, family retainer who stayed in service for life, to increasingly female, live-out, and part-time domestic workers (527). They write:

Newer flats, smaller and more restricted than both the big houses and older flats, pose challenges for the employer-servant dynamic that go much beyond just the physical and spatial...If servants were both everywhere and nowhere in the descriptions of the old order, the new order produces a spatial conundrum since the servant is never invisible (Qayum and Ray 2003, 531)

While their findings are useful in understanding the contemporary nature of adult-based domestic servitude, they are less relevant to child servitude which Qayum and Ray neglected. My findings, suggest that the increase in children's involvement in domestic work is an effect of these similar changes in home construction as a consequence of the increasing urban density, as well as the increasing shift from large joint family homes, to nuclear families and homes. Chandra⁷¹, an employer of 16-year-old Priya, a full-time domestic worker who has been with the family of four since she was 12-years-old explains that children are adaptable and flexible. Re-iterating the sentiment of another employer whose arguments I included at the beginning of the chapter 4, Chandra suggested that a child worker is able sleep and eat anywhere and so is unobtrusive. Essentially, children are able to move across the threshold between visibility and invisibility in the home at different times of the day and night and when involved in different tasks. The employer⁷² of, Ria, another child domestic work who I interviewed, explained that hiring a young child removed the need for a separate

⁷¹ N7.

⁷² N8.

‘servant’ room. In hiring an older live-in domestic worker, such as a *masi*⁷³, it would be necessary to provide her a space of her own. Moreover, she revealed that as a young housewife, she was concerned that her command over her home would be diminished by the presence of an older woman in her space. “She would be set in her ways...she might not listen to me. Ria does her work and then she goes away and does what she wants. I don’t need to think about her.” This point speaks to David Harvey’s (1989) insistence that ‘the command over space is a fundamental and all pervasive source of social power in and over everyday life’ (226) even in the small scale spaces of the home, which Harvey ignores. Space, and access to it, becomes a justification for the preference for children rather than adults as workers in the live-in domestic service sector.

Entry into domestic servitude and the home as a space of work is a markedly different experience for girls and boys. Among my female respondents, it has become clear that their involvement in home-based work is representative of a broader discourse around control, honour, reputation and expectation. While no such pattern is clear for young boys entering the realm of domestic servitude, there is an evident division of labour that is reproduced through this discourse within the space of the employer’s home.

There is a significant body of research on the gendered nature of work in India (see Roy 2003; Singh and Hoge 2010) that shows how gender remains a potent structure in India today. Despite the increased incorporation of women as a whole into the global labour force, according to Roy (2003), in Kolkata the feminization of work has occurred most significantly within informal sector activities such as domestic service (95). This shift, according to Roy (2003) is related to the rise of ‘distress migration’⁷⁴, and is

⁷³ *Masi* is a term for mother’s sister, but also used to refer to older female domestic workers.

⁷⁴ Distress migration is primarily a function of financial hardship. Roy (2003) further suggests that distress migration signals a (disturbing) trend toward casualization alongside the feminisation of work (95).

particularly apparent through the 'domestication of working daughters', to use Roy's words (95; 102). The rise of girls in the sphere of urban work is a consequence of larger institutional and economic processes such as globalisation. However, the continuing restriction of girls to the sphere of the home, albeit now for wage employment, reflects the longstanding gendering of space in which the place of girls is in the realm of the private, as opposed to the public arena.

In the previous chapter, I suggested a link between the way children enter the labour market and socially regulated systems of surveillance and governance. In particular, I drew on the example of Vinita⁷⁵, a young female domestic worker whose entry into her position as a domestic worker was facilitated by her grandfather, a watchman employed in the same household. The familial connection serves as a key way in which Vinita's life away from her own family village is monitored, governed, and controlled. This point resonates not only with Vinita, but with all the young girls employed as domestic workers. Work in a 'known' home is a means through which girls contribute to the family income, while remaining in a monitored environment and under the watchful eye of both her employer and a relation close to her own family – in Vinita's case, her grandfather. The private space of the home is an ideal space of work for girls in the eyes of parents, for it is perceived to be impermeable to public life and the related threats of social and sexual deviance synonyms with the public sphere and occupations such as shop work, factory work, and most importantly, street work.

Work within the space of the home, therefore, reflects ideas around honour and reputation. According to Priya⁷⁶, a 16-year old girl who began working for an upper class household when she was 12-years old, most communities such as her own Hindu Bengali community view girls who work in any occupation apart from domestic servitude as

⁷⁵ F5.

⁷⁶ F3.

shameful. "We are respected but not the girls who work alone outside. They bring shame to their homes". Priya further reveals that girls who work outside the home are bold and aggressive – attributes in women that are considered undesirable within the larger Indian society. Moreover, there is an implicit assumption that a girl on her own in the public sphere is likely to be exploited, especially sexually, by boys or men. Priya's ardent use of the Hindi word *baisharam*, or shameless, is telling of the extent to which girls on their own in the public sphere are disparaged. Roy's (2003) example of the plight of a young domestic worker who was cast in shame after she went missing in the city for several months, reveals similar attitudes (102). Roy (2003) relates current preconceptions to the Hindu myth of Ramayana, which remains an important lesson in Indian society on observance and consequence. She writes:

Sita is instructed by her husband, Rama, to remain behind a strict cordon. In transgressing this boundary, she allows herself to be kidnapped by Ravana. Over time, her imprisonment is reinscribed as seduction, and thus once rescued she has to undergo *agnipariksha*, or test by fire, to prove her virtue (106).

Such ideas are not unique to Kolkata or to India. Ong's (1987) work on factory women in Malaysia, for example, similarly reveals the way that factory girls are dubbed as 'immoral' and 'micro-devils' (182). In the case of Kolkata, working girls are, thus, severely restricted for fear of bringing dishonour or ill-repute to the family home (Roy 2003, 106). Those who resist domestic isolation face a lifelong trajectory of discrimination – a point that will be explored in greater detail later in the later chapters that focus on forms of employment beyond the spatial boundaries of the home. It is important, however, to note here that girls who work in more public workspaces alongside their parents, brothers, or kin, are often exempt from such representations.

The specific designation of girls to the domestic realm, in addition to control and surveillance, can also be considered a means toward a goal – the goal being marriage. Work in the home for all the girls involved in this research represents a period of

transition, training and waiting. In the face of poverty and need, the additional income that girls bring in is often justified as an added benefit to the primary goal of preparing a girl for married life. Returning to the case of 16-year-old Priya, she revealed that her employment was an important stepping-stone to securing a “good match”. Priya, whose marriage had been arranged a few days prior to our interview, explained her reasons for becoming involved in domestic work:

When I completed class six my mother decided that I should start working. She wanted me to learn how to take care of a home. Now I can cook and take care of children. They [the family she works for] have two small children and I have taken care of them since birth.⁷⁷

In response to my questions about salary, Priya eventually revealed that some of her income was likely to be used to settle her dowry. “I think it [the salary] will help but I don’t know how much. [My salary] is sent to my mother every month.” Priya’s employers later casually revealed that part of the wedding and dowry expenses will also fall on them. The matriarch of the home revealed that Priya’s mother had already asked for money. When I asked why it was her responsibility, she explained, “when we hire unmarried girls we know that they will get married and we will have this responsibility. It is understood.”⁷⁸

Vinita, unlike Priya, states that working as a domestic servant was the only way for her to delay her marriage.

After [I completed] class eight [at the age of 13] my mother and father wanted me to get married. When I said no, they asked my grandfather to find work for me. I want to study more but my mother says no...I must work here or marry.⁷⁹

Vinita’s experience reflects of a common attitude in India toward educated girls and marriage. Vinita’s education was suspended once she reached a high enough level, for her parents’ fear that she would become over-educated and undesirable to potential

⁷⁷ F3.

⁷⁸ N7.

⁷⁹ F4.

husbands and their families. Her remaining options were either marriage or waged work, and in Vinita's case, her family respected her request not to marry immediately – unusual in Vinita's community according to her.

Priya and Vinita's narratives not only indicate that the choice of occupation of domestic servitude is a transitional stage in a girls' life toward marriage, but that it can be seen as a way in which girls are controlled and disciplined through work in the home. In this section, I have highlighted these aspects of work in the home to reveal the gender differentiation of work through which obedience is produced simultaneously in the household and the workplace and reproduced through the gendered identities of working girls.

Unlike girls, for whom domestic servitude is considered a safe and respectable employment option prior to marriage, for boys who work in the space of the home, work is pursued, not necessarily as a way to gain skills for the future, but rather, is an ideal means of generating an income. As discussed above, domestic servants are often hired through known social networks. The boys in this study all revealed a relationship to their employers through other employees or acquaintances to the family, such as the case of Chottu⁸⁰, discussed in Chapter 4. Like Chottu, all the boys entered work in the home at a young age. According to Shanti, one employer, boys older than "16 or 17" years of age are not ideal to teach or train, and often skew the power relationship in the home:

I can teach the small boys but many of the older boys don't want to listen and they do what they want. It's hard to even tell them what to do. Now even these boys [referring to the three teenagers who work in her home] have started disappearing and going to the park to play cricket in the afternoon. But I've already taught them. They will do all their work without complaining.⁸¹

⁸⁰ M7.

⁸¹ N4.

Boys tend to remain in their employment for as long as they wish – even beyond marriage. 18-year old Manoj⁸², for example, who has been with his employer's family for the past eight years, reveals that despite his marriage, he has continued to work and live in the same family household. His wife lives with his family in their village in Bihar, to which he returns for holiday every few months. Despite the objection to hiring older male domestic workers, by all the employers of domestic servants, those who have been working since childhood are relatively secure in their employment. Within the realm of domestic servitude in Kolkata, I found that job security was not a significant concern among workers, for the increasing scarcity of round-the-clock help, and the increasing difficulty in securing children from the same ethnic or caste background. As a result, once hired and trained, both the employers and the working children in this study reveal that it is unlikely that they will be let go of, unless there are significant problems, such as stealing.

Shweta⁸³ the employer of 11 year-old girl Ria, however, reveals that she was hesitant to hire boys to work in her home, for fear that they may pose a sexual threat to her young daughter. In this regard, it became clear that there was a social, labour and spatial distinction between the work and perception of boys and girls in the home. None of my male respondents had the task of childcare, even when children resided in the household. Furthermore, male servants generally live in dwellings outside the home – in a garage or a shed behind the house, or in the general servant's quarters in an apartment building. Shanti, the employer⁸⁴ of the three teenage boys, referenced above, reveals that despite her long employment of the boys who work in her home, she was hesitant to allow them to sleep in the house at night, since she had one young female domestic

⁸² M8.

⁸³ N8.

⁸⁴ N4.

worker, as well as several daughter in-laws and a granddaughter in the home. Instead, the boys were given their own space in a garage beside the house, and the doors to the home were locked each night at 11pm and unlocked at 6am.

As this chapter has illustrated so far, gender is a key structure, not only in the production of working children, but also within the spaces of work, where gender is constructed and reproduced through every day social relations and divisions between child workers and their employers, as well as among workers. I explore how this works out through the description of a typical working day for Vinita⁸⁵, who is employed by a large and wealthy joint business family. The household comprises four couples – each with their own bedroom and bathroom: the patriarch and matriarch, their son, his wife and newborn daughter, and two nephews and their respective spouses. The house is made up of several shared living areas, a primary and secondary kitchen, and a main dining area. There are several spare bedrooms for guests and other family members.

Vinita's day begins at 5:00am when she is awoken by the female head of her employer household to make a cup of *chai*. She explains to me that her duties are primarily toward the women in the joint family home and she has very little interaction with the men, although her chores, such as making beds and cleaning, benefit all the members of the household. Communication with the male family members, however, is either through a female member of the home or a young male servant or one who has been with the household since their youth. After making and serving *chai*, she bathes and prepares the home *Mandir* (temple) for morning prayers undertaken by some of the women of the home. She scrubs the floor of the *Mandir*, lays out the rugs and washes all the silverware in the *Mandir*, while her employer, whom she calls 'Auntie', arranges the idols and lights the prayer lamps, or *dia's*. The prayers last until approximately 8am,

⁸⁵ F4.

after which Vinita takes her own *chai* break before she begins her daily chores of collecting the previous days' clothes from the drying line, folding the clothes, ironing, sweeping, making *chai*, collecting dirty clothes once the men leave for work, clearing the table, washing dishes, sweeping again, mopping, making beds, cleaning the bathrooms, dusting the bedrooms, and washing clothes. In between she stops to have breakfast – generally after all the other members of the family have eaten, and bathes once more – a common habit for most domestic workers who clean bathrooms.

By the time she completes her chores, it is time to serve lunch to the members of the home that remain during the day – almost exclusively women. Once they have eaten, Vinita washes up and straightens out the dining area, before taking her own lunch at about 4pm. With the bulk of her daily chores complete, the rest of her day consists of small errands around the house, such as making *chai*, organizing the kitchen or closet, peeling or chopping vegetables, and helping the female household heads with small jobs. By 9pm Vinita usually lays out her mattress on the floor of a spare bedroom and goes to sleep – usually to be awoken a few hours later to have dinner. Vinita explains that all 'servants' must take their meals only after the members of the home have eaten, and while "Auntie" has told her to eat earlier, she is uncomfortable doing so. As the only female domestic worker in the home, Vinita has her own bathroom on the rooftop terrace, as servants are restricted from using the same bathroom as family members. Next to the bathroom, she also has a small room to keep her belongings, which doubles as the space where she folds and irons the family's clothes

The home in which Vinita works also employs, Mohan⁸⁶ a 16-year old boy who does many of the same chores as Vinita but on different floors of the house. Mohan's primary responsibilities, however, involve going to the market every evening to buy

⁸⁶ M4.

groceries and running errands outside the home – tasks that Vinita is not permitted to perform. Additionally, Mohan, unlike Vinita, serves both the men and women of the house when they eat, as well as more generally in everyday requirements. The male domestic workers share a bed in a garage space beyond the gated driveway to the home, and have their own bathroom and washing space behind the home, which is also shared by other male members of the household staff, including the security guards, gardener, and drivers.

As exemplified by Vinita and Mohan's cases, there is a clear gender division of labour in many homes in Kolkata, such as in this traditional business household. Female and male child workers have very specific roles, often reflected through their interactions with members of the household and in their spatial presence. The broader societal and cultural perceptions of a girl's place are reproduced in the working space of the home through the tasks she is given. Interestingly, however, while there is an implicit barrier faced by girls in the tasks they perform, spaces they occupy, and their relationships within the home, young working boys have the unique freedom of crossing conventional gender barriers and representing both male and female interests within the home. Girls, even within homes where they are the sole worker, are rarely given this freedom. In this regard, young boys are at times considered favourable over girls for employment in some domestic settings.

5.3 REGULATING CHILDREN'S WORK IN THE HOME

Work in the home has been a significant topic of interest among feminist and youth scholars examining the nature of unwaged everyday household work. The home as a workplace, however, has tended to be perceived as contradictory, for it becomes both a private, intimate space constructed around and influenced by processes linked to family and emotions, as well as a realm of contracts and negotiations tied to the service

economy. This is compounded by the fact that most domestic work in India, especially by children, is performed outside the realm of labour regulations and social protections – that is, it is informal. These contradictory processes are reflected in the way young people’s work is constructed, negotiated and pursued in domestic environments. As this chapter has illustrated, gender, ethnicity, and age are key social relations of power that familial and community networks utilise to produce, organise and control young people’s work in the home. Home-based workers are essentially brought into the realm of work by these networks for a range of overlapping reasons: out of necessity; for training; to domesticate children (particularly among girls); or even as a means of constructing valuable social and economic networks through employers. Employers, too, rely on the same social relations to organise and discipline labour in the domestic environment. In the second part of this chapter, I examine the value of formal and informal structures of power surrounding children’s involvement in domestic work in the informal economy, and the nature of these structures as regulative, as well as their potential to be exploitative and dangerous. First, I look at the efficacy of formal legislation on children’s work in the home, and the way it is implemented, perceived, and negotiated. Second, I examine the nature of social and kinship networks as regulative and protective, as well as exploitative.

5.3.1 INFORMAL WORK AND FORMAL POLITICS: REGULATORY CHALLENGES

On 16 October 2006, the Indian Government introduced an amendment to the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986, banning the employment of all children under the age of 14 as domestic workers (Bourdillon et al 2010, 156). The move, as discussed in chapter three, was largely in response to international criticism on the extent of child labour in India (Bourdillon 2009, 1). Child labour legislation, however, both according to my informants, as well as scholars such as Edmonds and Pavcnik

(2005) and Burra (2005), has done little to deter the employment of children. Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) write that direct bans of child labour, however appealing, are 'doubtful in effect', for enforcement is difficult especially in developing countries which often lack resources to enforce policy (216). Burra (2005) similarly explains that in the particular context of India, labour laws are ineffective, for there are few labour inspectors and most of them 'are in collusion with employers' through the use of bribes or by exercising power through social and political contacts (5204). Bhaskar, a child protection advocate and a coordinator for CINI, explained during one of our interviews that "child labour laws are only on paper. ...they mean nothing."⁸⁷ He describes laws around children's work as a farce, essentially used as a smokescreen by the State to mask the reality and extent of children's work. Bhaskar gives the example of a group of young boys he had recently observed, who were painting metal fencing along Park Street in Kolkata's central business district. "They are doing work of the municipality. ...Yes, hired by labour contractors, but who do you think hires [the contractors]?" In this view labour legislation in India is essentially a façade – unenforced, inefficient, and ineffective.

Employers of children in the home environment did not necessarily share this perception that child labour laws are ineffective, but rather dismissed them altogether, often trivialising government efforts to stem children's participation in work. Several employers contended that the laws were unrelated to them or their circumstances by assuming a familial discourse to justify their use of children's labour in the home, effectively normalising the domestic employer-employee relationship through claims of affection and family. Research on domestic labour in many societies has shown how this argument, termed 'false kin', is typically used as a justification in work (cf. Cox 2006; Anderson 2000). As a result, child domestic workers were positioned, not as labour, but

⁸⁷ IA2.

as kin 'helping' with chores. Therefore, children's work and any potential for exploitation in the home is masked, hidden, and passed off as 'part of the family'. Other employers I interviewed dismissed child labour laws as nonsense, or "*baqvas*", to use the Hindi term, vilifying government institutions as corrupt, while painting themselves as the child's saviour by providing a means for children who *need* to work for survival. For example, the employer of Ria stated, "think of what else she would have to do...this is the best life she could hope for"⁸⁸. Kolkata's 'culture of servitude', to borrow Ray and Qayum's (2009, 19) use of the phrase, is reflected through such discourses, which are derived from class hierarchies that have been cultivated and normalised through generations of domestic servitude. The relationship of domination and exploitation that underlies the employment of children has essentially been naturalised through space and time (Ray and Qayum 2009, 146).

Labour legislation regulating children's work in the home was also often dismissed by the working children themselves, who regarded it as impractical and ineffective. Mohan⁸⁹, for example, who is now above the legal age of employment, explains that in cases where children need or want to work, they will find a way to work, regardless of any laws. Mohan has 'worked' for most of his short life. At the age of eight, he explains that he left his home near the West Bengal city of Siliguri to find a job. He was uninterested in attending school and had little else to do in Siliguri. After "running away", he travelled to Bangalore by train, where he found work as a labourer on a construction site. Over the next four years, he travelled to different cities in Southern and Western India, where he found a variety of jobs in the informal sector including on building sites, re-constructing roads, and loading cargo at a factory. When he returned to his home in West Bengal at the age of 12, his uncle, who was 16 years old at the time, introduced him

⁸⁸ N8.

⁸⁹ M4.

to the family for whom he now works⁹⁰. Mohan explains that he was never prohibited from pursuing or participating in work – not by his parents, the range of employers he worked for, and not even by the police he occasionally had altercations with when he lived and worked on the streets. On the contrary, Mohan reveals that poor children who do not work are often criticised by adults and perceived as lazy or beggars.

While it is evident from the discussion so far that Child Labour Laws are largely perceived to be ineffective in Kolkata, it became apparent over the course of this research that children and their social networks are, nonetheless, aware and cautious of the legislation and its potential repercussions (i.e. job loss and paying off officials). Mandipa Ghosh, the director of CINI's urban head office explains that in recent years she has found that children have become adept at evading questions regarding age. Supporting her claim I found during the course of this research a pattern among my informants, based on age. In my first set of interviews with child domestic workers, a disproportionate number of children said that they were 14 years old. Through follow up questions, including "how long have you worked here" and "how old were you when you began working", it became clear that the age revealed was fabricated. Ria, for example, initially told me that she was 14 years old. She also stated the same age when I asked how old she was when she began working in the home more than a year before. Over the course of our interview, she eventually revealed that she was approximately 11 years old, although her exact birthdate is unknown to her or her family. Overall, half of the domestic workers that I interviewed were under the lawful age to work. The disproportionate number of 14 year olds indicates the way children position themselves in order to secure work. In the context of India and Kolkata, age restrictions are easy to

⁹⁰ The family that Mohan presently works for employed his uncle, Krishna, as a child in Siliguri, where they previously lived as a large joint family. When the male and female head of the household, along with their son shifted to Kolkata eight years ago, Krishna remained in the family home in Siliguri to serve the remaining relatives.

evade, according to Burra (2005, 5204), for false documentation is easily obtainable. Furthermore, many poor children in India do not have legal documents indicating their age, for their births go unregistered, and few poor children are able to obtain legal identity cards, PAN cards or Ration Cards from the government as a result of institutional corruption, which often sees officials demanding bribes. Informants revealed that a verbal indication of age by parents, guardians, employers, and children themselves, is often enough for proof of age. In this regard, children often disclose the age they want to be, or that their employers or those receiving their wages would like them to be, rather than their actual age.

5.3.2 TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN: STRUCTURES OF PROTECTION OR NETWORKS OF EXPLOITATION

Harriss-White (2010) writes, 'out of the formal reach of the state, economic behaviour cannot avoid the influence of social institutions' (171). As this chapter has illustrated, state legislation regulating children's work is, not only, not enforced, it is ineffective and evaded by employers, and more importantly, by children who believe that it does not serve their interests. The majority of child domestic workers in this study revealed that they work because they are obliged to work. With the exception of two boys who chose full-time domestic servitude in preference to education and a home life in their family of origin, all the children indicate that their employment has a social or economic function for their families or communities. The outright ban on domestic and factory work for children under the age of 14, essentially forces children to disguise their working identities and pushes those who do work into the sphere of invisibility, denying them access to any formal rights, protections, or support. According to Chen (2011) home-based workers are susceptible to 'lower wages, fewer benefits, and less legal or social protections than most other wage workers' (169). Young workers constitute the most vulnerable and disenfranchised segment of domestic workers (Bourdillon et al 2010,

156-157; Bekele and Boyden 1988). As a result, social networks occupy a significant place in the lives of children who work, for they represent, arguably, the only alternative form of regulation and support to children.

Social networks, as discussed in chapter two, form an important regulative feature of the informal economy. Meagher (2005), who has written widely on the role and value of social networks in African informal economies, explains that social networks represent an invaluable form of economic organisation (217). Networks can be understood as the 'social ties that shape economic behaviour outside the state through embedded relations of solidarity and trust' (Meagher 2010, 11). These networks, which are often based on kinship, community or friendship, are fundamental to economic life. They are ultimately the 'social relations between people in a group that are used as sources of strategic information, to exert influence, to accumulate social credentials, or to be socially recognised' (Wasiuzzaman and Wells 2010, 283). The young people in this study who participate in work in the space of the home are situated between two key networks – their family or community, and those of their employers. My research reveals that these social networks have the capacity, on the one hand, to aid, facilitate, and produce more responsible and well-adjusted child workers. They can encourage children in, both, pursuing their livelihoods and increasing their own personal agency by providing care, resources and support. On the other hand, the social networks that regulate young people's work in the home have the capacity to exploit children further, by disciplining and restricting labour, occasionally even pushing children into long-term contracts akin to bonded labour.

The rights and benefits of most formal employment should include, although often do not, decent wages, job security, a safe work environment, appropriate work hours, as well as access to benefits such as healthcare, salary increases and vacation time (Chen 2011, 180). In informal settings, these become important areas of negotiation that

workers must become involved in in order to ensure their own well-being. Live-in domestic workers have the added problem of negotiations around sleeping arrangements, meal provisions, and personal time within the home with the people with whom they share a domestic space. All eight children in this study who work as domestic servants revealed that their employment was secured as a result of family and community contacts. With the exception of the two boys who chose work over education and home life, all the children in this research revealed that their familial or community networks that introduced them into the realm of domestic work negotiated their working arrangements on their behalf prior to their employment, particularly wages and working conditions. Chottu, for example, reveals that the terms of his employment, his tasks, sleeping arrangements, and his salary had been negotiated by the driver who brought him to the household to work:

When I started working, I found out that the other workers in the home are paid more than me. One of the older boys told me that I should ask for more money. When I did, *auntiji* (employer) said that when the other *nauker* (workers) started working, they were paid even less. She told me that at *Puja* (festival) time I will be given some extra money. She spoke to me well. Some days later *uncle* (the driver) told me that I should not ask for more money. If I need something, I should ask him.⁹¹

The sphere of work in which children are placed, therefore, is not arbitrary, but rather, carefully negotiated by children's families or intermediaries, who aim to ensure that children are safe, but are also productive, efficient, and valuable. The primary social relation that underlies the treatment of children in the private home space is trust. Social networks, as Meagher (2010) emphasises, are embedded in relations of 'solidarity and trust' (11). Earlier in this chapter I explored the way familiarity, through the Hindi concept of *jaan paichaan*, influences where and how children are placed into the economic sector by their families. As highlighted, this reciprocal concept also illustrates

⁹¹ M7.

how employers choose to hire children who come from known families or communities, specifically in the context of home-based work, as there remains a strong social connection and familiarity through ethnicity, religion and caste, which often translates to increased trust. The same relations of trust, furthermore, form a fundamental way in which children's interests and rights are secured in circumstances where few other direct monitoring structures exist. In this regard, wages, working conditions, and work hours are established and ensured, not through written or verbal contracts, but informally through the implied 'trust' constructed through the idea of *jaan paichaan*. It is necessary to point out that over-work and exploitation, which will be discussed below, however, are not entirely removed as a result of this process, and may in fact, be overlooked by the familial and community networks that place children into their employment.

Informal forms of social protection, specifically in the absence of state social security, are one of the fundamental roles that social networks perform in the lives of working children. The term 'social security' is broadly used to refer to formal schemes whereby individuals are protected through savings, compensation and assistance established through a 'mixture of contributions' between workers themselves, government, and formal employers (Lund and Nicholson 2003, 16). The core 'contingencies' traditionally covered under social security in most Western contexts include: healthcare; disability through work; child maintenance; unemployment; maternity; old age; and unexpected death (Lund and Nicholson 2003, 17). It should be noted that the provisions associated with social security in Western contexts have undergone significant transformations in recent decades, however, social protections, as Lund and Nicholson (2003) deem the new system of social security, continues to be an important system of protection.

In the context of Kolkata, children's work, in addition to the reciprocal relationship of wages for labour, also incorporates a form of social security through 'non-reciprocal exchanges' with their employer network (Wasiuzzaman and Wells 2010, 284). These include healthcare and treatment during times of illness – including hospitalisation and medication. Children also have access to credit through advances of their salaries to cover costs associated with unavoidable social obligations. Mohan and Vinita's employer explained that her young workers often request money to contribute to expenses such as weddings in the family, dowry, a relative's illness, and even inoculations for new babies born to relatives. In this regard, the 'non-reciprocal' benefits of children's work extend beyond them as independent workers, and are often afforded to their social networks (Wasiuzzaman and Wells 2010, 284). Harriss-White refers to this as 'a primitive form of occupational welfare', where the middle and upper class households in which children work becomes an economic and social resource for the child and their kinship network.

In some cases, children are specifically brought into the realm of work in particular households as a way of accessing the benefits and resources that are enabled once network links are connected (through the child). Sikander⁹², for example is a 16 year-old boy who serves as a cook in the same household as Mohan and Vinita. Sikander has worked with the family for two years is paid approximately Rs. 5000 (£50) per month. His tasks include cooking for a family of ten and three full-time domestic workers, three times daily, as well as cleaning the kitchen and washing all pots, pans and dishes several times a day. In comparison to Sikander's wages, Vinita who has worked for the family for a little under two years, and Mohan who has worked with the family for over four years, are paid Rs. 2000 (£20) and Rs. 3500 (£35), respectively each month.

⁹² M6.

Mohan and Vinita's work primarily consists of cleaning, errands, and serving members of the family. While the extent of work that they conduct is substantial, it is significantly less intensive than Sikander's. The variation in wages between children is strongly related to form and availability of labour. Mohan and Vinita perform labour that is basic, unskilled and repetitive. Their employer explains that the type of service they provide is not in short supply. As a result, their starting salaries were significantly lower than the cook, Sikander, who started at Rs. 3500 (£35) per month. Echoing McDowell (2009), the meanings behind the specific forms of work undertaken in the home produce significantly different 'social realities and opportunities for time compression, neglect or replacement' for workers (82). Food production, more than sweeping and cleaning, encompasses 'affective embodied work involved in caring for others'⁹³ (McDowell 2009, 82). In this regard, Sikander's work is not only imbued with greater meaning for his employers, but warrants a higher income and job security compared to the work undertaken by the other two domestic workers. Despite his higher wages, Sikander's age still makes him an ideal and economical choice for his employers, compared to an adult. Their employer emphasizes that few would be willing to take on the amount of household work that Sikander does for the same salary. Sikander, separately, reveals that he does not know the rate that he should receive for his work, but suspects that his wages are relatively low. He explains that his father, however, prefers he work in this particular home, for his own family and his employer family belong to the same village in Uttar Pradesh, and are of the same caste and religion. Like many of the child domestic workers interviewed in this study, Sikander's family has a strong working relationship with his employers' family, as multiple relatives are employed in other capacities by the

⁹³ It is important to note here that McDowell constructs two categories for work in the home: a) low-level and unskilled work, which includes sweeping, dusting and other basic forms of work, and the 'affective embodied work involved in caring for others'. According to McDowell, workers who provide meals fit within the former category. Food preparation, however, I argue, involves providing nourishment and must be placed within the category of 'caring for others' (82).

large affluent extended family. Sikander's employment therefore, has served as a way for his own family to construct and secure a useful social and economic alliance, whose influence and resources can be drawn on in moments of crisis or obligation.

Boris and Parreñas (2010) write 'intimate labour...exposes personal information that would leave one vulnerable if others had access to such knowledge' (5). The close proximity of employer and employees in the space of the home creates a unique power dynamic, where employees become privy to the most personal relations that are often confined to family and home. In this respect, employees are sometimes constructed as indispensable, and the very same exchanges linked to social protection discussed above, can become restrictive for children, essentially tying them to their working household through obligation. For example, the 'primitive form of occupational welfare', to use Harriss-White's (2010) term, discussed above as gifts and loans that employers provide children and their familial or community networks for medical expenses and social obligations, in this regard has the potential to become a way in which employers 'tie up labour they do not wish to lose' (173-174).

Children's social and kinship networks, therefore, may not necessarily serve children in a supportive way, but rather, are employed as a means of disciplining labour and restricting them to spaces that favour the networks through the exploitation of child labour. Moreover, in cases where children are unaware of the worth of their labour, they could be liable to overwork, verbal abuse, and even physical abuse. For example, Ria, the 11 year-old girl who I wrote of earlier, spoke of her experience with verbal abuse as an everyday part of her work. She reveals that over the course of the year that she has been employed, she has endured scolding on a daily basis. In instances when the shouting was particularly harsh, she would resort to "running away" from the home to her nearby village, however, was always forced back to the home by her mother.

Once when I ran away to my village I didn't want to go back but *bhaiya* [brother] and *bhabhi* [sister-in-law] came for me... my mother made me go. I cried so much. Now I know that I will have to be here. I sometimes feel like running away when *bhabhi* shouts at me. She always shouts...she shouts too much.⁹⁴

Ria's employment was arranged by her mother, who learned of the opening from the parents of another girl from the same village who worked at the home previously. Her family was in need of the additional income, and had been searching for a "good home" for her to work in. "Good home" is translated here directly from the Hindi phrase *aacha ghar*, which is not only used to represent the space of the home, but refers to all material and social relations linked to the space. An *aacha ghar* is one that is secure, protected, and trustworthy, both in terms of the physical space, but also the people within the space. It is also one that is well-off and has the potential to be advantageous, socially and economically, through association. The previous employee had worked for the family for several years, however, as her marriage had been arranged, her employers were searching for a new domestic worker to take over her live-in position. Similar to the other child domestic workers in this study, the referral through the previous employee was a primary factor in Ria's employment, for it produced from the outset a sense of trust and kinship, both from Ria's family, as well as her employers.

Ria explains that she is essentially on call around the clock. In some cases, she has been awoken in the middle of the night by her employers to clean or change their daughter's nappies and bed sheets. In addition to sweeping, dusting and mopping the three-bedroom flat twice daily, she cleans the three washrooms each day, hand washes all the dirty laundry and dishes, makes breakfast each morning and tea several times a day, as well as helps a part-time cook make lunch and dinner. She must also play with and take care of the young child, feed her, bathe and clothe her, babysit and take care of any other household tasks throughout the day. Ria explains that previously, a part-time

⁹⁴ F1.

domestic worker to sweep and mop twice a day was also employed by the family, however, following an argument between the worker and her employer, she left the job. Ria's employer never replaced the worker and instead, Ria has been forced to take on the tasks. Ria, whose wages are collected each month by her mother, does not believe that she is paid any more despite her added responsibilities. Her sleeping arrangements are makeshift and sparse, and consist of a thin mattress, which she lays out every night in a spare bedroom. When unused, it is folded up and stored under a desk in the room, along with a plastic bag with her belongings. When any overnight guests are present, Ria must lay out her mattress in the living area. Ria is given two weeks off during *Vishvakarma Puja*, an important Hindu festival in her village. Her female employer, however, is very strict and regulates her vacation time with the threat of termination.

Ria's earnings are approximately Rs. 1500 monthly, and are collected at the beginning of each month by her mother, who cleans several homes in nearby apartment buildings. Her family relies on her income, as well as on the benefits such as access to credit and healthcare that Ria's employment provides. As a result, Ria insists that she has no choice but to work, despite the abuse she constantly faces. As a function of poverty, Ria's work is essentially 'unregulated-able' through her familial network that brought her into the domestic sphere as a worker in the first place. Her welfare, therefore, is in the hands of her employer.

The social structures that regulate children's work have the capacity to ensure that children are safe and protected from abuse. As Jennings et al. (2006) write, when children's work is conducted under 'caring oversight and with responsible guidance from adults', young people tend to 'exercise greater personal agency, including experiencing more spatial autonomy within their daily geography' (233). Similarly, Boyden and Mann (2005) explain that supportive relationships with family and non-parental adults, not only help to protect children from the negative effects of stressful

situations, but social support from peers can greatly enhance children's resilience – a point that will be explored in following chapters. Yet 'supportive' social structures can easily become exploitative, such as in the case of Ria, by tying children to specific forms and spaces of work, where they may be prone to overwork and even physical or verbal abuse.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The idealization of the private sphere of the home has been a central feature of modernity. A key element of this has been the segregation of children and childhood into the private sphere: the home is seen as the appropriate place for children to be raised, facilitating their physical and moral protection from the outside world. (Harden 2000, 47)

As this chapter has shown, Harden's words can also represent the reasoning behind children's participation in waged work in the space of the home – particularly among girls. Yet, the perspective remains very much adult-centred, for the home as a safe haven does not always ring true. The unique space of the home as private, personal, intimate, and emotional is reflected in the way in which children's work is negotiated and regulated.

This chapter has shed light upon the way gender, age and ethnicity are drawn on to organise and discipline child workers, and the way in which social networks become an important way that children's working lives in the home are pursued, monitored and regulated. As I have argued, domestic work is often undertaken by children as a result of necessity and familial duty. Children who work in the space of the home, however, remain in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis their employers, and their own familial and community networks that place them into their work. Hidden in the private realm, they often lack the agency to negotiate their own work, wages, and rights in the home. Yet, this research has also revealed the way that work in the home has the potential to

provide children with useful skills while contributing to their family's income and welfare, as well as forms a way of building long-term social and employment connections that may prove valuable in the future. Moreover, domestic servitude among female children in Kolkata potentially increases their own personal agency by providing a socially acceptable means of postponing an unwanted marriage. As a result, child domestic workers exist in a unique space between protection and vulnerability, for the social networks that regulate young people's work in the home have the capacity, on the one hand, to aid and facilitate young workers in pursuing their livelihoods, and on the other hand, to exploit children further, by disciplining and restricting labour, occasionally even pushing children into long-term exploitative labour relationships. In the next chapter, I move up the spatial scale as it were to consider children's work in shops and small-scale (in some cases, home-based) factories.

'IN-BETWEEN' THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC: CHILDREN'S WORK AND STRUCTURES OF PROTECTION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I move 'up' the spatial scale, in a sense, to explore the micro-geography and socio-spatial constructions of the lives and work of children in shops and workshops – represented in this chapter as an 'in-between' space of work, relative to the private enclosed sphere of the home and the public open-ness of the street. I draw on data that I collected through interviews and observation with children who labour in small-scale, occasionally home-based, manufacturing units and in informal 'shop' environments, to explore the relations of power that underlie their working experiences in these spaces that are not quite private, yet not entirely public. Edensor (1998), describing the culture of the Indian street, accurately illustrates the blurred private-public boundary of workshops such as those in this study:

Open fronts of most workshops mean that the activities of engineers, smiths, potters, bookbinders, metal workers and others spills out onto the side of the street, further blurring the frontstage and backstage realms and activities (Edensor 1998 206-207).

The nature of private and public space occupies a significant place in scholarly work in Geography, as illustrated in chapter two. Questions around what constitutes private and public space – materially, representationally, and relationally – have been central to the writings of scholars such as Mitchell (2003), Habermas (1989), Marston (2000) and others. Public space, particularly in democratic societies, has tended to be positioned in opposition to private space, as open, accessible and a realm of interaction. Mitchell (1995) writes that in this sense, public space is represented as 'the material location where the social interactions and political activities of all members of "the

public” occur’ (116). The notion of public space as open and accessible, however, is a significant point of discussion in the literature, and Fraser (1990) and Mitchell (1995), among others, have argued that it is also fundamentally exclusive and contested – an argument that will be examined in the next chapter on children’s involvement in street work in Kolkata. Private space, as explored in the previous chapter has tended to be perceived as personal, intimate and embodied, and contrary to the public sphere, as a space of refuge and family (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 98). In bringing these two, arguably opposite spatial scales together through the lens of children’s work, I define the ‘in-between’ space of work, indicated above, as an intermediate space that exhibits characteristics of both the private and the public sphere. Essentially, if the home is a space of embodied work and the street is a space of visible and interactive work, then the ‘in-between spaces’ of shops and workshops exhibit features of both spatial scales. I seek to explore the everyday relations of power experienced by children who participate in work in an ‘in-between’ space – for example, a workplace devoid of the emotional relationships and rhetoric characteristic of the private realm, yet where children remain ‘hidden’ and vulnerable to ‘private’ and ungovernable risks. For, much like domestic servitude in the home space, children’s work and everyday lives in small-scale production units, as well as shop spaces are often defined and organised through very particular social, cultural and spatial structures and relations.

In this chapter, I aim to unpack the experiences of children in these ‘in-between’ spaces by analysing the social and power relations with which child workers engage in their daily lives. I consider the participation of children in small-scale manufacturing units and shops, separately, for while they are both occupations between the public and private scales, they rely on different types of labour and relationships. In the following section, I examine the nature of small-scale manufacturing units in Kolkata, which are primarily structured within and around very specific communities and community ideas

and values. I then illustrate the concept of the shop in the context of this study, exploring the nature of children's work within the shop space. Finally, I bring both spaces and forms of children's work together to examine the various insecurities and inequalities associated with work in these in-between spaces, and interrogate their access to different forms of social protection.

6.2 SMALL-SCALE MANUFACTURING

The children in this study became involved in work for a range of interrelated reasons, as discussed in chapter four. Their participation ranges from a means of gaining skills and training, to a form of social activity, a replacement for schooling, or as a way of financially supporting family. Small-scale manufacturing in this study incorporates work in both home-based production units inside or attached to private residential spaces and in which members of the immediate or extended family and community serve as labour, as well as in 'independent' workshops in informal or semi-formal mixed-use settlements. In large part, children who participate in waged and unwaged work in both types of small-scale manufacturing units are often related in some way to those who manage the space and work. Children's labour particularly in production units inside or attached to homes, in addition to the above typologies of work can be considered as a way of constructing or sustaining familial and community relationships. In this regard, work is undertaken in one's own parental home or a relation's home on the basis of providing assistance. Such work is not necessarily income-related, but instead, carried out to assist parents or relatives with a home-based business. Likewise, children may be 'lent' to assist relatives, neighbours, or community members in their respective homes with similar chores. As such, children's participation is essentially 'contracted' upon their

relationship to their ‘managers’⁹⁵ – be they a parent, a relative, or a family friend. My findings, here, echo those of Bourdillon and Pfigu (2006), whose research in Harare, Zimbabwe, indicates a similar pattern. Bourdillon and Pfigu produced four categories of children’s work in relation to family or kin: a) helping in the family home (unwaged labour in one’s own home); b) helping kin (being sent to work – without pay – in a relative or friend’s home); c) fostering (movement of children between relations’ households – without pay, often to take the burden of care (food, shelter) off the parents or in circumstances where parents are migrant workers); and d) formal paid employment, which was the principal model of work I explored in the previous chapter. In the case of Kolkata, the first three categories of their model are particularly applicable to workshops located in homes and in close-knit community neighbourhoods, while the last applies occasionally. However, child workers remain linked to their employers through community or religion.

6.2.1 THE NATURE OF ‘MANUFACTURING COMMUNITIES’ IN KOLKATA

Prior to discussing the nature of manufacturing and the involvement of children in such work in Kolkata, it is necessary to briefly examine and define the concept of community, which forms a crucial aspect of the way small-scale manufacturing units are organised and work is carried out. Conceptualisations of ‘community’ are varied, and both geographers and sociologists have contributed widely to scholarly work on and around the concept. At the simplest level, community can be understood as ‘a group of people who share common culture, values and/or interests, based on social identity and/or territory, and who have some means of recognizing, and (inter)acting upon, these commonalities’ (Gregory 2009, 103). Community is most often formulated in terms of

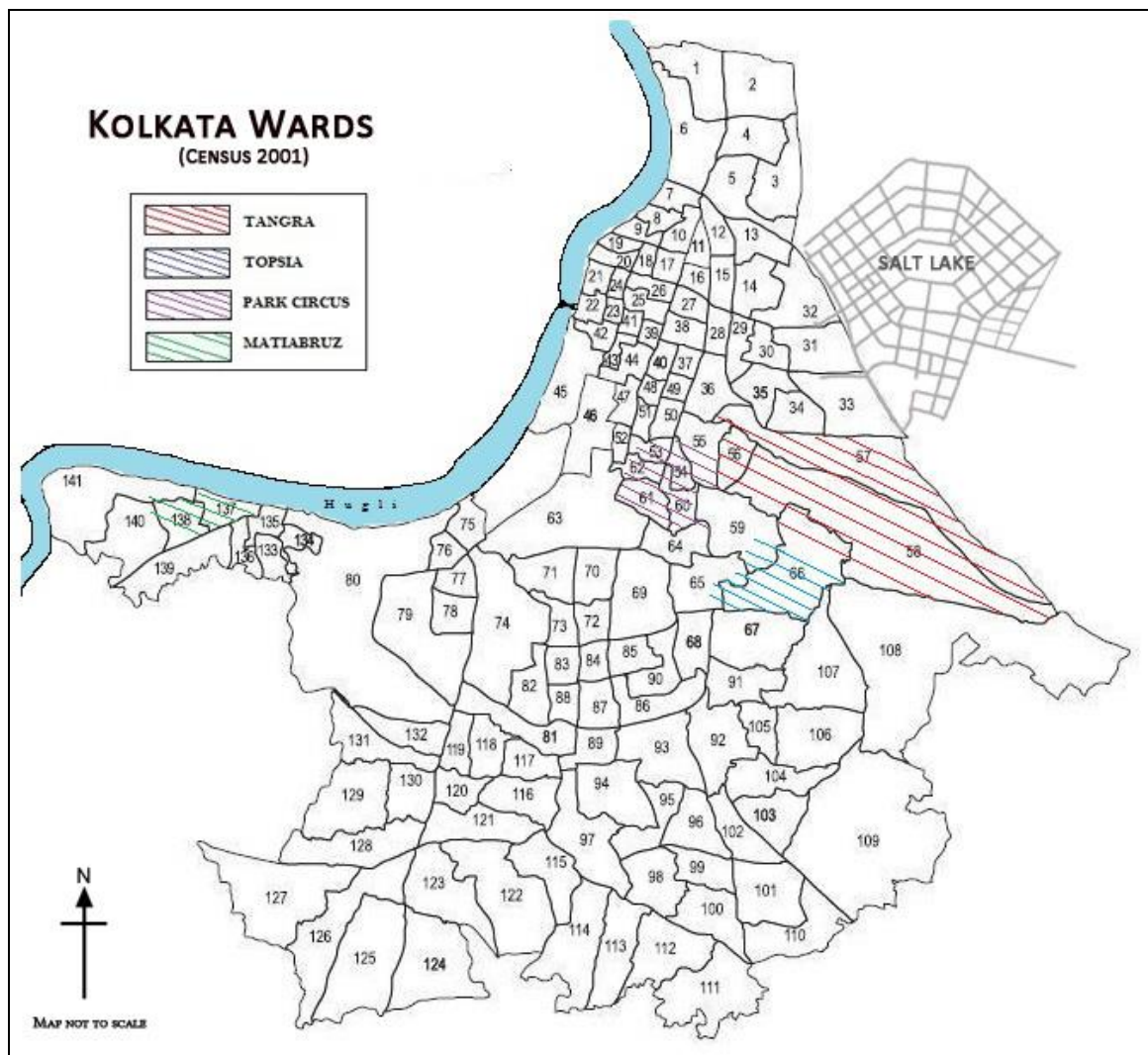
⁹⁵ I refrain from using the term ‘employers’ here, since there is rarely a monetary exchange as payment

scale, and presented as a scale at which individuals interact and political and economic activity is carried out. The term, however, is contentious and different schools of thought and scholars have adopted the term to represent different types of social formations and relationships. For example, the Chicago school of sociologists' understanding of community as the 'basis for social organisation' has a link with the concept of neighbourhood, whereby neighbourhoods 'provide a mutual support required for a community' (Gregory 2009, 103). While 'neighbourhood' is often used synonymously with 'community', in the sense above it would seem that place is the primary constitution of a neighbourhood. Joseph (2002), alternatively, suggests that community is produced through practices of production and consumption associated with capitalism (12-13). In this study, I define community, by incorporating part of Gregory's definition outlined above, as 'a group of people who share a common culture', ethnic background and religion (2009, 103). I define neighbourhood in socio-spatial terms, as a physical and bounded space where individuals are familiar to one another, either as a result of belonging to the same community, or through regular social or economic interaction.

The research that contributes to this section of my study was undertaken in four neighbourhoods largely based around small-scale manufacturing units in the Kolkata metropolitan area: Topsia, Tangra, Park Circus and Matiabruz – highlighted in Map 6.1. While the neighbourhoods are geographically distinct, their social composition is quite similar and is significant to understanding the types and forms of work in which children here are involved. The small-scale manufacturing units where the majority of the research for this chapter was conducted are located in unplanned and semi-formal settlements within the neighbourhoods of Topisia, Tangra, Park Circus and Matiabruz. The settlements are primarily constructed from concrete and reclaimed material, and made up of narrow pathways lined with clusters of single room units that serve as homes, shops, eateries, and/or spaces of production. The settlements of Park Circus, for

example, are located on the north side of Kolkata's major commercial avenue, Park Street, and are accessed through narrow streets and gullies between the formal commercial and residential buildings that line Park Street.

MAP 6.1: LOCATING TOPSIA, TANGRA, PARK CIRCUS AND MATIABRUZ



Ward Map for Kolkata Municipal Area (2001) and suburb of Salt Lake, highlighting research sites. Incorporating data from Kolkata Municipal Corporation, 2013. *Source: Kolkata Development Authority.*

In total, I observed and conducted interviews with fourteen child workers between the ages of eight and sixteen, three adult residents and factory owners in the manufacturing communities, and three community outreach workers associated with some of the children. All of the participants that I interviewed for this section of my study identified themselves as Muslim Bengalis from West Bengal. As I have illustrated in

other chapters, Kolkata is highly spatially segregated according to religion and ethnicity. Small-scale manufacturing units in Kolkata are dominated by Muslim Bengalis, and reflect a wider socio-political and economic shift that has taken place in Kolkata since independence (Harriss-White 2003, 146). Muslims in India and West Bengal are disproportionately urban, and in contrast with Hindus, have a significantly higher involvement in artisanal craft production (woodwork, embroidery, etc.), which is highly skilled, yet low paid and still defined as ‘menial work’ among Indians (Harriss-White 2003, 142, 146). In addition, they control niches historically shunned by Hindus, such as leather production and tanneries, butcher shops⁹⁶, garbage-collecting and recycling, and the production of leather goods (shoes, wallets, etc), glue, soap, rubber and plastic (Harriss-White 2003, 144-146). Harriss-White (2003) explains this trend as a consequence of the migration of Muslims from East Bengal to urban West Bengal during partition – principally to the cities of Siliguri and Kolkata, where they settled and established themselves in informal settlements alongside low-caste Hindus in what Harriss-White describes as a ‘microcosm of Muslim society and culture’ (146). Within these trades, like in most sectors of the economy, there is an evident hierarchy between the *amir* (the rich) and the *gharib* (the poor), most clearly reflected in the technical division of labour – the *amir* are principally traders who purchase from the small-scale production units. I found that in some cases the Muslim elite own the manufacturing units and homes where *Mistry’s* (the name given to highly skilled fabricators and artisans) and their relatives live and/or carry out production.

A director of a large leather production and export house based in Topsia appropriately illustrated the intricate nature of the small-scale manufacturing sector through his narration of the evolution of a leather wallet, from the moment of slaughter

⁹⁶ The ‘untouchables’ of Indian society also participate in the labour force as butchers.

to export⁹⁷. He explained that the process involves a range of workers, from highly skilled fabricators to unskilled child labourers. Each stage occurs in a different space⁹⁸ – the home factory being the primary space for assembly, finishing, and packing, and the space where children are primarily involved. The company, which produces leather shoes, belts, wallets, bags, and purses for export to Europe⁹⁹, contracts the sewing and assembly of the final product to hundreds of different “fabricators” in the city, who source their own labour. The director, Sadaf, explains:

There are three hundred plus fabricators who we give contracts to...they also get contracts from other companies like ours. We, ourselves, own seven to eight workshops here in Topsia plus this factory [referring to the four-storey building in which the interview took place]. The ones you [referring to this researcher] passed in the below *gully* [motioning toward a window overlooking a small lane] only do our work. ... I will be honest with you. Many children do the work. ... We don't monitor labour. We just want the work to be done.

Religion in India serves as an important structure upon which social and economic life are organised. Scholars such as Harriss-White (2003), de Neve (2005), Niewenhuys (1994) and others have written widely about religion as a structure of accumulation, differentiation, and hierarchy in India; religion is significant as a means through which labour is organized and work is carried out. The city's distinct neighbourhoods inform the way the city is organized and the local economy functions – including the way that children become participants in work. The districts of Topsia, Tangra, Park Circus and Matiabruz are four such settlements within the larger city of Kolkata that are now dominated by Muslims and Muslim-owned businesses –

⁹⁷ N5.

⁹⁸ In 2008, the Government of West Bengal in accordance with a ruling by the Supreme Court of India tightened regulations on pollution-based industries, particularly leather tanneries, in the city. Almost all tanneries were removed from the city limits and given space in a leather complex in 24 North Paraganas, approximately 9km north of the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass, which serves as a partial outer ring road on the east side of the city. According to Sadaf, this resulted in a significant transition from child to adult labour in the initial tanning phase of leather production. The majority of children involved in this section now participate in the fabrication leather products in factories and home-based factories indicated in this section.

⁹⁹ He Specified Germany, France, Spain and Poland

particularly small-scale production units and workshops that rely heavily on child-based labour. In the next section I explore factory work in each of these locations.

6.2.2 CHILDREN LABOURING IN THE FACTORY: WORKING FOR FAMILY AND SECURITY

Small-scale manufacturing undertaken in both homes and workshops is constructed around kinship and community networks, and relies on labour that is 'familiar'. While I found that a small proportion of the children who participate in this area of work are from outside the community and neighbourhood – primarily migrant children hired as casual labour – I observed that the principal model of the home-based manufacturing unit in Kolkata involves the production of commercial goods (shoes, wallets, etc.) using a labour-force composed mainly of family or kin and involving specialised skills that are learned through active participation from a young age. In this sense, the work is primarily undertaken by those related to the managers or owners of the manufacturing units. The involvement of children as factory labour is a result of multiple and interrelated factors. To a large extent, they are unpaid and placed into such forms of work by parents or relatives as a way of inculcating them into the work discipline and providing them with artisanal skills that are associated with the trades of their communities. In other cases, their entry into work may be a result of a family crisis, and the consequent need to re-allocate labour resources where there is a demand, or even to strengthen relationships and create a mutual interdependency within an extended family (Omoike 2010, 210).

I found that children involved in small-scale factory spaces begin working from as early as four years old. Like Salim and Salman, two young brothers who appeared in chapter four and who participate as part-time labour in their father's home-based factory, children who are involved in manufacturing in the home space are usually encouraged, although occasionally forced, to work by their parents or relatives residing

in the same or a nearby household, while others may come from separate *jaan paichaan* (known) families, sent to work to learn and develop the skills of the trade and strengthen familial bonds by establishing a mutual interdependency. The situation of some of the children – almost always boys – who fit within the latter category can be understood through Bourdillon and Pfigu's (2006, 23-24) category of 'fostering', whereby a child is sent by his¹⁰⁰ own parents to work without pay in a factory operated by a family familiar to the child, in order to ease the financial burden of care (food, clothing, shelter, etc.) upon the child's own family, create or strengthen familial bonds, as well as to participate in work that provides useful skills and knowledge for the future.

Out of the 14 children interviewed and observed in this study who were involved in some form of 'factory' work, nine of the children were involved in waged and unwaged work in small-scale factories and workshops, while four were involved in unpaid work and one in paid work in *home-based* manufacturing units. Adil, a 14-year-old boy¹⁰¹ I interviewed who participates in unpaid home-based factory production in a Park Circus settlement is representative of the system of 'fostering'. During our first conversation, Adil was hunched over a wooden table in a tiny outdoor space between two home factories¹⁰², rapidly applying glue to rubber shoe sole cut-outs. He never stopped working as he answered my questions on how he came to be involved in work in the Park Circus slum:

Adil: I work with my *mamaji* (maternal uncle in Hindi). We make shoes for Khadim's (a large shoe retailer and exporter in Kolkata).

Me: Your real *mamaji*?

Adil: Yes, my mother's real brother. My mother sent me here.

¹⁰⁰ I deliberately use 'his' to indicate that this is a masculine trade from which girls and women are excluded. This will be explored later in this chapter.

¹⁰¹ M15.

¹⁰² The homes in the neighbourhoods I refer to are small, two or three room structures made of cement and other reclaimed materials. Generally the front room of the home is used for commercial production, while the rooms in the back are the domestic sphere and contain the kitchen and sleeping area.

Me: Why?

Adil: My father left. He has another family. My mother said we [Adil and his younger brother] should do work with *mamaji*.

Me: Where is your mother?

Adil: She lives in Kolkata only. It is not very far...one hour distance.

Me: Your mother wants you to work? Does the money you make go to your mother?

Adil: I don't get paid. My mother wants me to learn this work and get into this business. *Mamaji* is teaching me. It is better to be in business than in service. I will do only this business.

Adil exemplifies the experiences of other children who work for relatives in urban Kolkata. His involvement in this form of labour reflects a type of reciprocity and interdependency within kinship networks that I found to be central to the informal labour economy. This phenomenon is particularly visible in small-scale workshops, such as the one in which Adil works, and built on a system of exchange, whereby labour is swapped for support, shelter and/or knowledge. In this way, Adil provides a key form of labour to his uncle in return for a skill set that he and his mother hope will enable him to establish himself in this particular trade. Similar to Bourdillon and Pfigu (2006), Omoike (2010) refers to this system as 'fosterage', and explains that 'the parental task is delegated to a 'non-parent' and by the performance of that task the non-parent establishes the associated claim to support, allegiance and labour from the child' (208). I found that the primary distinction between children who are not fostered, but rather participate in in-home production alongside their own parents, and children like Adil, is access to formal education. Adil explains that he does not attend school, but rather, his main purpose in living with his uncle is to learn the trade.

Adil's day-to-day basic necessities, such as meals and a place to sleep, however, are met by his uncle. The domestic space adjoining the factory is small and like the rest of the family members, he can choose where to lay out his bedding. He reveals that he prefers to sleep in the less crowded factory space, or outside on the table top where he

carries out his work, as it is much cooler than indoors. Adil eats his meals with his aunt, generally after his uncle and the other adult male workers in the factory have eaten. When asked about his healthcare provisions, such as access to doctors, the hospital or medications when he is unwell, Adil was unsure, and admitted that when he has been unwell, he generally carries on with his work. It would seem from observation and interviews with other children, however, that all care is covered under the reciprocal relationship of fostering.

Adil's reference to "business" and "service" goes beyond this fairly traditional system that Omoike (2010) describes, whereby each child belongs to a 'whole family group', and not just the parents (208), and reflects his participation in work through the 'fosterage' system as a type of apprenticeship, through which he seeks valuable skills to secure his future as a business-owner. His desire toward 'business', rather than 'service, highlights a wider societal ideal that I found resonates in a more general sense in the Indian context of work – ownership of a business is preferable to participation in service. It became apparent throughout the course of my study that work in India is understood as having three tiers. The bottom tier to which the majority of India's poor belong is the 'labour' tier, which most closely equates to the Western notion of 'blue collar' work, and refers to lower class individuals who perform casual menial labour such as construction workers or cleaners. 'Service', the second tier, is often utilised in the larger Indian context to refer to individuals who are employed in a 'job'. For example, a salesperson for a company, a call centre representative, an employee in a formal retail store, a government employee, or even a banker, are all involved in 'service'. 'Business', the top tier, refers to self-employment or family employment, and is often viewed as the most lucrative and ideal form of work. Adil's participation in the workforce, as a result, is as much a reflection of a larger societal ideology that he imbibed through everyday working experiences, as it is a result of the 'fosterage' system.

In addition to fostering as a form of exchange, for some children, this system as well as participation in home-based and small-scale manufacturing, occasionally has the potential to provide a space and community of belonging, and becomes a source of agency and aspiration. In the case of Bilal, a 16-year old boy¹⁰³ who works in a small factory located in Topsia where he upholsters furniture in his “uncle’s” workshop, he approaches his work, not as a necessity or a means to an end, as Adil does, but as a form of membership in the wider community. Bilal’s mother lives in a village on the outskirts of Kolkata with his grandmother and younger siblings. Bilal’s father left his family several years ago and his mother sent him to live and work with an uncle, explained to me as a cousin of his mother. Bilal lives with his ‘uncle’s’ family, and works alongside his uncle and other male relatives from the neighbourhood. I was introduced to Bilal by an acquaintance of my translator, who also lives and works in the Topsia neighbourhood. During our initial introduction, he had been working on upholstering a sofa in the *gully*¹⁰⁴ in front of the small workshop in which his uncle and another relative were working. He stopped working to take a break and speak with me after receiving permission from his uncle. Bilal described his work with his uncle as hard, but useful. Holding out his hands to show me, he explained that he sustains numerous cuts and splinters, but he enjoys the work he does. During the course of our discussion, he was often greeted by boys passing through the *gully* and it became apparent that he was well-known in the neighbourhood. Bilal explained that he has been able to construct close friendships with others who work and live in nearby workshops. As I interviewed Bilal, a young girl dressed in a headscarf stepped out of a room across the *gully* carrying a tray with several cups of tea. She placed the tray on a low step at the entrance of the workshop. Bilal picked up a cup of tea and offered me a cup. The other men working in

¹⁰³ M26.

¹⁰⁴ A *gully* in India refers to a small and narrow side street or lane.

the shop stopped what they were doing to pick up their cups of tea, and stepped out into the *gully* to chat with other men who were also taking a break from their work in other workshops along the same *gully*. For the next few minutes, the lane became a space of social interaction, where boys and men in loud voices laughed and teased each other. Some of the men gathered around Bilal while he spoke with me, listening intently to our conversation. Bilal explained his approach to the work he does:

The work is good and I enjoy it. I work for many hours but also have fun. You see, all of us work over here and then we stop for some time and can talk and enjoy. ...I see the work I do positively because there are so many boys like me who also work. I do not feel that I am alone or I want to do other things.

When asked about his goals for the future, Bilal explains:

Our furniture goes all over Kolkata and India. I'll keep making this furniture and I will one day open a big furniture shop like on the main road. Many people from Topsia do that. Someone told me that all those big shops are owned by people from Topsia.

Reiterating my findings from the previous chapter on children's work in the space of the home, work carried out in an environment in which children feel safe and secure, as well as find social motivations, such as friendship, companionship and trust, often provides a greater sense of security, agency, and even a 'capacity to aspire', to refer the phrase by Arjun Appadurai (2004). Liebel (2003) suggests that 'the still widespread assumption that working children want nothing more ardently than to stop working does not correspond to facts...' on the contrary, children, with the freedom to do so seek to undertake work 'over which they can exert an influence' (224). The majority of children in this section of my study, as will become apparent, however, lack the freedom to do so.

6.2.3 ORGANISING CHILD WORKERS: RELIGION, GENDER, AND AGE

Religion, as already illustrated in this chapter, plays a critical role in the way the residents and businesses within some Muslim settlements of Kolkata operate and function. Reiterating Harris-White's (2003) words, the 'microcosm of Muslim society'

features, not only through the trades of the region, but in the way labour is organized and governed in the different spaces. All businesses, including small-scale and home-based manufacturing units function according to very specific religiously-based ideas around payment and credit, prayer and work schedules, hierarchy, and gender. Many of the neighbourhoods in which this research was carried out are economically, politically and socially segregated. They act as semi-autonomous realms within the larger city of Kolkata – to the extent that, according to Sadaf¹⁰⁵, as well as another factory owner¹⁰⁶ in Matiabruz, a settlement near Kolkata Port known for garment production, even the Kolkata police force has virtually no authority within the respective Muslim settlements. This point will be explored in greater detail in the later section on regulation. One of the principal representations of the way that religious views are upheld in the small-scale manufacturing sector of Kolkata is through the experiences of girls, who typically are exempt from participating in commercial economic life.

The home factory is built upon the ideology that ownership is passed from the father to the sons of a family unit and is therefore an inherently masculine space of work. Although I identified two girls helping with the work in home factories in Topsia and Matiabruz, according to the male adults with whom they were working, their participation was for “*timepass*” – a common colloquialism in India that refers to an active process of passing time¹⁰⁷ in an activity that is not seen as important or permanent. The majority of girls in India today, regardless of religion, caste, or class background, are still treated as property that is passed from one family to another through marriage (Harriss-White 2003). As a result, they are seldom allowed to participate actively in family businesses for, once married, their responsibilities, duties

¹⁰⁵ N5.

¹⁰⁶ N9.

¹⁰⁷ See Jeffrey 2010, 76-77 for a definition of ‘timepass’, and a comprehensive perspective on the practice of timepass in the context of male university students in Meerut, India.

and allegiance is toward their marital home and family, and not their family of origin. This is a significant feature of family-oriented businesses throughout India – both small-scale, such as in the case of the home-based factories, as well as large-scale corporations¹⁰⁸. Among many of the Muslim communities in which small-scale manufacturing is common, girls are often relegated to the space of the home and kept away from public or semi-public spaces. In cases where families may depend on income from a female child, their options for work are limited to domestic servitude, under the basic premise that girls belong in the home-space, while boys must learn skills to be economically productive.

Overall, small-scale commercial work represents a key feature of the neighbourhoods and culture in which they are based. This form of work is not only essential in sustaining the cultural and religious character of the children who participate in the space, but also maintain the ‘microcosm of Muslim society’ – to use Harriss-White’s phrase again. Essentially, small-scale manufacturing represents a significant sector in which some Muslims in Kolkata carve out a living, while maintaining their autonomy, culture and religion. This is strengthened by the involvement of male children in the main, who as a result – through force, duty, or desire – tend to have a considerable presence in this sector.

6.2.4 HIERARCHIES, INEQUALITIES, AND THE PLACE OF CHILDREN ON THE SHOP FLOOR

De Neve (2005), who has written widely on social relations on the shop floor in informal industries in Western India, suggests that the ‘culture of the factory workers is not merely characterised by ties of caste, kinship or community, but is also shaped by their interactions on the shop floor itself and informed by their work, by politics and by the

¹⁰⁸ The Marwari caste of India – Jains and Hindus traditionally from Rajasthan make up a significant section of large (corporate) business families in India. Women are fundamentally excluded from ownership, decision-making and participation in the family businesses (see Harriss-White 2003).

daily struggles in the work place' (83). Children in factory environments, both unwaged through the fostering system and employed on a waged-basis, are not immune to the politics of work to which De Neve refers, and often find themselves embedded within the hierarchical structures that dominate on the shop floor, particularly with respect to the division of labour and structures of payment. The small-scale factory is deeply hierarchical and I discovered that there exists an important division of labour that often sees children involved in the most time consuming and repetitive tasks. From work regimes to wages, eight out of nine of the children who are fostered or work for wages, perceived their place to be at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder on the shop floor and referred to their tasks as the most tedious among the workers in the same space. Moreover, they are afforded fewer freedoms than the immediate children of the managers of factory units who also work on the shop floor, and are severely restricted within a defined division of labour that sees them conducting the most menial and repetitive of tasks such as stitching or fixing errors in others' work. Often times, they are also placed in charge of tasks, that many of the boys attribute as "girls work", including sweeping and mopping the workshops and fetching tea and lunch.

In one Matiabruz factory that manufactures embroidery patches¹⁰⁹ for large-scale distribution, I interviewed three boys as well as observing them over the course of several hours as they conducted their tasks, unsupervised, in a small, enclosed workshop. Since it was a Friday, a day of prayer or *namaz* in the Muslim community, the manager¹¹⁰ was at the Mosque where most men congregate to pray and socialise. The boys revealed their ages to be around 11 or 12 years, however, they were unsure of their

¹⁰⁹ For example, the embroidered Nike logo or Adidas logo found on branded apparel such as hats, bags, t-shirts and other clothing.

¹¹⁰ The factory was one of several in the area owned by a businessman from the area, however, it is rented and autonomously managed and operated by another person.

exact birthdates. Two of the boys, Mika¹¹¹ and Tariq¹¹² each operated a small sewing machine, rapidly cutting and surging pieces of fabric, while the third boy, Aamir¹¹³, manned a large computer-automated embroidery machine. He casually monitored the progress of the machine while playing music from a mobile phone and talking to me – looking up every now and again to ensure there were no errors or threads out of place on the patches. Aamir revealed that he was the son of the manager of the unit, while the other two boys were relations who resided in the same Matiabruz community. All three boys were unpaid, unschooled and worked full-time in the workshop. However, there was a clear distinction in their roles, responsibilities, and overall approach and dedication to their work. Aamir had the easier and more relaxed tasks, frequently taking breaks and roaming outside into the surrounding lanes and shops. The other two boys, however, seemed to be more disciplined in conducting their tasks, and revealed that they were restricted to operating the sewing machines. 12-year old Tariq demonstrated his specific responsibilities:

I do this... I cut the big cloth around the design and then I sew it. When I have finished this many [pointing to a pile of cut and surged pieces of fabric] I put them in a carton. Sometimes *malik* (translated to 'boss') will check them and sometimes he just sends them.¹¹⁴

While Tariq and Mika did not explicitly differentiate between their and Aamir's roles and responsibilities in the factory, Tariq revealed that Aamir *chooses* to work in the factory instead of attend school or stay at home. The other two boys, on the other hand, do not have the choice, but rather, are required to work in the factory by their families.

In other factories where children participate alongside adults in their work, some of the boys revealed that they are given the more repetitive and uncomfortable tasks; for

¹¹¹ M20.

¹¹² M21.

¹¹³ M19.

¹¹⁴ M21.

instance, Shardoff, who works in a recycling and processing plant in Tangra explained that his primary responsibility was sorting through small pieces of plastic and separating them into different piles based on their thickness and malleability. Other children complained that they are seldom given new or working tools to conduct their work, and instead, must carry out their tasks using the most inconvenient tools and objects, such as blunt or broken hammers, picks and scissors. Furthermore, in instances where the factory is crowded or there are visitors in the space, they are made to sit outside the workshops under the blazing sun, while conducting their tasks.

Along the same lines, payment structures often see children receiving the lowest and infrequent wages – if any at all. Shardoff, who is paid approximately Rs. 50 (£0.50) per day, explains:

The owners don't always give us our wages. They tell us that they don't have money to pay everyone, so they don't pay us [younger workers]...sometimes for many months. Once I wasn't paid for three months and then when I got my salary, it was less. The *malik* said that I didn't do the work properly. He just cut my pay.

Mistry's [skilled artisans] sometimes take an advance on their salary. That is why the *malik* says there is not enough money to pay all the salaries.¹¹⁵

In a factory producing garments that operates twenty-four hours a day in Matiabruz, the owner, Salique¹¹⁶, explained that children are the ideal employees, for they cost less and tend to be less demanding regarding their hours, breaks and wages. Salique, explained that each shift is twelve hours – from 9am to 9pm and 9pm to 9am, again. The workers are able to take a short break, however, only when the manager permits it. Children generally are employed on the day shift, but some who wish to attend school are occasionally permitted to work at night. While Salique was happy to talk to me, he did not allow any of the child workers in his workshop to take a break and speak with me. Speaking, instead, on their behalf, Salique justified his position by explaining that they

¹¹⁵ M23.

¹¹⁶ N9.

would rather earn their daily wages than participate in my research, particularly since their wages are dependent upon their production rate. He explained that the workers are paid on a piece basis, and therefore, for each piece that they produce to specification, the children receive between 50 paisa (Rs. 0.50, or approximately half a pence) to Rs. 1.50 (1.5 pence). Salique revealed that male adults who participate in similar piece production are paid the slightly higher rate of between Rs. 1.50 to Rs. 2.50 per piece. Women and girls do not participate in work in the workshop environment; however, he contracts out work to some female home-workers – primarily the wives and daughters of the workers in the workshop – who earn slightly less than children, per piece.

Salique's assumed role as a representative for the children in his factory is indicative of the authoritarian structure of the factory environment, which has the potential at times to be abusive, exploitative, and insecure for children. This topic will be further explored later in this chapter, where I examine the insecurities around children's work in the shop and factory environments. First, however, I introduce the space of the shop, which I also classify as an 'in-between' space of children's work.

6.3 THE SHOP

Similar to the informal factory environment, children who work in informal shops in Kolkata occupy a space that is neither completely private nor entirely in the public realm. The importance in studying and understanding such spaces of work is that, as discussed in the section above, children are both constrained by, and at the same time, exposed to various social and power relationships. In this section, I provide a glimpse into the experiences of children involved in shop work, in order to generate an understanding of these relations, the division of labour, and work regimes that are imposed upon as well as negotiated and contested by children in these spaces of work.

The nature of employment and work within the space of the shop has been largely overlooked in geographical literature. In fact, with the exception of a handful of scholars such as sociologist Christine Williams (2005), there is a lacuna of work on the general labour processes, social and economic organisation, and relations between labour and capital and among workers specifically in the shop environment – be it formal or informal. Before exploring the everyday political and social discourses that shape the experiences of labouring children involved in the space, it is necessary to discuss the general definition and physical structure of the shops within which the children in this research are employed.

The version of the shop that I refer to here is situated within a realm of informal economic activity that Cross (2000), explains as:

...the production and exchange of legal goods and services that involves the lack of appropriate business permits, violation of zoning codes, failure to report tax liability, non-compliance with labor [sic] regulations governance contracts and work conditions, and/or the lack of legal guarantees in relations with suppliers and clients. (36-37)

Cross further emphasizes that this does not ‘imply a black/white definition of informality’, rather, there are variations on this spectrum of informality, in which a business may be formal by one criterion and informal by others (37). For example, a shop owner may have a legal vending permit, but not pay taxes or adhere to labour regulations.

The shops in which the children involved in this research participate in both waged and non-waged work, can be represented on this spectrum of informality through the violation of one or more of the indicated criteria. The types of shops that this research focuses on that engage in the use of child labour are informally constructed and situated and include, for example, small-scale grocery stores, teashops, and snack shops. The physical shape of the shops is far from the formalised structures set within concrete buildings with glass storefronts, open and welcoming interiors, and lighted up sign-

boards that often come to mind with use of the word ‘shop’. Rather, they are somewhat ‘unconventional’ according to Western depictions of the shop. The shops of the informal economy are often semi-permanent structures inhabiting urban space – at times set within formalised buildings, but occasionally constructed in empty spaces on train platforms or side streets. Often, they protrude from small gaps between buildings, encroaching on sidewalk space and built from informal materials such as bamboo canes, tarpaulins, and salvaged wood. The inside physical space of the shop is generally small, dimly lit, and crammed with reclaimed steel and wooden shelving and cabinets that are stocked with goods for sale. Customers generally gather around the entrance, shouting out their grocery lists or food orders.

FIGURE 6.2: SHOPS IN KOLKATA



RATION SHOP IN SALT LAKE, GD MARKET



FRUIT SHOP IN NEW MARKET, KOLKATA

In addition to Cross’s legal-based definition indicated above, the shop is defined within the sphere of informal economic activity through a second dimension that

revolves around the 'social relationship between economic actors' (Cross 2000, 37). Here, familiarity and trust are central to the economic exchange as opposed to institutional and governmental regulations present within formalised economic settings. This is better explained using one of Cross's (2000) examples, where he compares the relationship between a consumer at Walmart and a customer of a vegetable stall (37). In the former, the relationship is purely formal and expectations of service and accountability are established through institutional regulations, such as expiration dates, guarantees, warranties, return policies, and liability agreements. In the case of the latter, however, the question of produce freshness and whether the balance is fairly and accurately weighted are very much regulated through relations of trust. This social dimension of informality, particularly in the case of Kolkata, is also evident in the way labour is recruited and treated, and tasks and responsibilities are allocated. As with other spaces of work illustrated in this study so far, the relationship of trust in spaces of work in Kolkata is often built upon relations of kinship, caste, ethnicity and religion. This dimension of informality is particularly relevant to the discussion at hand, as in the case of the factory, it places at its centre, socially embedded spatial relations.

Like the small-scale factory, the space of the shop straddles the fine line between the public and private – particularly in the context of Kolkata, where a significant number of the children who work in shops, reside, as well, within the space. Much like the home environment, children who work and live in the shop are often at the service of their employers throughout the day and night. In the case of Suresh¹¹⁷, the young boy from Bihar introduced in chapter four, work, in his experience, is a round-the-clock performance. The informal roadside teashop where he works begins serving customers around 7am. However, Suresh's day begins closer to 4am, when he and the other

¹¹⁷ M14.

workers in the shop – a combination of young and middle-aged workers, but all migrants from Bihar, must wake up to begin preparing for opening. Several of the workers head out on foot to the nearby Newmarket, one of Kolkata's oldest markets to purchase oil for frying, spices, vegetables and milk in bulk. Suresh, in the meanwhile, explains that he sweeps the sidewalk in front of the shop, where most customers will stand and sip their tea and eat samosas, and then goes to a nearby water pump to bathe and fill buckets of water to aid in cooking and washing up. Upon the return of the men from the market, Suresh must begin washing, peeling and cutting the potatoes to be boiled. Throughout the day, Suresh's tasks vary from washing and cutting vegetables, washing utensils and pots, making and serving tea, sweeping, fetching more water, stocking and re-stocking shelves with chips and other snacks for sale, and running errands around the neighbourhood, such as delivering tea to other shops. The teashop generally closes around 10pm, when Suresh, along with the other workers lies down a woven mat near the doorway of the shop, or outside on the sidewalk, and go to sleep. What came across as particularly noteworthy during our conversations was the way in which Suresh spoke and his general demeanour. Despite his young age, he spoke in a way well beyond his years – wearily, indifferently, and with contempt. To whom, or what, however, was unclear:

I work all the time...night, day...always. This work is not easy, always moving and not even sitting for ten minutes. My whole body hurts, my back and my legs... Some people say 'you are such a young boy, how come you are starting to get grey hair?'

When asked about his relationship with his employer and customers, Suresh explains:

I have to face a lot of shouting...some people will throw tea on me if there is not enough sugar. If I drop tea or a samosa, the boss gets angry with me and says that he has cut my pay. Some people who come here to drink tea every day are alright. They will give me some extra money...one or two rupees.

Shops mark an important space of work for children, particularly young boys.

They form a crucial labour pool for the informal service sector and, according to data

gathered from interviews with six child workers in the shop environment and their adult social networks, shops, like many other sectors within the informal economy, often rely significantly on migrant and child labour. All six young boys interviewed in this study employed in the space of the shop were labour migrants from rural districts in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Similar to the factory environment, the expectation when they are sent to the city is that they will be fostered – including housed, fed and clothed by their employers. The primary difference, however, is that they are not necessarily directly related to their employers, but come from the same regional or caste communities. Komal¹¹⁸, a 17-year-old former migrant child worker who now counsels children at the CINI Sealdah station drop-in centre, where he also resides, explained that migrant children are highly favoured labour in spaces such as the shop for the flexibility they offer their employers. “Children who come to Kolkata from outside are preferred by employers in shops because we have no choice and must do what they tell us. We have nowhere else to go”. Komal emphasizes that migrant children seldom choose their spaces and forms of work, but instead are forced into them by family and community networks or circumstances.

The relevance of kinship, therefore, similar to the factory environment, marks a crucial means through which children become involved in work. Similar, although to a lesser extent than in the home environment, there exists a discourse around kinship whereby factory and shop owners, as a result of belonging to the same religious and ethnic community, assume a right to employ as well as discipline child workers, while children are almost always powerless to resist them – deemed the morality of kinship’ by de Neve (2005).

¹¹⁸ M11.

6.4 RISK, DANGER AND INSECURITY IN INFORMAL SHOPS AND FACTORIES

While employers draw on the 'morality of kinship' to attract and control workers, and families of children seek to both inculcate their children into a supportive, long-term, and familiar work environment, as touched on so far, 'kinship does not always guarantee the labour or quality one needs, and there are limits to the extent to which both employers and workers benefit from co-operating with kin' (de Neve 2005, 15). Children who participate in the spaces of work discussed above are often bound to work based on kinship relations on two levels: first, family or duty, and second, necessity. Yet the kinship arrangements, despite some of the positive aspects discussed earlier, are not free of the dangers and insecurities often associated with child labour. 16-year old Muhammed¹¹⁹, who worked in a small-factory in Tangra, sorting and processing salvaged plastic purchased from ragpickers for almost three years, highlighted some of the dangers associated with the type of work that children like him participate in: exposure to chemicals and high levels of toxins and fumes; injury from heavy lifting; inadequate training; use of dangerous machines and tools; and the lack of appropriate protective and safety gear. He explained, in a group interview with several other boys from the Tangra community who either worked or still work in small-scale factories, that some children are badly injured.

They do not get paid and lose their jobs and their families don't want them back because they can't work and become a burden. They will never marry or have children...they have no future. They are abandoned and start begging to survive.

Some of the other boys spoke in agreement. Athar Ali¹²⁰, the youth group leader similar in age to the boys who was also present at the group interview, and a resident of the same community, continues,

¹¹⁹ M25.

¹²⁰ IA8.

...many of the [injured] children join begging rings because they are accepted only there. Those organisations exploit their disabilities to get money by making them beg. You would have seen some of those people who have no arms or legs who stand at the main intersections begging for money? They all belong to begging rings from Kalighat...¹²¹

On the reasons why Muhammed chose to leave his job in the factory, he reveals that he had witnessed the dangers of the work, and left his job on the advice of other youth in the neighbourhood. His mother did not force him to work. Others, however, have no choice but to work and are forcibly 'employed'.

Athar *Bhai* (respectfully referring to Athar Ali) told me 'go back to school and find your interest'. ...it was good because I now work with CPM (Communist Party of India – Marxist) youth. I believe in the CPM ideologies and I want to become a politician and change our nation.

Athar Ali explains that his aim in the community is to ensure that working children understand the dangers of some forms of work, through outreach and educational programmes. "Most children in this area up to 16 years old are given free schooling under the minority Muslim quota", says Athar Ali. "We try to encourage them to take advantage of this, but few parents push their children to go to school, so most children choose work instead."

While Muhammed and his friends are aware of, or at least, informed of some of the dangers associated with their work, I found that the majority of children in factory and shop spaces are neither aware of, nor educated on the extent to which their working conditions might be harmful to them or their health. The children who do understand the dangers, however, are often helpless to change their circumstances.

Returning to the example of Adil¹²², his lack of appropriate protective gear was particularly striking during our interview. As he was applying glue to the rubber soles of

¹²¹ Kalighat is a residential and commercial neighbourhood in South Kolkata recognised for its Kalighat Temple which celebrates the Hindu Goddess Durga, and for the Mother Teresa's home for the dying. Kalighat is a well-known hub for activities of begging, with numerous beggar centres and 'begging unions' operational in the area, according to Athar Ali.

¹²² M15.

the shoes he was making, it was difficult to ignore the pungent fumes. Despite standing outside in an open space, within minutes, the intensity of the fumes caused me to become lightheaded. Adil, to an extent, recognised the dangers associated with the chemicals he was handling, and took it upon himself to implement some makeshift precautions. For example, instead of applying the glue directly with his hands, as I had observed other children in nearby factories doing, Adil used a small square plastic milk bag as a makeshift glove. He also demonstrated how he occasionally stretched the neck opening of his t-shirt up over his mouth and nose to help mask the fumes. Adil explained that he had not been provided with any gloves by his uncle, and when he asked for some form of protection, it was suggested that he adopt the makeshift precautions. Adil's overall working conditions are austere and rudimentary, despite his personal relationship to his employer. They not only consist of the lack of proper clothing, footwear and masks to prevent inhalation of the fumes from the heavy-duty industrial glue, Adil also spends almost twelve hours a day hunched over a crooked table, working under the hot Kolkata sun in temperatures upwards of 40 degrees Celsius in the summertime, with only a few short breaks during the day. These working conditions point to the apathy that exists among employers in Kolkata regarding the health and safety of their employees – a point that other studies have found to be a factor, not only in informal work environments in India, but in the formal sector as well (cf. Burra 2005; Shaw and Pandit 2001).

Athar Ali points to the harsh working conditions, as well as over-exposure to workplace chemicals and glues, known in Kolkata by the brand name as Dendrite, as a significant long-term hazard of work that he and his colleagues at the NGO, *Seva Kendra*, have witnessed among children. He reveals that it is one of his biggest concerns, for it is not uncommon for working children to become addicted to the chemicals they work with. Athar Ali provides examples of some of his own childhood friends from the area

who can no longer “function properly” and cannot contribute to their family income through factory work any longer. “Addiction among children in this area has been a very dangerous problem.” Asked if parents or employers know about the harmful effects of the chemicals, he explains, “parents sometimes know about this but say nothing, and sometimes don’t say anything because they don’t know. But those who also work in factories know...and employers know”.

According to another NGO volunteer active in the region, some children also suffer physical and psychological abuse at the hands of their employers, however, cannot escape as a result of the ideology of kinship that overshadows their individual decision-making options. As a consequence, they are held accountable, by their primary structures of protection, security and their only sources of emancipation from work – their family members, employers (particularly in cases where they are kin or parents), and their community networks. In light of this, child workers – particularly migrant child workers such as in the space of the shop, or fostered children – are often restricted in their demands for accommodation, working hours, wages, and overall working conditions. Furthermore, they are unlikely to resist their work or organise to contest their conditions for fear of the impact on their family and the family’s reputations.

Rahul¹²³, an 11-year old boy introduced in chapter four who worked in an Indian sweet shop, is a prime example of the impact that resistance can incite on social and familial networks. He explains: “my mother beat me when I left my job [at a sweet shop]. I didn’t like it there...I felt like there was an evil eye (in Hindi, *nazar*) always on me.” Rahul’s mother, who received his Rs. 500 (£5) monthly income directly from his employer, with whom she had arranged the job, expected him to work despite the insecure conditions in which he found himself. Rahul explains that as a result of leaving

¹²³ M10.

the job, he and his mother no longer have a relationship. Rahul further credits the organisation, CINI and their drop-in centre where he now resides, for helping him break free from work in the shop and his mother, by providing him with an alternative option to working in the shop. Rahul's experience is indicative of the way children's familial and community networks have the potential to be restrictive or damaging to their welfare.

6.5 FINDING SUPPORT, AID AND PROTECTION AT WORK

Children in the space of the factory and the shop, as illustrated in this chapter thus far, have limited options to resist exploitation or abuse in their work. Familial and community networks, rather than providing a source of protection and aid in times of insecurity at work, primarily bring children into the realm of work and determine the nature of their employment. Kinship, despite being a significant feature of small-scale factory and shop employment in Kolkata, does not guarantee trust, protection, security or fair and equal wages. As a result, I found that a large majority of children actively seek out other sources of protection, such as NGOs, which create spaces of respite and form networks of assistance providing support, information or guidance in times of difficulty or insecurity at work. In this section, I provide an overview of the different forms of NGOs working with children in both factories and shops, and interrogate the methods through which children active in these in-between spaces find avenues of safety and protection. First, however, I briefly analyse the failures of formal institutional bodies, such as labour legislation and the police, in ensuring the safety of working children.

6.5.1 FORMAL INSTITUTIONS OF PROTECTION

Labour legislation, as discussed in the previous chapter, is largely ineffective in monitoring or regulating children's work. In fact, employers and police often utilise child protection laws to discipline child workers. Almost all of the boys employed in informal

shop spaces revealed experiences of threats by employers to exercise power and authority and procure obedience among the young workers. Komal, for example, explains that many informal shop owners are often coerced to pay a daily fee to the police or other formal authorities, such as the Railway Protection Force (RPF), for occupying space. Komal reveals,

When I was small, I was working in the shop and the police used to come every day to take their money. One time my boss got angry and said he would not pay. The police said 'you have a boy working for you. I will take him away'. My boss told them 'take him' and pushed me to him.¹²⁴

The police and Komal's employer used the labour legislation as a bargaining tool, while Komal was treated as a pawn in their negotiation. Rahul, similarly, reveals that his boss at a sweet shop where he worked used to threaten him to "do work properly" or he would call the police to "take him away". Gautum,¹²⁵ another boy who worked in the shop environment, told a similar story. "Boss would always tell me that it is illegal for me to work and the police will arrest me. I used to be scared when he would say this."

Reiterating my findings from the previous chapter, labour laws in India are particularly easy to evade or bypass, as a result of a lack of legal documentation, and bribes to police and other officials. Furthermore, formal legislation contains significant loopholes. As Harriss-White and Gooptu (2009) write, 'the state turns a blind eye in various ways – from exemption from the Factories Acts to not enforcing the Minimum Wages Act' (98). For example, children under the age of 14, according to the Child Labour Act (Prohibition and Regulation), 1986 are banned from participating in work in factories, however work in home-based manufacturing units is not legislated. The work of the Labour ministry has 'limited, or even backhanded, impact on workers' (103). For example:

¹²⁴ M11.

¹²⁵ M9.

The Minimum Wages, Contract Labour and Child Labour Acts declare entitlements which actually have to be struggled for by labour organizations. Further, without reforms to give access to the courts and make their decisions binding, these laws are toothless. Labour organisations asserting claims to entitlements are, moreover, often dealt with under criminal procedure. At best, all laws have a normative role: to raise expectations as a rallying point for mobilization. At worst the very laws supposedly protecting labour encourage capital to informalize it (Harriss-White and Gooptu 2009, 103).

Implementation, moreover, is extremely difficult for the majority of workspaces in which children are employed are often unregistered and as a result hidden from formal regulatory bodies. Small-scale manufacturing units in Kolkata, for example, are primarily located in informal or semi-formal residential settlements that are not recognised through legal titles, and therefore, become exempt to state regulation. Settlements such as Topsia and Matiabruz, where small-scale factory work and children's employment is particularly widespread, are especially difficult to regulate, for police have minimal presence in these settlements as a result of contempt from residents – largely a product of religious and ethnic divisions. These settlements, I learned, are in many ways, semi-autonomous and socially regulated, where children are extensively favoured to adult labour. Business owners, Salique¹²⁶ and Sadaf¹²⁷, as well as Development Research Communication and Service Centre (DRCSC) representative, Kaberi Bannerjee¹²⁸ – all of whom live in the neighbourhoods – revealed that there exists a strong sense of distrust towards police and government officials, and the community members take it upon themselves to deal with internal community issues, disputes, violence or concerns. Hindus and other religious groups tend to refrain from entering the settlements. In fact, when I chose to enter Matiabruz and Topsia, my local translator mobilised three acquaintances with connections to the neighbourhoods to guide both of us and ensure that we would be safe. They simply walked close by and observed us, but did not directly

¹²⁶ N9.

¹²⁷ N5.

¹²⁸ IA11

engage with us. In this regard, police and other formal state-based bodies monitoring child labour and observing child labour laws are entirely absent from communities, where it was apparent in this research that the participation of children in work is widespread. As a result, children have few avenues of recourse and protection, beyond the non-government sector.

6.5.2 NON-GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

As evidenced from the discussion so far, NGO's form an integral structure of support and protection for working children in both shop and small-scale factory environments in Kolkata. The term 'NGO' is used in this chapter to refer to established organisations that are identified as NGOs by members of the communities they serve, or by the members of the organisations, themselves. I found that in Kolkata, most local institutions that promote support or aid to the public were regarded as 'NGOs', regardless of their actual status. Consequently, this research did not question the validity of the NGO title or registration documents, but instead, relies on the assessments of those that they claim to 'help' and 'serve'. It is necessary to also point out that this section aims, not to assess the NGOs, but rather, to examine the role they play in children's lives and the way they are encountered, positioned, and perceived by associated or affected children.

There are three forms of NGOs that were revealed through the findings of this study. The first is the full service NGO, which operates in a distinct and marked space and provides shelter, food and access to healthcare, counselling programmes, formal education and vocational learning opportunities. NGO administrators occasionally even seek funding or scholarships for the children, in order to place them into long-term formal education, and directly engage them in the work of the NGO through skill building programmes and opportunities to become involved in outreach. CINI, an organisation referred to numerous times in this study, is a prime example of a full-service NGO. CINI's

primary aim is to remove children from work and place them into full-time education, while educating parents on the rights of the child. According to the Director of CINI, Manidipa¹²⁹, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) serves as a framework for the organisation.

The second NGO model may be defined as programme-based. The organisations in this category recruit children from the surrounding neighbourhood through word-of-mouth advertising.¹³⁰ The primary goal is to encourage children's well-being by imparting education and skills aimed at improving health, offering alternatives to work and life on the streets, providing counselling services, and engaging them in informal training programmes that provide vocational skills. *Seva Kendra*, an NGO that various children in this research were either involved with or had encountered, is an example of this model. *Seva Kendra* is a large internationally funded NGO in West Bengal. They operate in various poor communities in Kolkata from single-room shanties, often provided by the community for their use. Athar Ali¹³¹, who is a part-time facilitator with the organisation in one Tangra *kagaz kaam* (ragpicking) community, explained that the *Seva Kendra* branch with which he is involved operates a range of programmes each week. Every Sunday, the organisation hosts youth from the surrounding slum community, encouraging them to engage with each other and discuss their experiences, concerns, and aspirations. Facilitators offer support and advice, as well as use the sessions as a way of understanding the needs of the youth, in order to plan relevant training programmes. The organisations in this category do not provide any material resources or incentives, such as access to services, healthcare or formal education.

¹²⁹ IA7.

¹³⁰ IA8.

¹³¹ IA8.

The final model of NGO that children in this study were involved with are basic 'street to school' programmes. The NGO, Development Research Communication and Services Centre (DRCSC) in Kolkata, is an example of this organisation and offers several 'classes' each week in a space provided by the community. Street children are taught proper hygiene, how to save money, and are provided basic Math and Hindi classes. Kaberi, an educator with DRCSC and the founder of the Tangra Canal Street Division of the organisation explains that the organisation is basic, however, has become an integral part of the community. Children are provided training in basic skills that will improve their own well-being. The classes also provide children with the opportunity to temporarily escape work and life on the streets.

The majority of organisations establish their presence in poor neighbourhoods and squatter settlements where working children and their families often live and work. They are made visible through painted sign boards on walls and the sides of buildings in the communities they serve, essentially positioning the organisations as a pillar of support for the neighbourhood and its people. The collection of photos in Figure 6.3, illustrates the ways NGOs establish their presence in communities.

FIGURE 6.3: NGO BOARDING IN KOLKATA¹³²



Photo 1: Seva Kendra branch located in recycling settlement, Tangra

¹³² Photography by Tanya Kumar



Photo 2: *Seva Kendra* Head Office, Chowdhury Road



Photo 3: DRCSC branch located along Canal Street South, Tangra



Photo 4: CINI Asha Urban Unit head Office, near Park Street

Children's encounters with NGOs in this study are varied, as I suggested earlier. Programme and education-based NGOs identified in this study do not actively seek out children to 'help', but instead establish their presence in the community as a resource through specialised programmes and advertising. The full service NGOs, on the other hand, actively pursue children in in order to bring them into their 'protective' custody to

offer assistance and services. In the case of children in the in-between spaces of the shop and factories, the latter full-service NGO was largely inaccessible and only three children, who had abandoned their jobs in shops and joined street-based forms of work, were affiliated with them. I discovered that the street-to-school and programme-based NGOs were more relevant to children operating in factories and shops.

As I have shown in this chapter so far, NGOs form an important body of support among children in the factory and shop environments. According to my data, NGOs in the area aim to provide children with education to encourage them to understand their options. They hold weekly lessons and workshops for working children and in some cases assist them in making employers recognise some of the dangers associated with their work. Table 6.4 provides a list of programmes that *Seva Kendra* offers working children, parents, and employers in the Tangra recycling settlement.

Table 6.4: NGO Programmes for Child Workers, Parents and Employers*

Child Workers	Parents	Employers
- Workshops aimed at encouraging children to return to school - Educating children on dangers in the workplace - Educational programmes on addiction → workshops for children suffering from addictions (glue, alcohol, cough syrup) - Health and hygiene programmes - “Economics training” to offer alternative means of producing an income - Created a ‘child parliament’ for children in the area to offer solutions on issues in community	- Educating parents on the relevance of formal education - Workshops for parents on addiction - Discussion groups on different issues children in community are facing: e.g. child marriage - Workshops on health and hygiene - Assisting in establishing a taskforce for parents seeking to create a safer community for children	- Training workshops of safety and protection at work: e.g. encouraging the use of gloves and masks

* Data accumulated from interviews with Athar Ali and recipients of support from NGO, *Seva Kendra*, Tangra.

According to the *Seva Kendra* representatives¹³³, they have achieved significant success in lowering the overall population of working children in the area – although figures were not available. Moreover, it was revealed that in the past several months, there have been successful drives to help children whose families have suffered hardships, in order to prevent them from being forced into the workforce. For example, one family lost all their belongings in a fire on January 21st, 2012. The organisation mobilised their resources to help the family. Additionally, the organisation has assisted several children in overcoming dendrite addictions and returning to school. Finally, a programme aimed at providing better educational opportunities for bright scholars, has lead to several offers of scholarships from private schools in Kolkata.

Despite the widespread presence and activities by organisations in the communities, one of the most significant obstacles for both working children interested in becoming involved with the NGOs, as well as NGOs, is access to their programmes and workshops. 15-year old Shadat¹³⁴, who works in a processing factory, explained that he often had trouble finding the time and receiving permission from his employer to attend the NGO workshops. According to my data, and reiterated by Athar Ali¹³⁵ from *Seva Kendra* and Kaberi¹³⁶ from DRCSC, not all children are given the freedom or opportunity to seek assistance or attend their workshops, despite the wide publicity in the communities. Those who do, as well as who participate in full-time work, do so in their own time – often on Sundays, or in the middle of the day during lunch, which is occasionally one to two hours.

Athar Ali and the other NGO representatives in the area explain that their only option for helping or educating the children regarding their rights is if the children

¹³³ IA8; IA12.

¹³⁴ M24.

¹³⁵ IA8.

¹³⁶ IA11.

approach them personally or attend their workshops. While NGO volunteers – themselves often children who have managed to escape work and are in full-time formal schooling – seek out parents and employers to attend their workshops, Kaberi from DRCSC acknowledges that some children face greater problems at work if their connection to the NGOs is revealed. As a result, the NGOs attempt to make their presence known through signs and a general presence in the area, however, it falls upon children in factory and shop environments, either, to find the time or get permission to attend their workshops, which are strategically scheduled to take place between 1 to 3pm on weekdays and in the mornings on Sundays to coincide with times when children or employers are likely to be taking a break from work, or are more freely available.

Shardoff¹³⁷, a working boy introduced earlier who is relatively active with both *Seva Kendra* and DRCSC, in Tangra, reveals that he began attending workshops with the organisations once a week on Sunday mornings, when he does not work. Now, he spends the hour-long break that he is given each afternoon from his job at the processing factory to attend programmes. His motivation in participating with the organisations is largely driven by the sense of community and belonging that he has found with the other children who attend. While the educational programmes are useful, he is now seeking to become a volunteer with *Seva Kendra*, which offers children the opportunity to become active members of the organisation, beyond simply attending workshops. In this regard, the organisation not only provides tools to improve living and working conditions, as well as creating a place of belonging, they also provide children with a sense of agency.

The children in this study were significantly in favour of the presence and work of NGOs in their localities, and suggested that they were a positive aspect of their community. While this discussion may perhaps seem overly optimistic, I was hard-

¹³⁷ M23.

pressed to find children involved with the organisations who have not benefitted in some form from the NGOs. Even children who do not directly participate in NGO programmes recognised that they have indirectly benefitted from programmes aimed at improving children's living conditions. For example, in Matiabruz another branch of DSCRC established a healthcare scheme where children who are unwell are provided heavily subsidised access to doctors and healthcare facilities¹³⁸.

6.6 CONCLUSION

As a space that is neither public, nor private, factories and shops, although spatially and occupationally distinct, share common features, as well as challenges, in terms of the way children experience labour and regulation, and their access to structures of protection. Unlike in the home space, where children's work and security is often observed and controlled or ensured through important familial relationships, my findings in this chapter suggest that children who work in the space of the factory have few options for protection, as their employers are essentially composed of kin rather than immediate family. Children in shops, similarly, enter the workforce at the direction of familial networks, resulting in limited options for escape or protection in times of distress.

Civil society organisations, alternatively, provide a varied level and type of aid to working children in the distinct and segregated communities discussed in this chapter. Yet, it is apparent that beyond education, guidance, and support through affiliation and programming, NGOs are limited in the extent to which they can exert their aims and offer outright protection to children, including lobbying for fair and equal wages, and safety in the work environment.

¹³⁸ M20.

IN PLAIN VIEW: CHILDREN'S WORK IN PUBLIC SPACE

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Early in my fieldwork in Kolkata, I met three boys at the CINI drop in centres in Sealdah station who swiftly took me under their wings and assumed the roles of my protectors. Babu¹³⁹ and twin brothers, Chotka¹⁴⁰ and Burka¹⁴¹, all approximately¹⁴² 15 years old when we first met, adopted me as their *didi* – a Hindi term used out of respect to refer to an elder sister figure – and took it upon themselves to guide me through the streets, *gullies* and platforms in and around the station. Burka, in particular, saw to it that I never walked to the taxi stand by myself in the evenings, and often relayed the horror stories of Sealdah station after dark as he accompanied me through the deserted *gullies* behind the station. All three boys attended a nearby school during the day through sponsorship from CINI, while their evenings and Sundays were often spent scavenging for plastic bottles on the railway platforms and streets outside the stations in order to earn a little money to help their parents – all of whom resided on platforms, in the car parks, in the streets and *gullies* connecting to the station, and in empty station warehouses. Over the course of my research in Kolkata, Saturday afternoons became ‘our’ time together. For a few hours after they returned from school and before heading off to the streets and platforms to work, the boys would join me at one of the CINI drop in centres near the station, where we would talk, play card games, or work on their homework.

¹³⁹ M13.

¹⁴⁰ M30.

¹⁴¹ M31.

¹⁴² They were uncertain of their exact ages, however, their birth dates on their ‘school certificates’ indicated that they were 15 years old. Babu and Chotka were in Class 8 (the age of most students in this class is 12-13 years) and Burka was in Class 9. Their class levels reflect their late entry into the formal education system. Babu and Chotka also failed to pass Class 3 and 6, respectively.

Our conversations, which were in a blend of Hindi and English, would often transition into a lesson by the boys on how to survive on the streets. They were keenly aware of the objectives of my study and often instructed me to take out my notebook and make notes if they felt our conversations were particularly relevant to my study. Candid in their answers to my questions, they became among my most outspoken informants. On one of my last Saturdays in Kolkata, I sat on a ledge near the main road behind the train station, waiting for them to return from school. I saw Babu and Chotka walking across the road and as they approached me I could see that Babu's eye and cheek were bruised and swollen, while Chotka's wrist was wrapped with a crepe bandage. They came over to me and laughed at my reaction when I exclaimed, "*kya hua?*" (what happened). Babu insisted I take out my notebook and record their story.

I was told that a few days earlier Babu was carrying out his work collecting bottles from a road behind the station, when he was confronted and beaten by several officers of the Railway Protection Force (RPF), an armed police force sanctioned by the Government of India and Ministry of Railways to deal with security issues pertaining to the Indian Railways. The boys spoke of the tendency for RPF officers to physically assault street- and street-working children, like them, at random. Using the example of a child sleeping on the platform, Babu explained that the RPF would simply begin hitting and kicking the child to make them move. Chotka, who was collecting bottles a little further away, saw one of the RPF officers attack Babu. "Without thinking I ran and hit him [the officer]. This is my brother [placing his arm around Babu's shoulders]." As they described the details of the attack, it became apparent that this was not their first experience with the RPF. Burka, who had not been a part of the incident, soon joined our conversation, which had evolved into a discussion of the forms of violence and abuse that the boys had experienced on the streets. He explained that the RPF and police were only one source of abuse against children on the streets. Shopkeepers, street vendors,

and even general onlookers also had a tendency to impose their authority, and discipline children who work on the streets through verbal and physical forms of abuse.

The boys' experiences of violence on the streets reflect a common perspective in the literature of children's presence in public space as alien and undesirable (cf. Evans 2006; Mukhopadhyay 2006; Harden 2000)¹⁴³. Burka's point reaffirms the common assumption that children in public space are both a threat to the social space, as well as in need of 'saving', or at least 'taming'. Moreover, their story highlights the range of groups and actors that participate – often forcefully – in the lives of children, essentially regulating their everyday work activities and movements on the streets. In this chapter, I move up the spatial scale from the 'in-between' space of shops and workshops, where I argued that children's work is constructed around family, community and neighbourhood structures and governed through social relations linked to religion and ethnicity. In this chapter, I consider the public realm of the street, and the social and power relations that influence the way children like Burka, Chotka and Babu, work on the streets in Kolkata.

My aim in focusing on the different spatial scales at which children engage in work, is to illustrate the way the spaces in which children work (and sometimes live) are imbued with social relations of gender, age, class, caste, religion and/or ethnicity, and how these are enacted through constructions of hierarchies, divisions of labour, work regimes as well as abuse and violence. Moreover, I aim to uncover how children negotiate their working lives through everyday social relations. This chapter focuses on children who participate in paid and unpaid work on 'the streets' in Kolkata, and the individuals and groups that they engage with on a daily basis in order to carry out their work. I use the term 'street' as a metaphor for all public outdoor spaces in which children

¹⁴³ Parallels work by scholars such as Hecht 1998 and de Oliveira 2000 on Brazil, which observes violence against children in the streets. See, also Ruddick (1995): *Young and Homeless in Hollywood*

engage in work, including roads, sidewalks, alleyways, car parks, bus shelters, and train stations¹⁴⁴. Essentially, I aim to explore the way children work on 'the streets', and the micro-social and spatial structures and relationships that influence their everyday working lives. In this chapter, I first examine the subculture of the Indian street and the way children in public spaces tend to be represented. I construct a typology of street-working children in Kolkata in order to better understand the reasons children enter work on the streets, as well as the way in which they work. Second, I analyse the key social structures of age and gender, and the way children's work and working lives are constructed, exercised and negotiated through these working identities. Third, I explore the way in which children are governed and their work on the streets is regulated through social structures of identity, kinship and friendship, and institutional bodies.

7.2 REPRESENTATIONS: THE INDIAN STREET, CHILDREN AND PUBLIC SPACE

One of the most popular representations of the Indian street in the literature comes from Tim Edensor (1998) in his chapter entitled *The Culture of the Indian Street*. Edensor describes the Indian street in vivid detail, portraying the diverse social activities, rituals, performances, and movements characteristic of Indian streets and arguing that the social ordering or regulation of streets is culturally specific and cannot easily be transferred to other contexts (220). Edensor defines the street as 'part of a spatial complex which also comprises the bazaar and the fair and together they constitute an unenclosed realm which provides a meeting point of several communities' (206). He deems the Indian street as a 'heterotopia', in which 'the random juxtapositions of disparate objects, activities and people not normally found together challenge hegemonic modes of

¹⁴⁴ Train stations in India have become a common space for the homeless. They have also become a key space where children work, live, and play.

regulating and representing space' (218). For example, of the forms of work that occupy the streets of India, he writes:

whilst there are fixed shops, the street is also the work place of mobile providers of services such as dentists, fortune-tellers, shoe-shiners, barbers, letter-writers, shoe repairers, bicycle fixers and tea-wallahs, as well as mobile stalls of all kinds (1998, 206).

Central to his argument is the idea that the street is highly regulated, not by obvious institutional structures that actively govern Western streets, but through complex interactions. He writes, '[The] seeming disorder and lack of regulation [of the Indian street] disguises the forms of power that are played out on the street' (1998, 211). This can be understood through de Oliveira's (2000) conceptualisation of the 'subculture of streets' (9), which he refers to as incorporating a 'world of meanings and actions', including the way street people, including children, behave, socialise, and perform everyday activities' (10). He argues that the subculture of the streets 'defines space – geographically...politically', and socially. It constructs 'perceptions of social roles and representations (e.g., "prostitute", "beggar," "victim," "friend")', and establishes inclusiveness or exclusiveness (e.g., "community," "marginals," "us," and "them")' (de Oliveira 2000, 10).

Kolkata's streets, much like Edensor's depictions, are diverse and multi-use, and occupied by a range of social and commercial actors, interests, and activities. Similar to de Oliveira's argument, the Kolkata street, specifically access to activities in the street, is strictly governed and controlled through the 'subculture' of the streets, which is built upon normative conceptions of culture, ethnicity, gender, age and class, which will be explored in detail throughout this chapter. The street in Kolkata serves as an important space in which children participate in both paid and unpaid work. Street work, in the context of this study, refers to all work that occurs within the public sphere. This includes the work-related activities of begging, ragpicking and scavenging, and itinerant

street-vending, on streets, sidewalks, in *gullies*, and along publicly accessible train platforms.

As discussed in chapter two, space has appeared in the literature in recent years, as a key defining feature of the concept of childhood. Nieuwenhuys (2013), for example, writes:

Children should at all times be in safe, supervised, controlled spaces. Outside these spaces their safety, and with it their very experience of childhood, is deemed to be at risk. Children who spend too much of their time outside the safe spaces of childhood are not only deemed to be out of place, they are also perceived to as being outside childhood (Nieuwenhuys 2013, 99)

Nieuwenhuys expresses the vital connection between space and perceptions of childhood, particularly the role of space as a defining variable between what is considered as a pure, secure, and protected childhood, versus an insecure or 'non-childhood'. Aitken (2001b), similarly, emphasises the perception of young people's engagement with public space as 'unchildlike' and 'a breach in the moral fabric' (156). The presence of children in the street is widely viewed in international policy as a social concern – a point clearly observable through the large number of organisations and causes aimed at helping street children. Taking Brazil as an example, Gough and Franch (2005) note an increasing interest in Brazilian society during the 1980s and 1990s on the presence of poor children and adolescents in the street (151). This was observed particularly among NGOs, established to educate and house street children. Hecht (1998) similarly emphasises this phenomenon by writing:

...in a city where hundreds of thousands of children suffer from hunger, disease, and deprivation in the *favelas*, why [does] the presence of a tiny number of children and young adults living in the street mobilize such a wide array of social actors? (Hecht 1998, 5)

Hecht's question is striking, for it points to the pervasive assumption that children who occupy public space are necessarily neglected, underprivileged, and deprived (Hecht 1998). Moreover, both examples suggest that children who participate

in life on the streets are a homogenous group – that all children on the streets are victims of the same situation. Popular discourse deems them ‘street children’ – children who live, work, exist and survive on the street and from the street. In reality, children on the street are a varied group, coming from a diverse range of backgrounds, circumstances, and experiences. Evans (2006), emphasises ‘street children, like all children, are a highly differentiated group of people, with differences of age, gender, ethnicity, class, disability and other characteristics affecting their experiences’ (109). Recent studies (cf. de Oliveira 2000; Glauser 1997) have sought to deconstruct and distinguish between children who live, work or frequent the streets, and represent them, not as a homogenous category, but rather through their activities on the street and their social connections on and outside the street. Institutions such as UNICEF have suggested a distinction between ‘in’ and ‘of’ – children *in* the street being those who ‘use the street as a venue for their actions, not the essence of their character’, while children *of* the street representing those who perform all their activities, including sleeping, on the streets (Hecht 1998 102-103; Glauser 1997, 142). Hecht (1998), on the other hand, differentiates between both groups by using the nouns, ‘home’ and ‘street’ in conjunction with child – the latter representing children for whom the street is the space in which they work, play and live, and the former referring to those whose childhoods are ‘lived at home’¹⁴⁵ (21). I lean toward the institutional terminology in denoting children who occupy street space, for ‘home’, as explored in chapter five, is a loaded term in itself, and several children with whom this research was conducted choose to use ‘home’ to refer to the position of the street in their own lives. Furthermore, in Hecht’s use of the phrase ‘home children’, he excludes children who reside on streets only occasionally, as well as those who remain connected to their parental ‘homes’ through remittances, such as

¹⁴⁵ Hecht (1998) does differentiate between the two types of childhoods within the home: nurtured childhoods where children are economic liabilities to the household, and nurturing childhoods, where children from an early age take on the responsibilities of bringing in resources to their mothers and nurturing the households (21).

migrant street working children (Hecht 1998, 102). All these children represent children *in the street*.

7.2.1 CATEGORIES OF WORK ON KOLKATA'S STREETS

As this study has shown, entry into the realm of work by children is often the result of inevitable economic or social constraints. Financial difficulties, illness or death of a parent or guardian, or a father or elder brother's departure can push children (and occasionally, their families) to seek out work opportunities on the streets. The choice of the street as a medium of work marks, for some of the children in this research, an easy way to create an income, while for others, is a socio-cultural decision linked to their relations with family, identity and social belonging. Based on my research with street-working children in Kolkata I have distinguished between three broad categories of children who work on the streets. The first is embodied by the image of the lone child working out of desperation to obtain money for survival – indicative of the 'adultization of work' category from the typology¹⁴⁶ in chapter four. I found that children in this section seek work on the streets as a result of an urgent need for money for themselves and/or their family's survival. In this case, children may be pushed into a form of street work, often begging or scavenging, as a result of a sudden loss of income or dire circumstances due to an illness in the family. Children who run away from home, have been abandoned by family, or become orphaned also often start their lives in this category, and may transition to the third category, below. The second type of child – who may fit into any of the categories from the typology in chapter four – performs work on the streets on an everyday basis for a set period of time. The work may represent a daily chore, task, or occupation carried out alone or alongside a parent or relative. Income

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter 4, page 117 for typologies of children's work.

directly serves the family or household. The three boys introduced at the beginning of this chapter, Babu, Burka and Chotka, represent this category, for they approach their work of scavenging for plastic bottles, as a daily task to be conducted for a set time period, each day. The third type of child works on the streets alone or with peers, and undertakes work as a social activity. Their presence on the street, although driven by troubled circumstances such as poverty or violence, is not necessarily reflected by a need for money. This category can be linked to ‘work that gradually replaces school’ from the typology in chapter four. In some cases, this work also exists as a social activity and may begin as an adventure or game. Although not necessarily representative of all children, this can be accompanied by a wish to help their family survive. I have categorised work on the streets, not by the tasks they perform on the streets, but by the child’s working context, for children in different situations may participate in some of the same tasks. For example, scavenging, ragpicking, and begging are undertaken by children belonging to each of the categories outlined above.

I interviewed and observed 20 street-working children, as well as 11 members of their social networks. All the children largely fall into the first and second categories of children *in* the street who work in the streets alone or alongside a family member in order to contribute to their overall family income and well-being. Several of the children, over the ten months I spent doing fieldwork in Kolkata, made the transition from this category to children *of* the street, where they severed ties to their families in favour of a more independent life on the streets, where work was treated more as a game through play with peers. One boy, 11-year old Masood¹⁴⁷, represents a runaway, whose presence on the street was of his own volition – albeit, driven by power dynamics within his family home that he sought to escape. Masood’s income through work was for his own

¹⁴⁷ M12.

consumption and unlike ninety percent of the children in this study he did not begin working to contribute to a family or household budget. Masood, instead, chose to sever ties with his family and pursue work on the streets of Kolkata. All twenty children, regardless of the categories, however, are street-working, for they rely on public space and the everyday activities and interactions within this space, for their livelihoods.

7.3 THE SOCIAL DIVISION OF LABOUR IN THE STREETS

Work on the streets is essentially a facet of the informal labour economy defined in chapter two, and children, as the embodiment of informal labour as a result of exclusionary labour laws and policy, are bound to experience an inherent insecurity in their working lives. Working children in Kolkata often find themselves in precarious employment situations, exacerbated by the notion, outlined earlier that children belong in specific, defined spaces in which they are expected to be safe. All working children rely on a range of links with individuals, groups and networks, including peers, parents, employers, customers, or other adults, religious or ethnic communities and child welfare NGOs (Invernizzi 2003, 321). Nonetheless, street life can be 'marked by both wrenching solitude and intense solidarity' (Hecht 1998, 46). Structures of inclusion and exclusion are important in the way in which children participate in work on the streets. This is strongly linked to their circumstances, their circle of friends, and with that, their participation in certain activities such as games and work, but also in stealing and the consumption of drugs or alcohol. It is also, however, linked to broader social constructions around religion and ethnicity, and gender. In this section, I argue that gender and religion/ethnicity are important axes of social differentiation among children who work on the streets in Kolkata, and strongly influence their experiences and negotiations of work.

7.3.1 RELIGION/ETHNICITY AND THE STREET

Similar to other spaces of work examined in this study, religion and ethnicity are decisive factors in the ways children on the streets construct their social networks. As I have pointed out in previous chapters, they are important factors in creating community and forming kinship bonds, as well as in constructing social divisions among individuals and groups in Kolkata – a point that remains as relevant among street working children in the city. This argument is reflected through the example of Rajib¹⁴⁸, one of the first children I met near Sealdah station. Approximately 10-years old and from Bangladesh, Rajib found his way to Kolkata by doing odd jobs on passenger trains, travelling throughout India. His participation in work was a consequence of his parents' death and ill-treatment by his brothers in Bangladesh. Rajib spoke at length about his connections to both Bangladesh and India. In fact, in my field diary reflections after our first meeting, I wrote, "Rajib radiates with pride when he speaks of his links to Bangladesh and India". Figure 7.1 exhibits some of Rajib's drawings which he produced at the CINI drop in centres, and gave to me during our meetings together. All his drawings incorporate the Indian and Bangladesh flags in some form, revealing the extent to which he identifies with both countries. Rajib spoke at length of his fondness for all things Indian, and while he identified as being from Bangladesh, he explained that India was *now* his home. I met Rajib several times over the course of two weeks to carry out individual interviews, as well as to observe him in his everyday work. During one of our interviews, he complained that he was excluded from work and play by the other boys who also worked on the streets. Rajib explained that when he arrived in Kolkata, he began collecting plastic bottles to sell. Although many of the children I spoke with participate together in the same activity to make money, Rajib was excluded for being "different", a word

¹⁴⁸ M32.

Tapas¹⁴⁹, another boy who worked in the same vicinity, used to describe him. Upon clarification, Tapas explained that Rajib's spoken Bengali was different, and that he was not from "here" – he was essentially of a different cultural and linguistic background than the other boys. Similarly, another street working boy, Ganesh¹⁵⁰, the only Hindu boy I met who participated in the ragpicking in and around Sealdah station, explained that despite his presence on the streets for several months, he was never permitted to join other boys who participated in the same activity. One of the CINI coordinators, Shantanu,¹⁵¹ explained that this lack of peer support often left Ganesh vulnerable to abuse from other children and adults on the street. His isolation from other children was, moreover, reflected through his dependence on the NGO coordinators. The importance of friendship as a network of support and protection will be discussed further in the sections that follow.

FIGURE 7.1: DRAWINGS BY RAJIB



Bangladesh flag and name written in Bengali script as Rjib (রাজিব) and Rajib (রাজিব)



House coloured as Indian Flag

¹⁴⁹ M33.

¹⁵⁰ Ganesh was not directly involved in this research, as he was not involved in any form of work. However, I did interact with him as a result of his constant presence at the drop-in centre

¹⁵¹ IA10.



Indian flag

7.3.2 GENDER AND THE STREET

Gender, like ethnicity, forms an important structure of differentiation on the streets in Kolkata. As a public space, the streets have tended to be associated with production, men and masculinity, while the private realm, as discussed in previous chapters, has been generally been perceived as a space of reproduction, and women/femininity. Echoing Skelton (2000), girls in the street are perceived as 'occupying an ambiguous and often uncomfortable position of being the "wrong" gender and being in the "wrong" place' (80). This perception is reflected in the way girls on the streets are constructed, as well as through the division of labour on the streets. I found that girls who participated on the streets by themselves were principally relegated to the activities of begging and scavenging, and were given few opportunities by other street workers and consumers to become involved in street trading or selling the goods they collected through scavenging, for example, to buyers who purchase the picked goods by the kilo. Their exclusion from work that is more interactive suggests a sense of discomfort and distrust towards girls who occupy public space. Street girls do not

conform to conventional gender roles, and therefore, 'destabilise the identity category of "female" and subvert norms of "gender" as well as norms of "childhood"' (Evans 2006, 120). In addition to forms of work, I found that girls were also typically excluded from joining the boys in their social circles and networks. Similar to Hecht's (1998) observations in Brazil, younger boys were generally reluctant to allow girls in their groups, while older boys viewed girls as their "conquests", rather than their peers (55-61). The view among the older boys is linked to a perception indicated in chapter five that girls who are alone in public spaces are immoral and sexually promiscuous.

Komal, a 17-year old boy¹⁵² who worked in shops and on the streets before becoming a volunteer cook and administrator at the drop-in centre in Sealdah station, introduced me to 15-year old Meera¹⁵³ when we crossed paths while walking in the Kholi Market in the Sealdah area. After a short and casual conversation, during which time she and I made plans to meet again, we parted ways, and Komal whispered "she is not a good girl". Upon my request for clarification, he explained that she "is married and has a baby but she has many boyfriends...she has relations with other men". Komal advised me to keep my distance from Meera. Komal's assertion that Meera is sexually promiscuous reflects a common stigma attached to the presence of young women in public spaces (Evans 2006; Rajani and Kudrati 1996). Evans (2006) suggests, 'since street girls cannot be situated in their conventional place as daughters, sisters, wives or mothers performing domestic duties in the home', they are branded as 'sexual beings and the stigma of prostitution is attached to them' (120). In my later interview with Meera, she automatically addressed perceptions such as Komal's, as implicit assumptions on the part of the general public that girls who work on the streets are involved in such activities. She explained that very few girls stray away from their families on the streets

¹⁵² M11.

¹⁵³ F34.

because of such perceptions. In her case, however, it was necessary; “My husband doesn’t work. He drinks and does *masti* (nonsense) all day with his friends. Sometimes he leaves for long days. How do I take care of my son? He doesn’t give me money”¹⁵⁴.

Meera was one of a handful of girls who I observed undertaking work on the streets independently or visibly apart from others, and the only one who I was able to interview as part of this study as a result of time constraints and hesitation to confide in me, on the part of the girls. Two girls who I approached to request participation in the research seemed uncomfortable to talk to me and explained that between their work, ragpicking, and taking care of their families, including childcare, cooking and washing, they did not have much time just to talk. Another girl indicated that her husband’s family would not want her to talk to me, although she did not reveal the reason. While the participation of girls in begging and scavenging was not unusual, based on my observations, girls rarely appeared to be by themselves, and often worked alongside other members of their families or siblings – a point that will be examined later in this chapter. As discussed in chapter five on the space of the home, independent street girls tend to challenge gender norms, making them vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion in terms of income generation opportunities, but also to abuse and exploitation, often with few avenues or options for recourse. In this regard, girls on the street experience an aggravated sense of danger, and marginality than boys on the street.

7.4 STREET POLITICS: CHILDREN’S WORK AND SCALES OF ‘REGULATION’

In the previous chapters, I outlined some of the key social links and structures that children contend with in entering and working in the spaces of the home, workshops, and shops. Children who work on the streets, similarly, rely on specific social

¹⁵⁴ F34.

and economic alliances, depending on their work activity, in establishing their working lives. The social links, kinship networks and friendships they produce, whether family-based, through employment, or as a result of their mere presence on the street, are often essential to their inclusion or exclusion in work and their everyday sense of security and protection. Mukhopadhyay (2006) argues that the assumption that children on the street are alone or abandoned is based on a 'Western bourgeois' notion of childhood and family (229). He suggests:

The imputed essentialist assumptions about these children's lives hegemonize these children's identities who left home to earn much-needed extra cash and who form kinship ties in the city itself. These children form 'families' with other street children and older members from their immediate community, persons who do not fit within the Western idea of family (229).

In this section, I examine these 'families' and communities that children form through their work on the street, and the ways in which children construct, engage with, and negotiate them, building up forms of social capital (Bourdieu 2006).

7.4.1 FRIENDSHIP AND PEER SUPPORT NETWORKS ON THE STREET

The sheer ability to pursue work on the streets is based on socio-spatial networks. As the literature on street children points out, a child's mere presence in the public sphere leaves them vulnerable to any number of threats and influences – many of which can be detrimental to a child's well-being (cf. Invernizzi 2003; Gigengack 2006; Evans 2008). Social networks, while sometimes exploitative or pursued through harassment or violence, may become networks of trust and protection, and are a primary way in which children shield themselves from the dangers connected to street life and street work. Ashu¹⁵⁵, a 13-year-old ragpicker and bottle collector at Sealdah Station explained how

¹⁵⁵ M29.

working and sleeping on the station platforms and streets often leaves children exposed to the dangers of arrest, violence and kidnapping.

Ashu: All of us have been beaten. The police come and they beat us. Lady police are the worst. They will keep beating us! The shop keepers also beat us because they think we are thieves. Did you know that some boys have just gone away? They are here and then they are gone. They just take children away... they cut out their body parts [pointing to his abdomen].

Tanya: Cut out body parts?

Ashu turns to a nearby CINI support worker and asks a question in Bengali. She says to me in English, "he is meaning organs".

Tanya: Organs? How do you know?

Ashu: They do... eh! Shankar Da!

Calls out to an older street boy

Ashu: Tell her! They want organs, no?

Shankar nods 'yes'

Ashu: See! We have to watch our backs all the time.

Tanya: Who 'they'?

Ashu: [shrugs] I don't know. Bad men... but they come at night. That's why one of us [gesturing toward his group of friends playing marbles close by] is always awake at night. We keep each other safe.

Other children and the NGO support workers I interviewed were neither able to corroborate nor refute Ashu's claims of kidnapping for illegal organ harvesting. There has, however, been some media coverage on black market organ transplant rings in India. In a recent Aljazeera feature on missing children in India, it was recorded that there were 3,517 incidents of child trafficking in 2011, with an unknown number of children trafficked for the illegal harvesting of organs (Aljazeera, 10 Mar 2013). Based on a report by child protection organisation, Childline India, on the extent of child abduction in India, it is evident that Ashu's concerns and measures to ensure safety are valid. According to this report, Kolkata has the second highest incidence of child abduction from railway stations, after Mumbai. It reveals that children are often forced into slavery,

prostitution, and trafficking for organs, however, no official data on the latter were provided¹⁵⁶.

All the children I interviewed had stories of violence and abuse that they had encountered or witnessed on the streets. Ashu's reference to 'safety' highlights how vulnerability to risk, whether perceived or actual, is minimised through the organisation of his social group. Friendship, in this regard, becomes an important network of trust and protection out on the streets. I found that social networks, including peer/friendship and kinship networks serve as an important means through which children that work on the streets first, find or establish opportunities for income generation; secondly, traverse risk and minimize vulnerability to, often exploitative, power relations and hierarchies on the streets; and thirdly, organise resources and construct networks of support during times of crisis. It is important to point out that such networks also have the potential to be unstable, restrictive and even at times harmful.

Friendship, for the purpose of this section, is defined as 'an interpersonal relationship between two or more people that is voluntarily entered into and may be similarly dissolved' (Bunnell et al 2012, 491). The role of friendship in the daily lives of working children has received relatively little attention in geographical scholarly work (Bunnell et al 2012). Dyson (2010), a notable exception, explains that studies investigating friendship have tended to be more 'concerned with competitive and hierarchical relations than with social bonds that have affirmative dimensions' (482). There is, however, a small and growing body of work in the wider social sciences that seeks to understand the ways in which children and young people are able to achieve a sense of autonomy through peer relations (Blazek 2011, 287). These include the role of friendship or other forms of peer relations in young people's daily strategies for survival,

¹⁵⁶ Childline India. (2005). Report of the NHRC Committee on Missing Children.
<<http://www.childlineindia.org.in/CP-CR-Downloads/Missing%20Child%20report%20NHRC.pdf>>.

for example, in providing protection and ensuring safety among street children (Hecht 1998), in escaping controlling norms linked to their labour (Jensen 2013), and in the organisation of begging and access to resources (Swanson 2010). Echoing Dyson, 'friendship is tightly bound up with pragmatic concerns over livelihood' (Dyson 2010, 495). The following section contributes to this growing literature by arguing that peer groups and friendship networks provide a crucial resource and structure through which children are able to establish their livelihoods in the public space, negotiating and navigating daily risk and vulnerabilities, while finding sources of fun and play to facilitate effective labour.

The interviews I conducted with street-working children largely focused on their experiences of work, the nature of the social relations that are constructed through work and in the space of the street, and their engagement with these social structures, which include family, peers, community, institutions, and economic networks, such as employers, customers, credit providers, and competitors. Through the questions I posed to the children, I sought to understand how they became involved in work on the streets, the ways in which they earn money and the different individuals and groups they contend with. Of itinerant child vendors, I sought to learn about their suppliers, how they purchase the goods they sell, and what the stipulations of the credit arrangements are, among others. Amongst children who scavenge for a living, I asked about who they sold their goods to, how they were paid, how much they were paid, whether they were ever cheated. Many of these questions opened the door for further discussion on other aspects of street life and work, and our interviews often transpired into animated demonstrations by the children, both, of the fun and games they played, but also the abuses and violence they suffered while pursuing their livelihoods in public space.

Every child interviewed revealed that they faced some form of harassment and abuse on the streets, and had been cheated and robbed of their incomes or the wares

they intended to sell for income. All the boys above the age of fourteen, as well as several younger boys, also revealed a pressure to become involved in drug use and alcohol consumption. A recurrent theme of 'power' directed many of our discussions of the streets, and several children highlighted their struggle to occupy space for fear of physical abuse from any number of individuals. They also discussed security issues in protecting their 'collected goods' and/or money from other teenagers, gangs, corrupt police and RPF officers and other adults who viewed them as easy targets to be robbed. Friendships and peer networks were revealed to be a vital avenue for protection and security for many of the children. Ashu, for example, repeatedly referenced his 'friends' during our interviews about his experiences of work on the streets, and like many of the other children, revealed that his success in earning money¹⁵⁷ on the street was tied to knowing who to trust.

Ashu's participation in work on the streets in Kolkata began through a need for income to support his family:

My father was a drunkard and didn't do any work. He hit my mother and me and he was useless. I needed to help my mother and support her. I first went to Garia station and began picking up bottles and other *kagaz* and selling them. I used to go home sometimes to give my mother money. My father found out and hit me and told me to give him all my money. I ran away from there and now I live here. ...I came to Sealdah because it is bigger than Garia station. I can make more money.¹⁵⁸

Ashu now, both, lives and works on the streets – on train platforms, in carparks, and occasionally in drop in centres, such as the one provided by CINI. He vehemently condemns his father, and explains that he will only return home when his father either "runs away" or "dies". As a result of his severed relationship with his home and family,

¹⁵⁷ Ashu earned more than any of the other children I interviewed who are involved in scavenging. I discuss his earnings in detail in the next section on NGOs.

¹⁵⁸ M29.

Ashu has built a network of peers on the streets to replace his family and with whom he engages as he works.

My first real interaction with Ashu was brought about by his effort to warn me of the dangers of the *gullies* behind Sealdah station. I was walking behind the railway station, on a road along a set of abandoned railway tracks now occupied by squatters, when he came running up to me. Although I had seen him numerous times during the previous month that I had spent talking to working children at the station, he never seemed to take much notice of me. On this occasion, he questioned my presence in the space and explained that the streets around the back of the station were unsafe and I was open to harm by other children and men who used the space to do drugs and consume alcohol. He gestured to a group of men of mixed ages, a few metres away. When I asked him why he was not afraid to be in the space, he explained he knew the area and more importantly, had the protection of his friends to keep him safe. For some children, much like Ashu, and Burka, Chotka and Babu from the introduction of this chapter, the streets serve as a space where they find community and belonging. Tapas¹⁵⁹ who I wrote of briefly in chapter four, similarly, sought life and work on the streets as a way of creating social networks and spaces to “play” – ‘benefits’ that he did not have access to in the South Kolkata slum where he grew up with his parents.

Friendship and peer networks, therefore, are more than a means of protection. During times of difficulty or crisis, they serve as a source of income or financial security and support. For instance, Babu¹⁶⁰ revealed that a few months earlier, he had developed a severe case of diarrhoea, a common and very serious illness among poor children in India. Through the support of CINI, he was able to go to hospital. However, his illness and time in the hospital meant that he was unable to earn money for his family, who live near

¹⁵⁹ M33.

¹⁶⁰ M13.

the train station, and who depend on the small income he generates to survive day to day. His close friend, Chotka,¹⁶¹ worked throughout the day to earn extra money to supplement Babu's family's loss of income. During the nights, he also stayed in the public hospital where Babu was being treated. Chotka supported Babu and his family financially through the extra work, for several weeks, while he recovered. This finding is not unusual, and in fact, reaffirms the work of scholars such as Liebel (2003), who deem this action 'mutual assistance in cases of need'. Liebel suggests that children 'resist exploitation and strive to share in decisions about their work' (216). One such way is by assisting each other to compensate for negative consequences.

Hierarchies and exclusion, as well as networks of mutual support, among the children, however, form a component of their lives on the streets, and cannot be ignored. Exclusion, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is a pervasive aspect of life on the streets, and as in the example of Rajib¹⁶² and Ganesh, I often observed children rejecting others from participating in their work and games – particularly in cases where there was a clear cultural or religious difference. In some cases, children would simply be excluded from participating in games, such as playing cricket or carom, while in other cases, boys were made fun of and bullied. As mentioned above, the administrators at CINI Sealdah explained that over the long-term, children without social or familial networks often found themselves exposed to greater insecurities, such as violence and abuse from other children, adults and the police, as well as had more trouble carrying out their work and creating an income. Teasing and bullying from other children, meant that they resisted participating in certain spaces – often the more popular and lucrative spaces – to beg, scavenge, or collect bottles, for fear of being tormented. Ganesh, for example, had abandoned pursuing work altogether and often stayed within the boundaries of the CINI

¹⁶¹ M30.

¹⁶² M32.

drop in centres with the administrators. One of the administrators, Shantanu,¹⁶³ described some of their efforts to assist Ganesh:

When I first rescued Ganesh and took him to the centre, he had spent some days begging on the platforms. [When we take in a child] our first step is to reunite the child with his family. We found Ganesh's mother, but she didn't want him. In situations like this, our next step is to refer them to Childline (an organisation that aids abandoned and lost children). The problem is that depending on the child's age and condition, Childline might take a few days to help, or months. It has taken eight-nine months so far. ...Ganesh now lives here full-time along with [five] other boys, but they do not get along with him. Before, he used to work so he could earn some money. He begged and collected bottles like the other boys. But now he just sits in the centre, or goes onto the rooftop. I have tried to place him in school, but he hasn't received admission.

Tanya: Does he face violence from the other boys?

Shantanu: He is sometimes pushed and teased. One older boy outside the centre hit him and then he didn't leave the centre for many days.

The case of Ganesh reiterates a finding from previous chapters: children, who are isolated and lack mutual support from peers and family networks, are more prone to insecurities in both life and at work. Ganesh abandoned his work as a result of the constant feeling of insecurity and danger that he felt on the streets, as well as the hierarchies that formed among other children workers to repress him.

7.4.2 NETWORKS OF KINSHIP AND FAMILY

Even the most vulnerable among the homeless street people of Calcutta, the 'street children' or urchins, who appear to be 'floating' or vagrant, have strong anchorage to family. [They are] far from being 'abandoned' by their families ...the Calcutta street children are esteemed members of families... (Mukhopadhyay 2006, 229).

A large number of children who are involved in work on the streets perform their tasks alongside their parents, other family members, or community members. From observation, I found this particularly to be the case among girls on the streets – supporting the association between the street and masculine space, earlier in this

¹⁶³ IA10.

chapter. In cases where children work alongside family and community structures¹⁶⁴, social networks and structures of trust are inbuilt and governed by sentiments linked to kinship, although affection and trust is not always the basis of connections. As Mukhopadhyay (2006) writes, 'kinship is not to be conflated with blood-relation, [a] restrictive Eurocentric idea which has impeded understanding' of children in public space (229). The children in this category have to deal less with issues of exclusion than children who work on their own must often contend with. There are, however, other uncertainties and insecure relationships that must be dealt with over the course of their daily work, for the occupation of public space, which underlies work on the streets, is often a primary source of contention, animosity, and even violence. I found evidence of clear spatial divisions between street workers in Kolkata. Street vendors, begging children, and ragpickers often carve out defined spaces within the city, and establish a sense of ownership over them through their occupation of the space. These spaces can vary from a small intersection of a street, or a single platform in the train station, to a section of a neighbourhood. In the words of Lefebvre, "there is a politics of space because space is political" ([Lefebvre 1972] quoted in Elden 2007, 822). A constant presence in the territory is often required in order to combat relentless threats from others seeking to occupy the territory. In the final months of my research in Kolkata, I met a mother and daughter involved in *kagaz kam* who take shifts collecting rubbish every morning from the streets of neighbourhoods along the Park Circus VIP road. They explained that they face a daily struggle against other ragpickers who attempt to drive them out of the neighbourhoods. The mother, Auntieji¹⁶⁵, has lived in Kolkata within the same Muslim-dominated ragpicking settlement along the Park Circus train tracks for her entire life.

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter 6 for definition of community.

¹⁶⁵ During the course of my fieldwork, I began referring to her as Auntieji as a sign of respect for her age and gratitude for her help in my research. N6.

She was born and raised in the same place, married within the same community, and raised her family along the tracks – supporting them through *kagaz kam*. Her husband left her soon after her youngest daughter was born, and while her other children are married and have moved away from the settlement¹⁶⁶, she remains in the same space and within the same occupation. Auntieji's 13-year old daughter, Zara¹⁶⁷, like the rest of her children before, has been involved in the same work on a full-time basis since she was an infant.

Through my observations and interviews I established that the ragpicking trade is built upon an intricate network of: scavengers; rental operators who rent out push carts, wagons, and bicycles to the pickers; 'separators' who are often the scavengers themselves, and who sort the picked goods and separate them according to their material composition; intermediaries between pickers and agents; and agents who purchase the sorted materials and sell them to factories where the materials are recycled or processed into products to be sold again. I found that ragpickers can be placed on a scale from those who pick goods for a few hours a day or a week, collecting their pickings in plastic bags or baskets that they find, to those who pursue the work on a larger and more organised scale, renting carts and bicycles to aid them in increasing efficiency, to large scale pickers who employ a workforce of ragpickers and are involved in all areas of the ragpicking trade, including, picking, separating, processing, and re-selling.

Zara and her mother are middle-scale ragpickers and separators, and collect their pickings into a pushcart that they rent for Rs. 20 (approximately £0.20) per day. Ragpickers who have more money or labour power may hire bicycles with attached carts for Rs. 80 (£0.80) per day. Zara and Auntieji scavenge from sunrise until approximately noon and then again from sunset, into the night. Afternoons in Kolkata are often too hot,

¹⁶⁶ Her children do not help her financially.

¹⁶⁷ F38.

and the roads and sidewalks are too congested to carry out work. Instead, Zara and Auntieji sort their pickings from the previous day and morning – a process that takes place outside the entrance of their makeshift home which is built using reclaimed wood, tarpaulins, and tin sheets. They separate each piece of *kagaz* collected into piles based on material type. For example, aluminium foil is separated from morsels of food that remain stuck to it, and placed in one pile, while plastic bags are placed in another with other “thin” plastic items. Thicker plastic, such as plastic utensils or plastic ties are placed in a different pile, paper into another, cardboard into a fifth, and so on. Each material is worth a different price, and the salvaged material is sold according to weight. Zara explained, for example, that a kilogram of paper fetches Rs. 15 (£0.15), while plastic bottles fetch between Rs. 20-22 (approximately £0.20) per kilogram. Auntieji and Zara sell their goods directly to an agent who purchases from many other ragpickers in the same settlement, and sells to a factory in Tangra. Auntieji explained, however, that other men in the area often harass her and other female scavengers to sell to them instead of the agent.

The first time I met Zara, she was returning to their railway settlement with her day’s pickings piled in a wooden push cart, ready for sorting. Zara had a bruised eye, and upon my inquiry, she simply said she got hurt. Over the course of my research with mother and daughter, I learned about a nearby family whose son constantly attacked Zara for her day’s work. The boy and his family are among those who have sought to push Auntieji and Zara out of the space where they collect garbage, as well as their home-space within the shanty. In recent weeks, the boy also began demanding that Zara marry him. One afternoon, a little over a week after I had previously visited the settlement, I returned to conduct an interview with Zara. Auntieji explained that she was forced to marry Zara to the boy a few days earlier. She justified the union as necessary for her own, as well as her daughter’s, safety. She revealed that she and the boy’s father

had negotiated a compromise with regards to her home and work, and the dowry she paid was relatively low in comparison to what other girls of her daughter's standing would provide. The specific details of the dowry and the distribution of territory and income negotiated between the two families was not revealed to me, however, Auntieji explained that the marriage, although not ideal, was a means of uniting the two families in work and space. Furthermore, the union became a source of protection, instead of vulnerability for her. It was evident that Auntieji was well informed about the danger of domestic violence that the union posed for Zara. She dismissed this, however, as many vulnerable women do – “any man in this community will be the same way. At least now our livelihoods are secure”.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork with children on the streets, it became clear that marriage, and at times sex, is often used as a means of creating solidarity, as well as a source of conflict and power, between individuals and communities. Moreover, it represents a key and accepted way to strengthen social bonds and networks, and expand economic and spatial territory. This practice was most apparent on the streets and public platforms around Sealdah train station and connected *Kholi* Market, where I talked to six children and their families who begged, collected bottles and garbage, and engaged in work as small-scale itinerant vendors. Different families often occupied distinct areas within the train station platforms and nearby parking lot, roads, and market for work and everyday life (e.g. food preparation, eating, sleeping). Through observation and casual conversations, it became apparent that each family was linked to the other through marital or sexual relationships. Soma¹⁶⁸, a facilitator of the Sealdah station drop in centres and the NGO, CINI, explained that her organisation had identified close to thirty families living on the station platforms and in the station parking lot, but

¹⁶⁸ IA5.

there were likely to be more families in total in the market. Chotka and Burka, the twin brothers at the beginning of this chapter, who grew up on the street outside the station, attempted to explain the phenomenon within their own family. They explained that their elder brother, who died from a drug overdose a few years earlier, was married to a girl whose family lived near the entryway to *Kholi* market. The girl re-married their cousin shortly after she was widowed in order to maintain the same family connections. Similarly, their cousin-sister was married to a man who lived with his family in the parking lot of the station, while the man's sister had married into another nearby family. As we walked through the station, the boys pointed to each family and highlighted the connection they had to their family through the marriage of a relative.

Soma, additionally, suggested that this pattern of connections through marriage, as well as the issue of multiple partners and early marriage, is a key challenge that her organization faces in combatting the rise of street and working children in the Sealdah station neighbourhood, as well as the wider city. Moreover, these structures, she asserts, are detrimental to the “proper” development of children. She explains that many of the children in the surrounding area have up to “eight or nine siblings, who need to be supported financially, and who are then married off at a young age”. Moreover, with little support and guidance, the children are prone to becoming involved in “alcohol and drug use”, as well as in “stealing” and other illegal forms income generation.

7.4.3 CIVIL SOCIETY AND INSTITUTIONS OF ‘PROTECTION’

Civil society organisations (CSOs) form a crucial structure with which children *in*¹⁶⁹ the streets engage. Earlier in this chapter, I highlighted the growing relevance of the

¹⁶⁹ I highlight ‘in’ to bring attention back to the distinction between children for whom street is home (children of the streets), and children for whom the streets are the spaces where they conduct a variety of activities, including work (children in the streets). Let it be noted that the children I write of are not necessarily alone or unsupported on the streets, and do not necessarily reside full time on the streets.

category of 'street child' both as a consequence of, and a factor in the rise of non-government organisations (NGOs) and programmes to 'save' children who occupy public space. Children in the streets have become more visible as a result of increasing interest in them by civil society – made up of 'concerned citizens, social service providers, and advocates for the poor' – often operating under organised bodies such as NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs) (de Oliveira 2000, 6). CSOs are useful institutions that children engage with for protection and access to resources and services, such as education. They also, however, are occasionally a restrictive force in children's lives, which, according to my research, some children actively seek to avoid or escape.

The non-government sector has expanded worldwide since the 1980s (Mercer and Green 2013). Rooted in a Western philanthropic tradition that revolves around the notion of a 'deserving poor' (Nieuwenhuys 2001, 543), there has been a noticeable 'institutionalisation of social service' and desire to aid and represent the poor (de Oliveira 2000, 7). The term 'NGO' is generally used to refer to organisations that are 'officially established, run by employed staff..., well-supported (by domestic or... international funding), and that are often relatively large and well-resourced' (Mercer 2002, 6). India's widespread poverty, coupled with a lack of adequate state provisions has been established as an ideal recipient of this NGO doctrine (Ghosh 2009). In fact, a recent Washington Post article claimed¹⁷⁰ that in 2011, 22,000 NGOs in India received more than \$2 billion in overseas funding – over a quarter from the United States (Lakshmi, R. May 19, 2013). While the exact number of NGOs in India, both registered and unregistered, is unknown, Ghosh (2009) places the figure at approximately 1.5 million (234). The rise of NGOs and the quest to 'represent' the poor and marginalised

¹⁷⁰ I have been unable to locate the original data that contributes to this figure, hence my use of the term 'claimed'.

has been well documented in the literature over the past several decades (Nieuwenhuys 2001). Scholars, however, have observed a fundamental change in the approach of NGOs since the 1990s, from the charitable approach, whereby organisations directly offered provisions, to a ‘rights approach’ advocated through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (Nieuwenhuys 2001, 543). Correspondingly, there has been a shift from the act of giving, to ‘empowerment’, which favours engaging beneficiaries in their own development through outreach programs that provide practical skills and training, and establish support groups (Ansell 2005, 205). This shift is a function of the liberal political ideology, which emphasises individual autonomy. As such, ‘participation’ has become a buzzword among NGOs and donor communities who set the agenda. Children, in this regard, are actively encouraged to participate in programmes that offer them the resources to ensure their rights.

ENCOUNTERING INSTITUTIONAL ORGANISATIONS

I was sleeping on the road and a boy woke me up. He told me that I did not have to sleep there and he brought me to the centre. I like coming here sometimes. I can play games and watch TV. (Gautum 12, CINI)¹⁷¹

People tell me all the time that I should not be [in the street]. Why is it bad to be here? ...I am happy. (Asad 10-13, Park Street)¹⁷²

The prevalence of organisations that aim to ‘help’ children on the streets in Kolkata are numerous and varied. Almost every child involved in this research revealed an encounter or experience with an NGO. Like Gautum, the majority of the children found the NGO to be a body of support and a space of refuge, play or interaction. According to my findings, NGOs were largely perceived as: a) allies and agents of protection; b) a resource; c) a service provider, and/or d) as a space of refuge from

¹⁷¹ M9.

¹⁷² M35.

everyday life on the streets. Yet some children, such as Asad¹⁷³, a young boy involved in begging in the city centre, revealed their encounters with organisations as disruptive and a nuisance that seek to control children and define how they *should* live.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are three forms of NGOs that my study uncovered. To reiterate the three models (see an in-depth description in Chapter 6), the first is the full service NGO, which occupies a distinct urban space and offers children shelter, food, access to healthcare, formal and vocational education, counselling programmes, and facilitates extra-curricular activities. They also provide savings schemes for children who prefer to remain in work. CINI, which was a key NGO accessed by children in this research, is an example of a full service organisation. CINI essentially ‘finds’ children in public spaces to assist through outreach programmes, which are facilitated by administrators of the organisation and carried out by child beneficiaries, themselves. The aim of the organisation is to remove them from life and work on the streets and reunite them with family through community-based education and “sensitisation” initiatives for parents. “Sensitisation” was a key term used by the facilitators at the organisation, and refers to educating parents about children’s rights, and educating them on ways to ensure that children’s rights are protected¹⁷⁴. The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) serves as a framework for the organisation. In cases where parents cannot be located, children are orphans, or parents specifically request and are permitted by the organisation, children may be sheltered on a temporary or permanent basis. In these cases, NGO administrators may seek funding or scholarships for the child, in order to place them into long-term formal education, and

¹⁷³ Asad initially told me he was 13 years old, however, during subsequent interviews, he indicated that his actual age was unknown, but perhaps around 10 years old.

¹⁷⁴ Data gathered through interviews with Mandipa Ghosh (IA7), Soma (IA5), Bhaskar (IA2) and Shantanu (IA10).

directly engage them in the work of the NGO through skill building programmes and opportunities to become involved in outreach.

The second NGO model is programme-based and seeks to encourage children's well-being through educational initiatives aimed at imparting vocational knowledge, skills related to health and hygiene, alternatives to work and life on the streets, and by offering counselling services. The organisations recruit children through word of mouth advertising. *Seva Kendra*, discussed at length in chapter six and the present chapter is an example of a programme-based NGO. The third type of NGOs in which children in this study were involved, are 'street-to-school' programmes. Children involved with these NGOs are provided with basic skills to improve their well-being, through daily or weekly workshops. The NGO, Development Research Communication and Services Centre (DRCSC) is an example of a 'street-to-school' organisation.

THE NGO AS A STRUCTURE OF SUPPORT

I like coming to the centre when I am tired or it is hot outside. Sometimes I don't like to be outside and that's when I also come here. I like it here because I do what I want. I can play and talk and write. (*Ashu 13, CINI*)¹⁷⁵

After coming here I want to study again. I do not like being outside anymore... I can study and play and watch TV here. There are other children and it's fun. (*Masood 11, CINI*)¹⁷⁶

I like to play with the other children. (*Tapas 12, CINI*)¹⁷⁷

As portrayed through the quotes by Ashu, Masood and Tapas, the NGOs have become spaces of refuge, protection, interaction, and play. They have essentially become 'allies' to the children and come to represent a means through which to secure daily needs such as food and shelter, but also friendships, kinship, and love.

¹⁷⁵ M29.

¹⁷⁶ M12.

¹⁷⁷ M33.

Over half of the children in my study had in some way benefited from local NGOs. Many discussed their relationships with facilitators as mutually affectionate. The extent to which an NGO may come to represent family to children in the streets was revealed to me through my observation of an incident with Bapan, a 14-year old street working child¹⁷⁸ and his interaction with Soma, the facilitator at CINI Sealdah. According to Soma, Bapan had been abandoned by his mother several years earlier, and became involved in begging and scavenging on the streets. Outreach staff at CINI found Bapan and brought him to the centre. After numerous attempts to reunite him with his mother, it became clear that it would be in his best interests to remain at the centre. Bapan was sponsored by CINI and provided a place in school and shelter at the centre. In recent months, however, Bapan's mother has been in contact with the organisers at the centre. "Reunification", Soma explains, is the primary goal of CINI, and as a result, they encouraged contact. On a Saturday afternoon, I observed the excitement around the news that Bapan's mother would be returning for a visit to re-establish bonds with Bapan, a stage in the reunification process. Bapan waited for his mother to come to the centre, and by late afternoon, it was apparent that she would not be coming. Soma managed to get in touch with his mother, but was informed that she would not be able to visit and had changed her mind regarding taking Bapan back home. Bapan refused to speak to his mother on the phone, and spent the rest of the evening crying, hugging and being comforted by Soma. He repeatedly referred to the NGO as his home, and expressed his affection for Soma as a mother figure in his life, and the other children and facilitators as his family.

While the circumstances under which this observation took place were intense and emotional, I highlight the experience to reveal the nature of the bonds that many

¹⁷⁸ M44.

children on the streets build with civil society organisations. To a large extent, NGOs produce a sense of community and kinship, but also create an environment of 'belonging'. It might be argued that this sense of belonging through institutional support groups is particularly relevant to children, like Bapan, who have been abandoned. My data suggest, however, that there is very little distinction between those with strong familial support networks, and those without. Komal,¹⁷⁹ referred to earlier, and who was a former working child and beneficiary of CINI, for example, revealed the extent to which he considers the NGO as 'family'. He explained that throughout his years as a beneficiary, he continued working in shops and on the streets as a means of creating an income and supporting his family in his home village. The centre, however, served as a space where he was able to 'escape' the everyday realities of street life, which ranged from harsh environmental conditions to physical harm, theft, and illegal activities. As discussed throughout this chapter, the streets function as a space of freedom for some children, and provide opportunities for pursuing work and earning an income. They also, however, are governed through powerful and, often, violent groups, such as gangs and police. Komal and other boys, including Burka and Ashu, revealed the importance of the NGO as a way of temporarily escaping life on the streets, but also as a source of protection and security. They utilise local organisations such as CINI to their benefit, traversing the dangers of everyday life and work on the streets, while maintaining their independence and autonomy in work. In some cases, children rely on the services offered by NGOs, such as savings schemes, in order to actively pursue work. Ashu, for example, revealed several instances of robberies, ranging from a few rupees to approximately eighty rupees – which was worth earnings of several days' collecting and selling plastic bottles. His initial engagement with CINI was at the recommendation of

¹⁷⁹ M11.

another street-working child, who provided Ashu with information about CINI's 'savings programme', which offers children and women in the Sealdah community, the option of storing their earnings with the centre, for security. Soma explains that several children take advantage of the programme in order to protect their savings. "The child will look for his name [in an account book] and write the date and the amount they give or take. If he doesn't know how to write, I have to write it for them. But they can withdraw money when needed". Ashu's own savings amounted to Rs. 127 (£1.27). Over the course of the three months of affiliation, according to Soma, Ashu had accumulated the most savings among all the children.

Echoing Abebe and Kj rholt (2008), street working children are resilient, capable, and knowledgeable, but also vulnerable, 'dependent, adults-in-the-making in need of care and protection' (177). I found that the interdependent relationship with local organisations, essentially allows children to pursue their work with less insecurity and fear.

DISSATISFACTION, DISILLUSIONMENT, AND THE NUISANCE NGO

The primary goal of all the groups working with children *in* the streets in Kolkata, however, is to remove them from public space (Hecht 1998, 154). This view is backed by the assumption that children are antithetical to the streets. My data suggest that this notion is the driving force behind children's encounters with NGOs. In fact, the majority of street-working children in this study revealed stories of being approached and coaxed by NGOs to leave work in public spaces through the argument that the streets are "not meant for children"¹⁸⁰. In this sense, local organisations are occasionally perceived as a nuisance by the children whom they claim to help. Asad's quote from the beginning of

¹⁸⁰ Direct quote from interview with Burka, February 11th, 2011. Sealdah Station. Variations of this quote are iterated in numerous interviews with children on the streets.

this section suggests that local institutions have a tendency to patronise children *in* the streets by assuming that they are unhappy and in need of rescuing. On the contrary, Asad revealed the street as a “great place to play”¹⁸¹. The streets, for Asad, are not merely a space in which he can create an income, but a space where he is a decision-maker and where he has agency. Asad came to live and work on the street – in particular, a pavement corner at the intersection of Park Street and Mirza Ghalib Street – approximately two years earlier, when his mother sent him to the city with his aunt and her family to earn money to remit back to their village. Recently, his younger brother and sister joined him in Kolkata, and the three, together, now earn money through begging and selling small toys, balloons, and gum on the streets¹⁸².

People say ‘come with me and I will take you somewhere safe’ or ‘come with me and you can go to school’. Sometimes when I ask people for money they say ‘You’re young and strong. Why should I give you money? Come work in my home’... I run away! These people give me lots of trouble.¹⁸³

Several children affiliated with local institutions also expressed an explicit dissatisfaction with local child welfare organisations. During one of my many walks through the streets behind Sealdah station with 15-year old Burka, he revealed his disappointment with CINI, the NGO that had supported and sheltered him and his twin brother since they were ten years old.

I don’t know if I want to stay [at the centre] anymore. I sometimes think I should just go back to the platforms. I will have to leave school, but in two years I will anyway be forced to leave school. I just don’t like it anymore. I feel uncomfortable...like I don’t have a choice in my life. And what is the use anymore? I have my board exams next year and nobody helps me to study. I don’t see any reason to stay here. ...I will become a labourer or whatever my father tells me to be.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ M35.

¹⁸² It is necessary to point out that, despite Asad’s insistence on freedom, I learned that he is rarely on the streets by himself, and is often monitored in work and play by his aunt. Refer to chapter 4 which explores children’s work in the streets, divisions of space, and surveillance.

¹⁸³ M35.

¹⁸⁴ M31.

Burka's exasperation and his reflection over possible emancipation from the NGO was surprising, as he was one of the few children to whom CINI in Sealdah provided full support. The branch of the NGO serves as a temporary drop in centre and night shelter for between twelve to twenty children at a given time. Only five children, however, are permanently sheltered, fed, clothed and schooled by the NGO, including Burka, Chotka¹⁸⁵ and Babu¹⁸⁶. Soma¹⁸⁷, the day-time facilitator at the centre explained that the CINI head office had cut back resources to the Sealdah division, and was scaling back its programmes with the intention of closing the centres within the coming five years. As a result, they were no longer housing new children for the long term, and instead, looking for suitable placements for those with the desire to become educated and leave street life. She repeated several times during our meetings that she received multiple requests each day by families of the children who temporarily engage with the NGO, for full support like Burka receives. Burka's revelation touches on two important points: first, the value of the 'support' provided by the NGO; second, the issue of the future, particularly the process of 'aging out' of NGO care.

The issue of 'ageing out' or 'outgrowing' institutional structures of care is only just starting to receive attention in scholarly research (cf. Anghel 2011). It is a concern, however, that emerged repeatedly throughout this research, particularly in interviews with the children of CINI. I learned that full-service NGOs such as CINI often have an age limit for the children they help. In the case of CINI Sealdah, children generally begin the transition from full care to basic outreach programmes by the age of 16 years old, and lose all support by 18 years old. For Burka, this is particularly detrimental to his education, which would no longer be sponsored by CINI. As a result of Burka's late entry

¹⁸⁵ M30.

¹⁸⁶ M13.

¹⁸⁷ IA5.

into the school system, he will still be in school at the time that he is forced to leave CINI, essentially leaving him the options either to quit school altogether or find an alternative sponsor. Priska¹⁸⁸, the head of the CINI Sealdah programme, revealed that the NGO no longer had the resources or means to search for another sponsor. Moreover, since the Sealdah division was scaling back its provisions and involvement in the community to prepare for full closure, outreach programmes for the five boys presently residing at the centre, would likely to be unavailable when they make the transition out of care. Burka's point about the relevance of his education in this context is a valid concern. The NGO is persistent about the importance of education, and has essentially indoctrinated its child beneficiaries and their parents to rely on education as a means to a better future. Without their support beyond the age of 18 and until he passes his Class 12 board exams, Burka believes that his education is of little use to him. He reveals that he has abandoned previous aspirations to attend college and receive a degree, and now speaks of becoming involved in work to aid his father as a rag picker and day labourer.

Beyond education and the concern of "ageing out" or receiving relevant support from NGOs, in certain contexts, the NGO structure may work against child workers, instead of in favour of them. Returning to the case of Rajib¹⁸⁹, a young boy from Bangladesh who worked on the rails throughout India and Kolkata, his "rescue" (in the words of the organisation) by Shantanu and Bhaskar, CINI administrators, resulted, not in providing greater protections for Rajib, who left home because he was tormented by his brothers, but rather may have placed him in greater danger and insecurity. According to the NGO, in order to maintain their presence on the streets and near the railway station, they are forced to work alongside the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Kolkata Police – which, as the next section highlights, often abuse street working

¹⁸⁸ IA4.

¹⁸⁹ M32.

children. When a child is “rescued” by the organisation, in addition to reporting to Childline, they must also notify the RPF. Since Rajib was from Bangladesh the RPF response was to take him into their custody; early one morning, the RPF officers “took him away”, according to Tapas, a young boy who was present at the drop in centre at the time. I had been scheduled to interview Rajib for a third time, that afternoon, however, when I entered the centre, Tapas¹⁹⁰ excitedly exclaimed that Rajib was “taken away”. “They came very early in the morning and they took him away. He was crying and crying, but they took him away!” Administrator, Bhaskar¹⁹¹, attempted to explain further:

Bhaskar: He was here illegally...he’s not Indian, so they had to take him into custody.

Tanya: Where will he be taken?

Bhaskar: He will go to a transit camp for some time and then they will locate his family and send him back to Bangladesh.

Tanya: How do you know that he’ll be sent back? Did they tell you?

Bhaskar: They say he will be, but we don’t know when. I’m still following up with them on children who have been in the transit camps for more than a year.

Tanya: Why was it necessary to report him? He told me how badly he was treated at home.

Bhaskar: This is the way we are able to work in Sealdah. These two drop in centres have been given to us on rent and will be taken away if we don’t work with the Railway authorities. We have to be honest about the children who we rescue.

Rajib’s experience with the RPF and in the transit camp is unknown, and the degree to which Rajib may have suffered greater insecurities, can only be alleged. Yet, his example shows that regardless of the intentions of child protection and rights organisations, their actions are dictated by policies that do not always serve the interests of the children. Echoing research by scholars such as Niewenhuys (2001), in the promotion for child rights and protections by NGOs, children may become ‘increasingly exposed to situations

¹⁹⁰ M33.

¹⁹¹ IA2.

that jeopardise the very protection they were supposed to enhance' (551). In the next section, I discuss a final structure of governance that children working on the streets contend with: police and state sanctioned institutions.

7.4.4 POLICE AND INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

*Ashu*¹⁹²: The first time I got in trouble with the police was when I touched a girl's purse by mistake. I was asking for money and doing this [places his hand in front of his mouth, gesturing for alms] and I touched the girl's purse...by mistake. She started screaming. I got scared and tried to run away but some men got me and started beating me. The police came and beat me more. They told me that they will take me to the station and I cried. After they beat me more they let me go. The second time the police saw me sleeping on the road and they started beating me. They took me to jail and beat me.

Tanya: How long were you in jail?

Ashu: [shrugs] two days.

Tanya: The third time?

Ashu: I was in the ladies' compartment in the train from Bidhannagar. It is this train that comes here... [gestures to the railway tracks behind us]. I was in the ladies' compartment sweeping the train with my hand...some people feel bad and give money. A lady police officer saw me and beat me. Another time I was on Uttaranga express [a long haul train]. The police said I stole a book. I did not steal a book. But a passenger told them that did.

The brutality that Ashu experienced at the hands of the police in Kolkata is not unusual, In fact, this research found that the Kolkata police and the state sanctioned RPF are among the greatest threats to the safety and well-being of children working and living on the streets and platforms, as I noted at the start of this chapter. I have already highlighted the experience of 15-year old boys, Burka, Chotka and Babu, who were physically assaulted for collecting bottles from the platforms by the RPF. Similarly, of the sixteen children who perform street-based work that were interviewed, fourteen revealed some level of abuse at the hands of members of the Kolkata police and RPF (where children occupied railway property).

¹⁹² M29.

Gautum, a 12-year old boy who made the transition from working in a shop, to scavenging for saleable goods on the streets, revealed that his most severe beating was by a female police officer who found him resting against a pillar outside the airport, where he used to collect bottles.

She started hitting me with her stick...telling me to 'runaway from here'. I wanted to take my bottles with me, but she didn't let me. The female police are the worst. They don't care if they kill you!¹⁹³

Gautum reveals that despite the gathering crowd to observe, nobody attempted to help him or stop the woman from attacking him. It was not always clear to the children why they are targeted by the police; however, some reveal that the police view them as thieves and drug users. The police, however, often take the money that the children earn and confiscate the goods that they wish to sell. 10 year-old Asad and his siblings, who work alongside their extended family, selling gum and other small toys along Park Street, are tormented by police daily. Asad explains:

They are always watching us. When they see someone give me money...even just two rupees, they will force it from us. They steal these packets of gum from me and then I get in trouble because I can't pay uncle [the stall owner who sells him gum on credit].¹⁹⁴

Police assert their authority through physical violence and threats of jail time, often demanding money and other goods as "compensation for allowing them to remain on the streets"¹⁹⁵, according to CINI coordinator Shantanu. This would suggest, therefore, that police abuse and harassment is also a means of exerting power and dominance over public space.

Police corruption and violence in India is well documented by the media, however, has received relatively little attention in scholarly work – particularly pertaining to children. Studies out of Brazil, such as Hecht's (1998) work on Brazilian

¹⁹³ M9.

¹⁹⁴ M35.

¹⁹⁵ IA10.

street children, documents the extent to which police brutality affects children in the streets, even resulting in murder (121). While my research did not reveal abuse to that extent, the children in this study often complained about the “dangerous police” and their strategies to avoid police altercations, including running away and hiding in small lanes, or finding protection behind people in a crowded place. It was apparent that children who work on the streets are extremely distrustful of police and other formal institutional authorities. Rather than serving as a source of protection, police perpetrate violence against children, producing an air of mistrust and fear towards them.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Children, who work on the streets in Kolkata, continue to perform their work until adulthood, often shifting into the realm of construction as labour or loaders from ragpicking or begging. The street, however, represents one of the most significant spaces in which children engage in work, both waged and unwaged, in semi-legal and sometimes illegal activities. In this chapter, I have shown how the subcultures of the street as deeply hierarchical and gendered develop in Kolkata, as well as examined the ways in which children experience, navigate and negotiate their working lives in public space through social structures of friendship, family and kinship, and institutions of both support and exploitation.

Children in public space occupy a unique place in the city, for they are, all at once, free to move and pursue their own interests, yet, highly influenced by spatially-based structures of power and authority. They are trapped in and constructed through a contradiction between freedoms from the traditional patriarchal and paternalistic spaces of work explored in previous chapters, and the precarious and insecure conditions of street work discussed here. Yet, it is evident that street working children are not passive victims of their circumstances, but are social and economic actors in their

own right. Work in shops and factories, explored in the previous chapter, are often restrictive, and I found that almost all of the boys who faced insecurities in the shop environment, eventually made the transition to scavenging for saleable material on the streets. I argue that they actively pursue work in public spaces by generating close social networks, effectively producing a type of social capital, which they access for support during times of hardship or in moments of vulnerability. In the next chapter, I conclude this study with a comparison and review of the forms of regulation in the three spaces explored in this research.

CONCLUSIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this study I explored the social and power relations that young people encounter and navigate through work and space, through a case study on children who participate in waged and unwaged work in the informal economy in Kolkata, India. Children's work is primarily located outside the boundaries of state regulation in subsistence activities such as begging, hidden domestic work, manufacturing and industrial work, among others. Yet, children's participation and experiences with work in the informal economy has been significantly missing from the study of childhood and work. In particular, the socially-based forms of regulation that define the informal economy, as evidenced in previous scholarly research (cf. Harriss-White 2003a), have been largely overlooked as they relate to working children. The primary objective guiding my research, therefore, has been to uncover the way children's lives are constructed through the intersections of work and space, and to explore the social processes and relations of power that working children engage with in order to build and sustain their livelihoods. I have argued that children do not participate in work in isolation, but within specific social and spatial settings – often building, relying on, or resisting social links.

In this concluding chapter, I reflect on and discuss the findings of my case study by addressing each of the research questions guiding this study. I outline the contributions that my findings have made to the field of human geography and on research on young people in the global South. I follow this with an overview of the policy implications of this research, and suggest some key areas for future research on working children.

8.2 FINDINGS: ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My primary research objective in this study was guided by four interrelated questions around childhood, work, space, and regulation. The first question was as follows: what are the patterns of work and employment in which children in Kolkata are involved? Through an analysis of the reasons for children's participation in work, including the agents who facilitate their entry into employment, types of work, degree of dependence or independence, and their perceptions of work, I produced a typology to delineate the patterns underlying work and employment among children.

The typology I produced was based on earlier work by Vàsconez and Proaño (2002), which I adapted and extended to the case of Kolkata. It represents children's work in Kolkata in four categories that the children in this study move between in both their approach to work, as well as their experiences of work over time. The four categories are a) work as a means of creating skills and training; b) work as a social activity; c) work that replaces school; and d) the 'adultization' of work. The typology has served to exhibit the broader social and structural environment in which children engage in work. From the typology, it is evident that children's participation in work, including the reasons for their involvement, and their experiences of work, are not homogenous, but rather, children engage in waged and unwaged work for multiple reasons and in a range of socio-spatial settings. What emerged, more specifically, from my assessment of the children's patterns of work in Kolkata is that children's experiences are very often characterised by family and community arrangements and obligations, and are influenced by dynamics of gender, space, and power.

It should be pointed out that in producing a typology of children's work, I was concerned that I would minimize the subjective nature of children's work, effectively, boxing children into one category or the other. The typology, however, is driven by the desire to extract patterns in the way children approach and experience their work, and I

do not contend that all children fit into one category. Rather, my findings indicate that children traverse the boundaries between each category, moving back and forth in line with their personal circumstances. This typology is a useful addition to the theoretical perspectives on working children (Liebel 2004; Aitken et al. 2006), for it is not only pertinent to children who labour in Kolkata, but can be applied to other Indian cities and indeed to other cities in the global South, although case studies are needed to explore the extent of variations and ways in which the dynamics of class, power, caste and gender interact in different locations.

The second question guiding this research was 'how do working children find employment in informal sector work'? I found that children's opportunities for work are often produced through familial and community networks, and their working identities are constructed around particular socially regulated structures. While this finding is most directly observable among child workers who engage in waged and unwaged work in the private and semi-private spheres of the home, shop and factories, it was evident that children involved in street work such as begging and ragpicking were also guided, or coerced in some cases, into their occupations through family and peer networks. As a result, I found that children do not always arbitrarily or freely choose their occupations. Their entry into work, rather, is characterised by pre-scripted community-based norms and obligations. There is a high level of community social control that determines how children in particular communities and from specific ethnic groups or religions become involved in work. Furthermore, I have shown the central importance of gender, caste, religion and ethnicity in organising children's involvement work in India, which will be discussed in relation to the next research question.

The third question guiding this study is 'how do social structures of identity influence how and where children work'? This question builds on previous research by scholars such as Harriss-White (2003b), Roy (2003) and de Neve (2005), who have

contributed to the academic literature about the social organisation of work within informal economies in India. In this study, I found that children's work is both constructed around and produces important structures of identity. In addition to familial and community social control that dictates entry into the workforce and the occupations in which children participate, this research shows how children must contend with particularistic hiring practices based on gender, age, ethnic background, caste, and religion. These dimensions of difference serve as important relations of power that are utilised in the production of child workers, particularly in the more intimate workspaces of the home, factory and shop. The Hindi concept, *jaan paichaan*, which translates to 'someone who is familiar', was raised throughout this thesis, as a way of highlighting the importance of familiarity in the involvement and employment of children in particular forms of work in the informal economy. *Jaan paichaan* influences, both, where and how children are placed into the economic sector by their families, as well as employers' preferences in hiring children who come from families or communities that are 'familiar' through ties of caste, religion, ethnicity, or location. This process often translates to an increased sense of trust and kinship. As this study has shown, such practices have strong implications for how informal workers, particularly children, access, participate in and negotiate their working lives. Informal connections are important, not only in Indian cities like Kolkata, but also in other places where identity and familiarity define employment. The particular connections between class, gender and age, as well as religion, take a specific form over time and space.

The final question guiding this study is 'how do children experience work based on the locations in which the work takes place'? A significant finding in this study was that space, place and location – all key geographical concepts - matter. As I pointed out earlier, children's participation in informal sector work is not homogenous, but rather diverse, and the social structures of support, relations of power, and social links that

they interact with this diversity. I chose to explore children's work through the lens of different spaces on a continuum from the private to the most public, because, as this research illustrates, each space reflects a different set of relationships and practices that affect how children's work is organised and carried out, as well as affects the social relations in the different locations. It was not enough simply to generalise about the way in which children work and the social structures that they are part of in their everyday working lives, but rather, the specificities, particularities and nuances of the spaces in which that work is carried out play a substantial role in how children experience work. Space, as scholars such as Lefebvre (1991) and Massey (2005) have argued, is material, lived, and representational. Social relations are carried out in space but also transform space. Space absorbs, reflects and is a reflection of all the processes that occur within it – and the spaces of the home, factory, shop and street in Kolkata, although fixed in time and place, are immersed in and constructed through different symbolic and material meanings through the myriad of everyday relations that occur within them.

Through the examination of three distinct spaces of work in Kolkata, it is clear that there are numerous and overlapping social and power relations that influence the way children establish their working lives, participate in work, and experience daily life. In this study, I explored the significance of the spaces in which children work. Each space is distinct and reflects particular experiences, actors, obstacles, and concerns that are inherently spatial. These aspects of children's work frame the larger research question addressed through my research around governance, and the ways in which children's lives are shaped by structures of governance and relations of power, for the socially derived networks that children contend with daily, shape and are shaped by the spaces in which they work. Different spaces of work reflect and affect different types of relations and experiences of work for children. One of the absences of the small amount of

research that there is on children's informal employment is a consideration of these connections between society and space.

The primary objective of this study, to reiterate, was to uncover the way children's lives are constructed through work and space, and to explore the social processes and relations of power that working children engage with in order to build and sustain their livelihoods. I have shown that children do not carry out their work in isolation or in an unregulated environment, but rather within socio-spatial settings that are regulated through elaborate systems of discipline and power exercised through familial and community arrangements, strategic employment, social networks, and institutional structures – all set within and influenced by space. What I have not explored are socio-spatial relations at the broader scale – the city as a whole and the city region within India, with the exception of some reflection on the ways in which legislation and patterns of control affect the lives of children. At the scale of the city, for example, city authorities may act to remove children from the streets and other public and semi-public spaces or to regulate and eradicate some of the worst abuses of child labour, although, as I have shown a great deal of this work takes place in private or semi-private spaces where relatives are employers and so making legislative controls difficult to implement, in ways that perhaps parallel traditional attitudes to 'domestic' violence in many societies (Jha 2008).

8.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GEOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

As a contribution to work on the geographies of childhood, this research broadens current understandings of working children. What has become apparent in this study is that childhood and work cannot be separated from the social, the spatial and the scalar. Children are an integral and increasingly significant part of studies in geography, and are

now the subjects of a specialist journal, *Children's Geographies*, established in 2003. This thesis is a new contribution to the representation of children in the global South in the discipline. As I argued in the introduction, here I have departed from the common Western conceptualisation of childhood as a protected phase of play, education and family, in the lifecycle (cf. Aries 1976; Hendrick 1997; Cunningham 1995; Jenks 1996; and Diduck 1999), and rather, contribute to the growing body of research by scholars such as Dyson (2010), Punch (2003); Balagoplanan (2011); Beazley (2002) and Abebe and Kjørholt (2009), among others, that recognises the different ways in which children experience the world through waged and unwaged work in relation to their location, culture and identity, as well as the extent to which they are able to negotiate and contest their marginalisation through spatial, economic and social constructions and negotiations. This approach to the study of childhood and work is particularly timely on a global scale, as it is becoming increasingly clear that in cities in both the global North and South, growing numbers of children and young people are involved in the cash economy and the social relations of employment, sometimes on a temporary and voluntary basis as school children or students to support their studies (Anderson 2000; Liebel 2004). However, incidences of forced labour involving children are also increasing, including involvement in illicit trades such as street drug dealing and the sex trade (Heissler 2013; Brown et al. 2010).

I suggest here that I have made several key contributions to geographic literature. First, working children in Kolkata provide an important example of how the social processes and relations of power that influence children's everyday experiences of work are spatially contingent. Research in recent years around working children has sought to examine children within their specific employment settings, such as domestic workers (Jensen 2013; Harden 2000) and street working children (Beazley 2000; Beazley 2003; Swanson 2005; Hecht 1998). However, there has been a limited

interrogation of the nature of the spaces in which they work, including the way the social and physical structures of the spaces influence children's daily experiences with work, as well as the way children interact with space to carry out their work (Jennings et al. 2006). It is evident from my findings that there exists a crucial spatial component to the way children construct, negotiate and experience work. In this regard, this research has sought to deconstruct the wider category of 'child worker' by exposing the unique relations, both social and power, within their spaces of work. Moreover, this study provides a unique comparative view of children's work according to space, by examining children's individual experiences of work within their specific spatial settings. Focusing on work within the home, the factory and shop, and out on the streets, I have uncovered the varying patterns of work, relations of power, and intersections of identity at play in different spaces of children's work. This study, therefore, extends research on child workers to interrogate the particular nature of work in different spaces. It also highlights the need for research to approach childhood and work in the global South from a spatial perspective, for this study has shown that space is not absolute, but relational (Massey 1998), and the social implications of children's work are radically different in various spaces.

A second key contribution that I hope that I have made to the geographical literature is about the social construction of identity, its multiple nature and its production through the intersection of social processes at different scales and through different social institutions including the formal institutions of the state and informal cultural practices. While gender in relation to children's working lives has been considered to some extent in the literature (cf. Dyson 2010; Beazley 2002), other social dimensions of identity, particularly religion, ethnicity, and caste, as well as the way they intersect, have been largely absent from the scholarship on childhood as a whole, even though the concept of intersectionality is a key one in feminist geographical work

(Valentine 2007; McDowell 2008; and Crenshaw 1991). Moreover, the way they serve in regulating children's spaces of work has seldom been explored. As I have already noted through the research reported here, I engaged with this gap to show how children's spaces of work are embedded in relations of gender, religion, caste hierarchies, inequalities, and power relationships that fundamentally influence their everyday experiences of work. This study uncovered the important way in which these social institutions of identity interact to shape the multiple dimensions of children's work experiences. This process, known as intersectionality forms an important discourse within scholarship, and denotes the various ways in which dimensions of identity interact to influence a subjects' 'lived experiences' (Crenshaw 1989 in Nash 2008, 2). Studies that utilise the concept of intersectionality, however, have largely neglected to examine the way childhood is influenced by social dimensions of identity, instead focusing in the main of the ways in which class, gender and ethnicity intersect in studies of the identities of adult women. My research has shown that gender, caste, ethnicity and religion are key characteristics that also influence the ways in which and the spaces within which children participate in work in Kolkata. Specifically, they affect how work is conducted, by whom, and in what spatial contexts. Cultural norms around gender interact with religion and ethnicity, as well as in Indian cities, with caste, for example, to dictate the type of work with which children can engage, as well as the spaces (public versus private) in which they can work. This research, thus, contributes significantly to understanding the intersections between gender, religion, ethnicity and caste, and how they play out among child workers in Kolkata, as well as in different spaces of work. This addresses a significant gap in the geographical literature, for there has been limited engagement with social institutions of identity at the scale of the child, and how they play out in different spaces of work.

A final, and perhaps most significant, contribution that this study has made to the literature is around the informal economy and regulation. As I discussed in Chapter two, scholarly work on the informal economy and social regulation has largely overlooked the involvement and contributions of children, despite the inevitable nature of children's work as informal (beyond the boundaries of state regulation). Research (Harriss-White 2003a; Harriss-White and Gooptu 2009; Meagher 1995; Roy 2003) has tended to focus on the activities and social networks of adults who engage in work within the informal sector, with little reference to the social institution of age. Moreover, there have not been detailed examinations of the way children's participation in informal work and informal work-spaces are socially regulated, or the way children navigate, negotiate, evade but also depend on forms of regulation. This study, thus, has largely drawn on the work of Harriss-White (2003a; 2003b; 2010) and Roy (2003) in theorising the nature of work within the informal economy, with the aim of extending their discussions to take into account the role of young people in the informal economy. As outlined in chapter two, empirical research by scholars examining children who work, such as in subsistence activities like begging (Swanson 2010), hidden domestic work (Jensen 2013), contributing to familial households (Nieuwenhuys 1994; Katz 2003), and in hazardous industrial work (Burra 1995), among others, principally deal with the presence of children in the realm of work with a view to uncovering the nature of children's work, why they work, and the ways in which they participate in work or understand their working identities. In my study, I have engaged with the informal economy, not simply as a source of employment and livelihood for children, but also as a framework under which to uncover the social processes and relations of power that influence the everyday lives of young workers. This research, thus, builds on research by Harriss-White (2010) and Roy (2003) to incorporate child workers; I have shown how informal systems of power and social institutions emerge to organise and regulate, as well as discipline child

workers. Moreover, I have extended the work of Meagher (2005), who focuses on the role of social networks in informal economies, by showing how children's work lies outside the realm of formal regulation, and is often subject to informal forms of regulation constructed around family, community, and identity. Here I believe that I have made a significant contribution to the geographies of childhood and the study of the informal economy, as well as the nature of regulation within the informal economy.

Within the more general literature on young people, rather than that looking specifically at participation in waged work, there remains an important gap to be filled - the place of South Asian childhoods. Childhood has principally been addressed in a Western context by scholars (Prout and James 1997; Aitken 2001a; Ruddick 2003; Hollos 2002; Glauser 1997); and to a lesser extent in Latin America (De Oliveira 2000; Hecht 1998; Aitken et al. 2006 Invernizzi 2003) and Africa (Abebe 2007, 2008; Evans 2006; Katz 2004). To date, however, relatively few scholars, especially geographers, however, have sought to explore childhood and the place of children in India. More specifically, there has been limited empirical research conducted within the context of urban India. Balagopalan (2011), for example, has theorised the presence of a South Asian childhood, but neglects adequately to support her findings with empirical data. The handful of empirical studies that do exist (for example Dyson 2008, 2010; Nieuwenhuys 1998), primarily examine young people in the rural context. In the past few years, scholars (Haider 2008; Heissler 2013 and Jensen 2013) have begun looking at work in urban South Asia, particularly Bangladesh; however, the case of urban India remains missing from the literature. This study, therefore, provides a particular contribution to the work on childhood in urban India, and I hope it will provide a further impetus to wider scholarly engagement with children in India and South Asia by scholars in the global South as well as scholars based in Western universities.

8.4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS: INFORMAL ECONOMY, WORKING CHILDHOODS, AND REGULATING CHILDREN'S SPACES OF WORK

Current international policy on working children falls under two conventions adopted by the International Labour Organisation. The first, convention 182 explicitly focuses on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour (ILO 1999). The second, convention 138, exercises a minimum age for admission to different forms of employment and work. Despite being ratified by most countries in the world, including India, as this study has shown, the distinction between harmful and light work, and the imposition of age restrictions on children's work as a whole, is largely unregulated, and has been relatively ineffective in both deterring children from participating in different forms of work, as well as discouraging the use of children's labour and regulating and penalising parents and employers of children from engaging them in work. My intention in this research was not directly to assess the standards of labour of the children under study, but rather, to uncover children's socio-spatial links, in an effort to understand the different actors that children engage with in pursuing their work. I wanted also to assess the motivations for work, its costs and benefits and the place it plays in contributing to an adequate (or not) living standard for children and their families. In doing this, three key policy implications emerge from this study.

First, the primary findings of this research demonstrate that children do not participate in work independently, but instead, under the guidance and direction, sometimes beneficial at other times exploitative, of familial and community relationships, and relying on social networks made up of non-state actors. I suggest that policy must engage with these actors to provide appropriate forms and structures of support, including spaces of protection for working children. Banning child labour altogether does not necessarily increase children's life chances or sense of security, but

rather, drives them further underground into hidden forms of work (Liebel 2004). In the particular context of India, my empirical findings show how children and their social networks, along with employers, circumvent labour legislation to continue pursuing work. Difficult practical and moral questions are raised by calls to ban child labour completely.

Secondly, instead of penalising children for their participation in work, bringing children into the conversation on their rights will provide them with a greater sense of security, as well as highlight the negative and abusive processes and systems at play in their working lives, for example, the police and RPF. Moreover, by including them in policy discussions about their rights, it may be possible to differentiate between work that is exploitative, and work that increases the agency of children, such as by postponing an unwanted marriage, like in the case of the young domestic worker, Vinita, or producing informal safety protections, such as friendship, as defined by Burka, Chotka, Babu, and Ashu who worked in the ragpicking industry on the streets. The empirical findings of this study, supported by theoretical arguments (Aitken 2001a; James and Prout 1997), have shown the extent to which children have the capacity for decision-making and are able to exercise agency in their work. Nevertheless, it is clear that questions of the differentials of power and status between children and other social actors, including state and national legislators, the police and employers raise significant issues about the ability to construct this form of participatory policy that I have outlined.

A third finding of this study illustrates the significance of the nature of children's work as spatially diverse. Children who work in the private realm are subject to different relationships, work regimes, payment structures and forms of exploitation than those who work in factory or shop space, and out on the street. Not all children's work is equivalent, and furthermore, the two policy categories of child labour and children's work, is too stark to encompass the varying socio-spatial relationships that children

contend with. As a result, this study highlights the need to produce norms and standards of work that engage with the spatiality of children's work, as well as create more effective methods of state regulation, rather than outright elimination or eradication of children's work. This can only be achieved through advocacy based on research, such as this one, as well as work by the handful of scholars, including Dyson (2008), Beazley (2002; 2003), and Invernizzi (2003), who all show how working children are able to negotiate their labour.

8.5 WAYS OF EXTENDING THE RESEARCH AREA AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH INTO WORKING CHILDHOODS

This study has offered a detailed analysis on working children through four distinct spaces in which children in Kolkata labour. Initially when I designed my research approach, I had intended to focus in more detail on the structures of governance of children's work. It was not until I began my detailed field research that the significance of the variations in the spaces in which children laboured in Kolkata became so important – and so interesting. I had assumed that children's work was in the main carried out in the public spaces of the street and so designed an approach to focus my own work there. However, as I talked to child labourers it became increasingly clear that semi-public and private space were also the location of child labour and I expanded my interview strategy to include children in these different spaces. Not surprisingly, however, it proved more difficult to talk to children who worked in family homes and family businesses. As a consequence, the spaces of the street remained the main focus of my research. Interesting work remains to be done looking at the lives of children who work 'inside' or to complement the lives of those who 'go out to work'.

A second and related area where further work in the future is needed is a more detailed study of the lives of young female children. It is often hard to access the private

lives of girls in India. While I have discussed their relative absence from my own research as a product of the gendered norms and relations that construct children's participation in work in general and in particular spaces in Kolkata, it is still important to think through different ways of including more girls and young women and in placing young female voices at the heart of future research. Here the questions about positionality, and insider versus outsider status that I raised in my methodological discussion in chapter three become important.

There are a number of additional areas where future research would be valuable. These include both comparative and longitudinal studies to follow the lives of working children in large Indian cities such as Kolkata, Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai, to assess the effects of time and space on children's lives. Engaging in research with children over the course of a longer period of time will reveal the long-term implications of their relationships in work and space. Moreover, it will be useful to examine the way these relationships change as children move into the realm of adulthood. If some form of payment either in cash or kind, including training, could be part of such programmes then research may also have a positive impact on the material conditions under which child labourers live.

Through the findings of this study, I have also highlighted the significant gaps in 'protection' that working children face as a result of inefficient non-government programmes. Processes such as 'ageing out' with regards to NGOs, for example, see child beneficiaries facing a significant gap in their protection, education and general life chances, particularly in cases where the children have been supported by the organisations for much of their lives (Anghel 2011). Assessing the effectiveness of institutions in providing children with long-term support represents a notable area for future study. Moreover, an in-depth study of the precise process of 'ageing out' of

institutional care will provide a greater understanding of the way NGOs operate, as well as the inefficiencies in their care.

A similar area for future study is the nature of the relationship between street working children and formal institutions such as the police. In my study, I found that the police serve as one of the most violent and abusive institutional groups that children must engage with in pursuing their work on the streets. An examination of the specific role of the police in the lives of working children in India, including their experiences of support and/or abuse, and the way children in public space negotiate their position of authority would be a useful extension of this study, although it raises difficult questions of access to individuals and sources as well as the implementation of findings and policy suggestions. At present, scholarly work on children's experiences of violence at the hands of the police has been explored in only a small number of cities and regions of the world, such as Brazil (Hecht 1998). In the South Asian context, where police corruption is a significant issue, such a study would be a significant contribution to the scholarly literature and to policy debates.

A final area that warrants attention is the continued study of childhood and work through the lens of its intersection with space. As I have insisted here, there is a significant need to continue conducting research on children within the specific spatial settings in which they participate. Moreover, children's spaces of work and the particular relations within those spaces cannot be taken for granted. Space forms an important variable in common constructions of childhood, with appropriate and inappropriate spaces delineated based on age. Locations, moreover, provide, construct and produce the places in which children engage with others, access resources, and perform their everyday activities. A geographical lens is a key component in future inter- and cross-disciplinary research in childhood.

APPENDIX 1

A.1 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS: CHILDREN IN THE HOME

<i>FOOTNOTE CODE</i>	NAME	M/ F	AGE ¹⁹⁶	TASKS	LOCATION	METHODOLOGY	INTERVIEW DATE(S)
<i>F1</i>	Ria	F	11*	Childcare, cooking, cleaning, miscellaneous	Rajarhat	Semi-structured Interview, Observation	12 Dec 2010 20 Jan 2012
<i>F2</i>	Pooja	F	13	Childcare, cooking, cleaning, miscellaneous	Rajarhat	Semi-structured Interview, Observation	12 Dec 2010
<i>F3</i>	Priya	F	16	Childcare, cooking, cleaning, miscellaneous	Salt Lake 2	Semi-structured Interview, Observation	8 Mar 2012
<i>M4</i>	Mohan	M	16	Cleaning, food prep. & serving, errands, groceries, miscellaneous	Salt Lake 1	Semi-structured Interview	18 Jan 2012 24 Jan 2012
<i>F5</i>	Vinita	F	14*	Cleaning, food prep. & serving, miscellaneous	Salt Lake 1	Semi-structured Interview, Observation	18 Jan 2012 24 Jan 2012
<i>M6</i>	Sikander	M	16	Cooking, cleaning kitchen	Salt Lake 1	Semi-structured Interview	18 Jan 2012
<i>M7</i>	Chottu	M	11*	Cooking, cleaning, miscellaneous	Salt Lake All	Semi-structured Interview, Observation	19 Jan 2012 23 Jan 2012
<i>M8</i>	Manoj	M	18	Cooking, cleaning kitchen	Salt Lake, Camac St., factory	Semi-structured Interview	20 Jan 2012

¹⁹⁶ All ages were provided by the children or members of their social networks who spoke on their behalf. Ages indicated with an asterix (*) were provided as an approximate age; the indication of NG means that the age was Not Given; ages indicated with an X (x) were provided to the researcher, however, based on the researchers observations and discussions, does not appear to be accurate.

A.2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS: CHILDREN IN SMALL-SCALE FACTORIES AND SHOPS

<i>FOOTNOTE CODE</i>	NAME	M/ F	AGE	OCCUPATION/T ASK	LOCATION	METHODOLOGY	INTERVIEW DATE(S)
<i>M9</i>	Gautum	M	12*	Ragpicking, Begging, Shop work	Sealdah	Semi-structured Interview, observation	12 Apr 2011 14 Apr 2011
<i>M10</i>	Rahul	M	11*	Shop work	Sealdah	Semi-structured Interview, observation	14 Apr 2011 19 Apr 2011
<i>M11</i>	Komal	M	17	Ex-Ragpicking, shop work	Sealdah	Un-structured Interview	8 Feb 2011
<i>M12</i>	Masood	M	11	Service work	Sealdah/ Burra Bazaar	Semi-structured Interview, observation	14 Apr 2011 19 Apr 2011
<i>M13</i>	Babu	M	15*	Teashop, ragpicking	Sealdah	Semi-structured interview, observation	8 Feb 2011 9 Apr 2011 16 Apr 2011 30 Apr 2011 14 May 2011 11 June 2011
<i>M14</i>	Suresh	M	14*	Teashop	Park Street	Casual conversation, observation	21 Feb 2012
<i>M15</i>	Adil	M	14*	Small-scale factory	Park Circus	Semi-structured Interview, observation	22 Feb 2012
<i>M16</i>	Salim	M	12	Small-scale family factory	Park Circus	observation	22 Feb 2012
<i>M17</i>	Salman	M	8	Small-scale family factory	Park Circus	observation	22 Feb 2012
<i>F18</i>	Ausma	F	NG	Home-based manufacturing	Diamond Harbour Rd	Casual conversation observation	22 Dec 2010
<i>M19</i>	Aamir	M	11*	Factory – Sewing machine operator	Matiabruz	Casual conversation observation	9 Mar 2012
<i>M20</i>	Mika	M	11*	Factory – Sewing machine operator	Matiabruz	Casual conversation observation	9 Mar 2012
<i>M21</i>	Tariq	M	11*	Factory – Sewing machine operator	Matiabruz	Casual conversation observation	9 Mar 2012

<i>F22</i>	Noor	F	NG	Factory – Girl Sewing in fathers workshop	Matiabruz	Observation	12 Mar 2012
<i>M23</i>	Shardof	M	16	Sorting and processing	Tangra	Semi-structured group interview	25 Feb 2012 26 Feb 2012
<i>M24</i>	Sahadat Hussein	M	16	Sorting and processing	Tangra	Semi-structured group interview	25 Feb 2012 26 Feb 2012
<i>M25</i>	Muhammed	M	15	Sorting and processing	Tangra	Semi-structured group interview	25 Feb 2012 26 Feb 2012
<i>M26</i>	Bilal	M	16	Sorting and processing	Tangra	Semi-structured group interview	25 Feb 2012 26 Feb 2012
<i>M27</i>	Alim	M	16	Sorting and processing	Tangra	Semi-structured group interview	25 Feb 2012 26 Feb 2012
<i>M28</i>	Imtiaz	M	NG	Sorting and processing (boy sorting ribbons)	Tangra	Observation	24 Feb 2012

A.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS: CHILDREN IN THE STREETS¹⁹⁷

<i>FOOTNOTE CODE</i>	NAME	M/ F	AGE	OCCUPATION	LOCATION	METHODOLOGY	INTERVIEW DATE(S)
<i>M13</i>	Babu [^]	M	15	Teashop, ragpicking	Sealdah	Semi-structured Interview, observation	8 Feb 2011 9 April 2011 16 April 2011 30 April 2011 14 May 2011 11 June 2011
<i>M9</i>	Gautum [^]	M	12	Ragpicking, Begging, Shop work	Sealdah	Semi-structured Interview, observation	12 April 2011 14 April 2011
<i>M12</i>	Masood [^]	M	11	Service work	Sealdah/ Burra Bazaar	Semi-structured Interview, observation	14 April 2011 19 April 2011
<i>M11</i>	Komal [^]	M	17	Ex-Ragpicking, shop work	Sealdah	Un-structured interview	8 Feb 2011
<i>M29</i>	Ashu	M	12	Ragpicking	Sealdah	Semi-structured Interview, observation	15 Feb 2011 17 Feb 2011 24 Feb 2011
<i>M30</i>	Chotka	M	15	Ragpicking, Begging	Sealdah	Semi-structured Interview, observation	8 Feb 2011 9 April 2011 16 April 2011 30 April 2011 14 May 2011 11 June 2011
<i>M31</i>	Burka	M	15	Ragpicking, Begging	Sealdah	Semi-structured Interview, observation	8 Feb 2011 9 April 2011 16 April 2011 30 April 2011 14 May 2011 11 June 2011
<i>M32</i>	Rajib	M	11*	Ragpicking	Sealdah	Semi-structured Interview, observation	12 Feb 2011 15 Feb 2011
<i>M33</i>	Tapas	M	12	Ragpicking, Begging	Sealdah	Semi-structured Interview, observation	12 Feb 2011 15 Feb 2011
<i>F34</i>	Meera	F	15*	Ragpicking, Vending	Sealdah/ Kholi Market	Casual conversation and semi- structured interview	10 Feb 2011
<i>M35</i>	Asad	M	10*	Begging, Vending	Park Street	Casual conversation, observation	8 Dec 2010 12 Dec 2010

¹⁹⁷ Several children in this category also belong to the previous (factory and shop) category. These children are indicated using a circumflex (^).

<i>M36</i>	Raju	M	NG	Begging, Vending	Park Street	Casual conversation, observation	12 Dec 2010
<i>F37</i>	Ratna	F	NG	Begging, Vending	Park Street	Casual conversation, observation	12 Dec 2010
<i>F38</i>	Zara	F	13	Ragpicking	No. 4 Bridge	Semi-structured Interview	28 Feb 2012 1 Mar 2012 4 Mar 2012
<i>F39</i>	Reshma	F	11	Ragpicking	No. 4 Bridge	Semi-structured Interview	4 Mar 2012
<i>F40</i>	Kulsan	F	10	Ragpicking	No. 4 Bridge	Semi-structured Interview	4 Mar 2012
<i>M41</i>	Musa	M	NG	Ragpicking	Park Circus	Observation	2 Jan 2012
<i>M42</i>	Ismail	M	5*	Begging	Sealdah	Observation	Feb/March 2011
<i>M43</i>	Deepak	M	6*	Begging	Sealdah	Observation	Feb/March 2011
<i>M44</i>	Bapan	M	14*	Ragpicking, Begging	Sealdah	Casual conversation, observation	Feb/March 2011

A.4 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS: INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS

<i>FOOTNOTE CODE</i>	NAME	M/ F	ORGANISATION/ POSITION/ROLE	LOCATION	INTERVIEW DATE
<i>IA1</i>	Lopamundra Dey	F	Former head of CINI Sealdah	Park Street	28 Feb 2011
<i>IA2</i>	Bhaskar	M	Coordinator CINI Sealdah	Sealdah	15 Feb 2011 28 Feb 2011
<i>IA3</i>	Babu Da	M	Social coordinator CINI Sealdah	Sealdah	12 Jan 2010
<i>IA4</i>	Priska	F	Director CINI Sealdah	Sealdah	9 Jan 2011
<i>IA5</i>	Soma	F	Education coordinator CINI Sealdah	Sealdah	9 Jan 2011 8 Feb 2011
<i>IA6</i>	V Ramaswamy	M	Activist and Businessman	Industrial Zone	27 Dec 2010
<i>IA7</i>	Manidipa Ghosh	F	Director of CINI Urban Division	CINI headquarters	10 May 2011
<i>IA8</i>	Athar Ali	M	Part-time educator, Youth leader	Tangra	24 Feb 2012 25 Feb 2012 26 Feb 2012
<i>IA9</i>	Sabir	M	Activist, Youth community leader	Diamond Harbour Rd	22 Dec 2010
<i>IA10</i>	Shantanu	M	Coordinator CINI Sealdah	Sealdah	9 Jan 2011 9 April 2011 26 Feb 2012
<i>IA11</i>	Kaberi Bannerjee	F	Educator and CBO director	Tangra	24 Feb 2012
<i>IA12</i>	Coordinator	F	Community Outreach	Phoolbagan	19 Mar 2012

A.5 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS: EMPLOYERS, FAMILY, KIN, AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS

<i>FOOTNOTE CODE</i>	NAME	M/F	ROLE	LOCATION	INTERVIEW DATE(S)
<i>N1</i>	Chura Salesman	M	Itinerant street vendor, member of street children's social network	Russel Street	15 Mar 2011
<i>N2</i>	Naresh	M	Salt lake driver	Salt Lake 1	19 Jan 2012
<i>N3</i>	Salim & Salman's Father	M	Home factory operator (shoe maker)	Park Circus	22 Feb 2012
<i>N4</i>	Shanti	F	Domestic Employer	Salt Lake 1	18 Jan 2012
<i>N5</i>	Sadaf	M	Business Owner – Sarang International	Topsia	18 Dec 2011
<i>N6</i>	Auntieji	F	Ragpicker	No. 4 Bridge	28 Feb 2012 1 Mar 2012 4 Mar 2012 18 Mar 2012
<i>N7</i>	Chandra	F	Domestic Employer	Salt Lake 2	8 Mar 2012
<i>N8</i>	Shweta	F	Domestic Employer	Rajarhat	22 Dec 2010 20 Jan 2012
<i>N9</i>	Salique	M	Factory employer	Matiabruz	12 Mar 2012

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