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Street Food Governance in Dhaka (Bangladesh): The Appropriation of Street Vending Spaces and the Informal Politics of Exploitation

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1. Introduction / Abstract

The capital of Bangladesh is an extra-ordinary city; not only in terms of its' sheer size and population density, but also in terms of its socio-economic polarization and political fragmentation. And yet Dhaka is functioning, despite (or even because of) the ambivalent informal modes of urban governance, which I understood as not-state centred and yet still hierarchical systems of order, that structure the interactions of the city dwellers. This paper explores the appropriation of public spaces in Dhaka and the informal modes of governing these sites. It draws on data from own empirical investigations – both qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied over the course of three years – and was conceptually inspired by vulnerability studies and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice.

The distinct group at the centre of my analysis are street food vendors, who provide crucial services to the urban consumers and thus contribute significantly to the functioning of the city. In order to sustain their livelihoods, these food hawkers struggle to get the access to their vending sites such as street corners, bus terminals or public squares. The paper shows, however, that the access to and use of public spaces is not `free´ to the vendors as their rights of access and use depend on their resources and their social relations to the most powerful agents in the `field´ who set the `rules of the game´ that are imposed on the subaltern actors.

But the governance modes that are in effect at a particular site in the urban fabric are heavily contested. Local bureaucrats, policemen and security guards are competing with politicians, mafia-type networks of criminals and the vendors themselves over the control of and the extraction of profits from the vending sites. Consequently, street vendors not only have to physically appropriate sections of public spaces in order to sell their products, but also seek to position themselves in the local `fields of power´. In many cases, the vendors are forced to invest in ambiguous informal arrangements such as paying security-money to the police or other local power-brokers. Submission to the hegemonic modes of governance determines the vendor's access to (or their exclusion from) the most profitable vending sites. Moreover, street vendors face irregularly occurring eviction drives by the police. In Dhaka it shows that these violent campaigns by state actors against `ordinary´ citizens are not merely erratic threats to the vendors' livelihoods, but an immanent part of the logic of urban governance. The exploitation of poor livelihood groups as well as their condition of insecurity and vulnerability seems to be a widely accepted – or even desired? – aspect of ordering the society.

2. Looking at the Appropriation and Governance of Urban Public Spaces

In any society the specific cultural, economic, political, and social processes produce specific public spaces and, in turn, the social practices in public spaces reflect, reaffirm, and reproduce a society's constituting relations. It is not surprising then, that the access to, the use and the effective control of public spaces is contested to different degrees in many cities all over the world (cf. Selle 2003; Brown 2006a; Low & Smith 2006; Cross & Morales 2007). Although being used ubiquitously, the term public space needs closer attention. Smith and Low (2006: 3) define public spaces as "the range of social locations offered by the street, the park, the media, the Internet, the shopping mall, the United Nations, national governments, and local neighbourhoods." In this sense, public spaces epitomise the tension between distinct places, in which concrete social interactions take place, and the apparently spacelessness of popular opinion and public discourse (ibd.; Smith & Low 2006: 3). Urban public spaces then include all the available physical spaces in a city that are accessible to and usable by *all* citizens (Brown 2006b: 22; Hackenbroch et al. 2009: 49). This admittedly very broad definition can be conceptualized further with the help of the `Theory of Practice´ by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (cf. 1976; 1992; 1998; 2005), who recognizes the materiality of space, the social practices of actors, and the immanent rules that structure social relations of ownership, access and control of space.

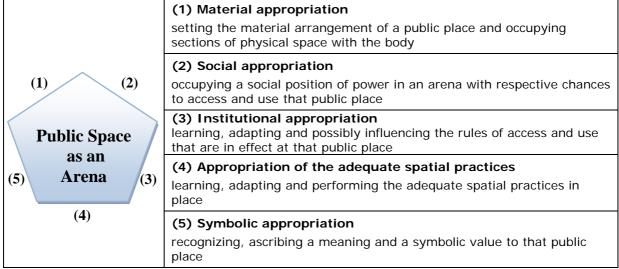### *Bourdieu's Perspective: Urban Public Spaces as Appropriated Physical Spaces*

Seen from the perspective of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, the design, governance and use of urban public spaces reflects the inscription of social structures in physical space. Bourdieu distinguishes between two basic types of spaces – social and physical space. In *social space* actors are positioned towards one another on the basis of their capacities, i.e. the economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital available to them. According to their position-specific habitus, i.e. acquired dispositions to perceive and evaluate the social reality, to think and act in a particular way, actors employ distinct social practices (cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). *Physical space* is the material abstraction of space, in which the laws of nature determine the relative position of elements. Actors are bound in physical space as their bodies cannot be at two places simultaneously (Bourdieu 2005: 117). Social space cannot be expressed in terms of spatial boundaries, but physical space matters in defining it "inasmuch as power is distributed spatially as well as socially" (Painter 2000: 257). A society's inherent social order manifests itself in distinct places through the spatial distribution of people, goods and services. Bourdieu (2005: 120) calls this projection of social space on the level of physical space *appropriated physical space* or *realised social space*. As the `consumption of space´ is a typical way to demonstrate power (Bourdieu 2005: 118), the material space that can be occupied by an agent and his own `sense of place´ are excellent indicators of this actors' position in social space
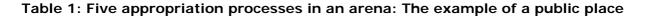
(cf. Dörfler et al. 2003: 18; Bourdieu 2005: 117ff). In turn, profits can be achieved, if actors can `spatialise´ their social position by owning, controlling or (temporarily) claiming a certain place for themselves, enabling them to use it according to their own interests. The access is then restricted for other agents or they are charged `rents´ for use (Bourdieu 2005: 122).

We can thus define urban public spaces as appropriated physical spaces or – for brevity – as *arenas* (cf. Etzold et al. 2009: 5f). Arenas are social constructions and historically contingent. Social practices take place in distinct arenas and specific rules govern the social relations according to the respective public spaces' physical setup, its function, logic and value (Frey 2004: 220). As follows, the access to, use and control of urban of public spaces can become a matter of contestations between actors with divergent interests, specific endowments with capital and distinct power positions, who seek to achieve profits from appropriating public spaces. The interests of the state and city authorities, for instance, often stand against those of `ordinary´ citizens or subaltern agents such as street vendors. Questions of order, i.e. control over space and execution of power, and the accumulation of capital are defining issues in urban public spaces (cf. Bayat 1997: 145; Bourdieu 2005: 118; Smith & Low 2006: 4)

Five Dimensions of the Appropriation of Public Spaces

The appropriation of public spaces relates directly to power relations as more powerful agents can gain spatial profits over others. The term appropriation not only refers to the seizure of physical space, but also to the acquisition of related perceptions, attitudes and practices. The (possibly subversive) appropriation processes of public spaces indicate how the prevailing social order and hegemonic rules of access and use of public spaces are accepted or rejected in a society. Extending Frey's (2004: 225f) reading of Bourdieu, one can distinguish five dimensions of the appropriation of public spaces: the appropriation of the physical space itself, the appropriation of a position in social space, the appropriation of institutions that regulate access and use of that space, the appropriation of the `right´ spatial practices, and the symbolic appropriation of that space's value and meaning.

Table 1: Five appropriation processes in an arena: The example of a public place

Public Space as an Arena (pentagon with points labeled (1), (2), (3), (4), (5))	**(1) Material appropriation**
	setting the material arrangement of a public place and occupying sections of physical space with the body
	(2) Social appropriation
	occupying a social position of power in an arena with respective chances to access and use that public place
	(3) Institutional appropriation
	learning, adapting and possibly influencing the rules of access and use that are in effect at that public place
	(4) Appropriation of the adequate spatial practices
	learning, adapting and performing the adequate spatial practices in place
	(5) Symbolic appropriation
	recognizing, ascribing a meaning and a symbolic value to that public place

Source: B.Etzold, own draft (09/2010)

The first dimension of *material appropriation* refers to the mere occupation or seizure of the physical space itself, which is a bodily practice. The material basis of public spaces includes surrounding buildings, architecture and basic infrastructure. Material appropriation thus also includes the ability to change physical structures, for instance by fencing off some sections or erecting structures like a building, a simple food stall or some tables. Self-evidently, material appropriation requires investments such as money to buy land and building material or to pay rents. Existing material structures of a public place are perceived by users on the basis of their habitus. Research questions addressing this material dimension include: What kinds of buildings frame a public place, how is the quality of their physical structure, and what is their value (land prices, rental fees)? What are the major functions of surrounding buildings? What are the material conditions of that space, such as its design, its size, or its surface? Are sections of that public space clearly delineated (by whom, for what purpose)?

The second dimension addresses the processes of *social appropriation*. Public spaces need to be understood as social spaces, in which agents take on relational positions of power on the basis of their endowment with capital. Their position-specific habitus frames their perception of a particular public space, their evaluation of its value and meaning, and thus their own interests, and serves as a disposition to act in a specific way. A privileged position in social space increases the chances to appropriate physical spaces. In turn, the material structures of a specific public place mirror the social relations of those actors, who have an interest and effect in that arena. Research questions that address this social dimension of appropriation include: Which agents are visiting, using and having interests in a particular public place? Which differences exist between these agents? Which exchange relations and network connections exist at place and how do these shape the physical structure of that place, its rules of access and use, and the spatial practices of

the agents? Are there authoritative actors or groups that are particularly influential at a distinct public site?

Formal and informal rules govern the legal, appropriate and legitimate patterns of access and use of public spaces. The third dimension of appropriating spaces therefore refers to the governance debate and the *appropriation of institutions*.[1] Different operating rules apply to public spaces on the basis of their ownership structure, their location and their functions. For public outdoor spaces, states and city municipalities legally define who is allowed to frequent these – in theory everybody – and what practices are allowed under which conditions, and which are not. In order to appropriate public spaces, actors first have to learn which operating rules – both the formal and informal ones – exist at a specific public place, and then evaluate their plausibility, practicability and meaning. But only the state, owners, and other actors in superior social positions are able to set or influence the prevailing modes of governance (cf. Frey 2004: 225f; Etzold et al 2011). Research questions addressing institutional appropriation include: What is the major function, e.g. exchange, representation, of a particular public space? Which (in)formal rules of access and use exist, and how are they actually brought into effect? How are breaches with dominant modes of governance sanctioned, and by whom? Who produces, negotiates and contests these governance modes in effect?

The fourth dimension of appropriation addresses *spatial practices* as such. In their socialisation people acquire knowledge about institutions, about the `right´ order of persons and things in space, and about normal or `adequate´ spatial practices. They learn to manoeuvre within confined spaces, to accept or trespass spatial boundaries, or even to construct new barriers for others. A specific spatial perception is therefore part of the agents' habitus, which in turn is expressed in specific spatial practices, i.e. styles and routines of interaction in space that in sum define the nature of that place. But how agents actually use public spaces depends on their interests and freedoms of action and thus on their social position in the arena. But which spatial practices have emerged at a particular place? Where, at which speed, in which rhythm, and how long are the practices carried out? What is their purpose? How are they perceived by other agents? How do the practices relate to the legal frame set by the state, and to informal institutions? How `profitable´ are these practices for those who carry them out?

The fifth dimension, *symbolic appropriation*, refers to the production of meaning of a specific public space and the spatial practices taking place there. Mitchell (2003) showed by looking at the highly contested people's park in Berkeley that public spaces are most

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[1] Addressing governance as an analytical – and not a normative – concept implies the need to look at the establishment, operation, negotiation and contestation of institutions. See Etzold et al. (2011) for a detailed discussion on recent trends in institutional theory and the relevance of these for development studies. Influenced by the work of Giddens (1984), Bourdieu, Scott (2008), Cleaver (2002) and others, institutions are defined there as "permanently socially (re-)produced rules that enable, constrain, and give meaning to social practices and that comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements" (Etzold et al. 2011).

important "spaces of representation" for individuals and groups who turn to the public with their political claims. Moreover, specific public places can become iconic symbols of broader political movements: The Pariser Platz with the Brandenburger Tor in Berlin, the Zócalo in Mexico City or the Central Shaheed Minar in Dhaka are not only large squares in capital cities, but each of them has a fundamental meaning in the history and for the identity of the respective nation states. These public spaces thus have far greater symbolic value than other public places in the same city, which impedes other functions such as commercial or recreational uses. The regulations of the access to and the use of these very visible and highly valued public spaces are therefore more restrictive, but also more likely to be contested by potential users (cf. Wildner 2003 for the case of Mexico City). In turn, there are public places, streets and whole city quarters that are less contested, because they are seen – in particular by the elites close to state power – as unimportant and marginal without much economic and symbolic value.[2] Likewise, the spatial practices at a place are assigned a specific economic and symbolic value. The `quiet encroachment´ of streets by hawkers is seen as economically negligible and illegal and thus as inappropriate by city planners and large sections of urban elites, although they are perceived as necessary, legitimate and appropriate by the subalterns themselves (cf. Bayat 1997; Cross & Karides 2007). Research questions at this discursive dimension of analysis include: How do public discourses frame people's perception of what is seen as appropriate uses of public spaces? What is the history and specific symbolic value of a distinct place in relation to other public places? Who can influence these public discourses on public spaces and spatial practices, and in whose interest are they being sustained?

Appropriating and governing public spaces from below
A distinct public space's physical design, its function and appropriate utilisation, its prevalent mode of governance as well as its symbolic value are always the historical products of the practices of agents. The "habitus of a place" (Frey 2004: 220f) not only structures the appropriation processes taking place in the present, but also predefine further possible functions and practices at that place in the future. It seems to make sense to distinguish between appropriation `from above´ and `from below´. Appropriation of public spaces from above refers to actors close to the field of state power who possess a larger scope of action, and who have the capability to seize public spaces at a large scale for private and often for commercial interests. Appropriation of public spaces from below – or "the quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (Bayat 1997: 7) – denotes the subtle, slow and often subversive occupation of public spaces by actors with

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[2] Although they might be perceived `from above´ as worthless, the public spaces in squatter settlements are highly valued by the slum dwellers themselves who also invest in site improvements (cf. Hackenbroch et al. 2009 & 2010 for the case of Dhaka; Sakdapolrak 2010 for Chennai; Zimmer 2010 for Delhi). As the economic and symbolic value of seemingly marginal sites increases, more people might become interested in obtaining spatial profits from these increasingly valued sites, which might foster further conflicts around space.

less economic and symbolic capital who have no other option but to seize available spatial niches in order to sustain their own livelihoods. Subaltern actors' styles of appropriating public spaces, for instance the mobility pattern of street vendors, and the extent of space that they can effectively use, for instance the size of street food shops, are sound indicators for their social position and therefore also reflect their social vulnerability.

Understanding the appropriations, negotiations and contestations around distinct public spaces, for instance street vending sites in Dhaka, requires a shift in the focus from macro- to micro-politics. A *macro-political perspective on governance* refers to the steering capacities of centralised forms of power and the efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy of the institutions of nation states (cf. Siddiqui & Ahmed 2004; Risse & Lehmkuhl 2006). The notion of *micro-politics* or "street politics" (Bayat 1997), in turn, refers to the political relations and contestations, which are inherent in the social practices of everyday life, and which are characterised by often diffused and decentred forms of power (cf. Best & Kellner 1991; Zimmer 2009; Zimmer & Sakdapolrak *forthcoming*). Looking at `street food governance´ requires both: First, the broader political economy of a city and the legal frameworks on street food vending, which are set by state and city authorities, needs to be sketched. And then, the social relations in the very local arenas, where state actors, informal `power brokers´ and street vendors interact need to be analysed in order to understand how abstract formal rules, social norms and personal power relations are being `pieced together´ (Cleaver 2002: 15f) and become the modes of governance in effect.

3. Methods used for this Case Study

In the early stages of research on street food vendors in Dhaka, which was conducted over a course of three years (2007 to 2010),[3] it became apparent that getting access to lucrative vending sites, the local politics of the street and the encounters with the state play crucial roles for the vendors' livelihoods. In order to get dense insights into the governance of the vending sites the empirical research was guided by an inductive research approach that combined semi-structured interviews with dozens of street vendors and other stakeholders with participatory research tools, e.g. time lines, venn-

diagrams, etc.[4] Street vendors with distinct styles of appropriating space, e.g. permanent and mobile vendors, were deliberately addressed in order to assess what `makes the difference´ for their access to vending sites and their livelihood security. In a second step, a quantitative survey (n=120) of street food vendors at six characteristic vending sites helped to extent and verify some of the insights of the qualitative research phase. The study sites were publicly accessible places within the area of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC): Among them where two slum areas, one illegally-built settlement in Dhaka's North with poor-housing conditions where roughly 10,000 people live (Bishil Slum), and one more consolidated, but run down settlement near the centre of Dhaka with a mix of residential use (approx. 90,000 inhabitants) and a dynamic plastic recycling and processing industry (Islambagh); two important transport hubs in the city from where passengers travel to all regions of Bangladesh, a ferry terminal (BIWTA at Sadar Ghat) and a bus terminal (Saidabad); one important traffic square in the city's elite quarter (Gulshan one area); and one street in front of the city's second biggest public hospital (Dhaka Medical College Hospital, DMCH) in the immediate vicinity of Dhaka University. Most of research time was spent and most of the in-depth interviews were conducted at this last study site.

4. Megaurbanisation and the Contested Governance of Street Vending in Dhaka

In Dhaka the contentious issue of food vending in urban public spaces stands at a discursive intersection between the challenges of megaurbanization, socio-economic fragmentation and conflicts over the `right´ urban order. Dhaka grew faster than any other of the 21 megacities – large urban agglomerations with a population of more than ten million people – that exist worldwide and that together host almost five percent of the total global population: In 1950 it had only 336,000 inhabitants, but over the next sixty years, its population increased by almost 240,000 people or 6.3 percent (on average) per year; in 2010, approximately 14.65 million people crowd the capital of Bangladesh (UN 2010: 6f). Dhaka is incorporated in the global commodity chains of consumer goods, in particular through its garments industry, in which more than two million people work. It thus connects millions of people to the global economic system; a defining feature of megacities (cf. Castells 2000: 434).

Like in many other megacities of the South, global integration was achieved in Dhaka at the cost of growing spatial fragmentation and socio-economic polarization – if not to say blatant impoverishment of the majority of its habitants. It is not surprising, then, that the

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[4] Although an inductive approach was applied that included hundreds of friendly and respectful conversations, interviews and group discussions with (mainly male) street food vendors, and which aimed at understanding the interests and practices of the vendors from their perspectives, it was not possible to take on an *emic* perspective as a researcher. In particular, my insufficient language skills in Bangla clearly limited the analysis in the sense that I always had to rely on (also mostly male) student asstiant who directly translated my questions and the answers of the SF vendors in the qualitative interviews and who facilitated the quantitative surveys.

accumulation of millions of people is accompanied by unprecedented challenges in terms of the provision of housing, infrastructure and basic economic, social and health services (such as access to formal employment; access to water, electricity, gas; access to health care and education); in terms of environmental pollution and natural hazards; in terms of poverty and the lack of employment opportunities; in terms of (political) violence, social unrest and crime; and thus also in terms of justice, equity, and human security (cf. Pryer 2003; Siddiqui & Ahmed 2004; Islam 2005; World Bank 2007; BRAC University 2008; Keck et al. 2008).

These considerable governance challenges cannot be assigned only to the sheer number of people living in the city and to a lack of funds for adequate planning, provision of infrastructure and services, and up-keeping of law and order. They rather refer to gross failures of the formal urban governance system as such, which can be characterized by a lack of coordination, high inefficiency, no accountability and transparency, corruption, nepotism and political patronage, the abuse of formal positions by representatives of the state or city authorities, and by the politicization of all public life (Siddiqui & Ahmed 2004: 408; BRAC University 2008). This seems to hold true for all levels of governance – from the city Mayor, to Ward Commissioners, representatives of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and other public bodies such as public hospitals, down to the level of local bureaucrats, police officers and security guards. Urban governance in Bangladesh is thus largely defined by personal networks, local politics of power and informal modes of regulation (Etzold et al. 2009: 7).

We need to keep these general observations on the governance of the megacity of Dhaka in mind when looking at the governance of urban public spaces. In Dhaka, street food vending is illegal by law (Pure Food Ordinance 1959; Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance 1976; Dhaka City Corporation Ordinance 1983) and thus there are no licences that street food vendors can obtain.[5] Moreover, the city authorities, the planners and the growing middle-class see street food vending as obsolete, unhygienic, disorderly and `in the way´. Nonetheless, street food vendors knowingly ignore formal rules and `silently´ encroach on streets, roadsides, footpaths, market squares, parks and other publicly accessible places. The vendors' appropriation of public space has been largely tolerated by the city authorities, the police or security officers of other public institutions for many decades. But from time to time, state actors are compelled to react to the informal

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[5] The Pure Food Ordinance dates back to 1959 and has not been changed since. It states that "no premises shall be used for [...] the manufacture or sale of ice-cream or any pickled, potted, pressed or preserved food [...] unless such premises have been registered by the occupier thereof" (Chapt.2, section 21). The Dhaka City Corporation Ordinance from 1983 stresses that "The Corporation may [...] prohibit the manufacture, sale or preparation, or the exposure for sale, of any specified article of food or drink in any place or premises not licensed by the Corporation; [...]; prohibit the hawking of specified articles of food and drink in such parts of the City as may be specified" (Chapt. 3, section 95). With regard to the access and use of public space in Dhaka, it says that "No person shall make an encroachment, movable or immovable, on, over or under a street or a drain or any land, house-gully or building or park except under a licence granted by the Corporation and to the extent permitted by the licence" (Chapt. 7, section 115).

appropriation processes of public space. For instance in 1996 or in 2007 (see the examples given below), the respective governments were in quest for political control and order, and used the eviction of hawkers to symbolically demonstrate the authority of the state. But how rigorously and violently the formal rules on street vending are actually implemented at a vending site depends on the social network relations and the present configurations of power in the very local arenas.

5. Street Life: Spatial Practices of Street Vendors and local Governance Modes

The Field of Street Food Vending in Dhaka

After rickshaw-pulling, street vending is probably the second most important employment opportunity for the urban poor in Bangladesh, and particularly important for young and middle-aged men who have migrated to Dhaka in the past five to ten years (World Bank 2007: 168). Roughly 750,000 rickshaw pullers and 300.000 street vendors live and work in Dhaka (Islam 2005: 25f; both estimations for 2005). Dhaka is among the world's cities with the highest number of hawkers: In Asia, only Mumbai (~250,000), Delhi (~200,000), Calcutta (~150,000) and Bangkok (~100,000) have similarly large numbers of street vendors (Bhowmik 2010: 20ff). It is impossible to establish the absolute number of street *food* vendors in Dhaka. However, on the basis of own surveys and official labour statistics one can expect that between 90,000 and 100,000 street vendors sell prepared food items, and around 418,000 people or 2.9 percent of Dhaka's total population depend on the income generated by street food vendors. Own data indicates that each vendor serves 84 customers per day on average. This implies that almost eight million people or 55 percent of the population of Dhaka take some street food everyday.[6] The significance of street food for Dhaka's food system is beyond doubt. And selling street food is not a marginal economic activity, but a normal – yet highly visible – social practice that is economically efficient and deeply embedded in the urban economy and in urban life as such (cf. Tinker 1997; Chen 2005; Cross & Morales 2007).

In the following, Dhaka's street food trade is briefly characterized in order to approach the prevalent social conditions in the local arenas of street vending.[7] First, the street

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[6] The estimate of the number of street food vendors in Dhaka (Statistical Metropolitan Area) in 2010 and their economic impact is based on the latest available population data by the UN (2010), the Bangladesh Governments' Labour Force Survey 2001 and the Population Census 2001 (BBS 2004, 2007), on an own food consumption survey (n=204) that was conducted 2009 in nine slums and an own street food vendors survey (n=120) that was conducted 2009 at six study sites.

[7] Although I do not approve of the dualist schools' assumptions on the informal economy (cf. Chen 2005; Etzold et al. 2009), the six characteristics that were sketched by the International Labour Organisation (ILO 1972) in its study in Kenya are nonetheless helpful for a first descriptive assessment of the street food trade. The `informal sector´ was referred to as activities, which are "largely ignored, rarely supported, often regulated and sometimes actively discouraged by the Government" (ILO 1972: 4), and which can be characterised by ease of entry; reliance on indigenous resources; family ownership of enterprises; small size and scale of operation; low, but labour-intensive productivity; self-employment; skills acquired outside the formal school system; and unregulated and competitive markets.

vending business is easy to enter. Almost all of the street food vendors are rural-urban migrants, but only 38% (in our survey) have migrated to Dhaka in the last ten years. Fairly little capital is needed for opening a small street food stall or selling tea, snacks or fruits in a mobile manner. However, some money and a good social network are necessary to actually get access to a vending site – a point which will be further emphasised below. Second, most of the vendors (95%) own their vending units themselves or these belong to family members or friends, who also help with small loans, needed for investment. Third, most of the vendors are self-employed and operate their business alone (69%), while some more permanent street food shops (30%) have one to three constant helpers – most often younger family members. Many women help at home with the preparation and processing of the food sold on the street and thereby contribute significantly to the household income (8% said so). Fourth, despite having little formal education (45% are illiterate, only 10% have more than 5 years of schooling), most vendors develop business skills on the streets that enable them to see opportunities and seize them. Fifth, the social conditions of street food vendors are characterised by low incomes, no social security or state benefits, long working hours (on average 14h/day) and poor working conditions. In Dhaka, street food vendors earn around 284 Bangladeshi BDT (profit, ~ 2.70 Euros) per day on average. If business is not disrupted by police raids or weather extremes, this is quite a substantial income compared to the wages of untrained employees in the garments industry, day-labourers and rickshaw-pullers (cf. Islam 2005: 18ff; World Bank 2007: 21). However, the level of income varies substantially depending on the food products sold, the socio-economic characteristics of the vending site, the number of customers, the hours and days they work, the time of the year, and the style of vending. Moreover, street vendors are constantly at risk of harassment by local gangs and evictions by the police. Street food vending is, thus, a day-to-day business that involves high risks and uncertainty for the vendors and their families. Sixth, as the market for street food is highly competitive, each vendor has to find his or her economic niche by serving customers specific needs at particular sites at certain times of the day. As a result, there is a broad variety of food items that are sold on the streets of Dhaka (during fieldwork more than one hundred different street food items were counted). Products sold range from full rice meals, spicy snacks, sweets, ice cream and biscuits, to open-cut fruits and drinks like tea.

Public Spaces: the Arenas of Street Food Vending

The most important locations for street food vending are then those public places, where people assemble in great numbers; where there is a high demand for prepared food by the most important consumer groups, i.e. on the way to work, close to the office, close to home, at the places where the rickshaw pullers can take a rest; and where more formal food provision services cannot meet the food demand in the peak-hours, i.e. rush hour or

lunch-break. Street food is sold in *publicly accessible buildings* such as bus and train stations, harbour terminals and other hubs of public transport, in *institutionalised public spaces* such as school or university grounds or large market places, and in *public outdoor spaces*, in particular in highly frequented streets, squares and parks in a city centre. Furthermore, street food can play an important role in densely populated living quarters (cf. Brown 2006: 24f; Nirathron 2006: 27). Like all goods and services, street food shops are unevenly, but not randomly, distributed in space (Bourdieu 2005: 118).

Styles of Appropriating Public Spaces

Whether a public place becomes an arena of street food vending also depends on individual vendors' chances of appropriating that site. Simply put, a street vendor can only sell at those sites, to which he can gain access to, where he is formally or informally allowed to be – in some cities there are even explicit vending and no-vending zones for street traders (cf. Dittrich 2008 on Hyderabad; Ha 2009 on Berlin)– and where he can sell in relative security. Given a high competition over the use of public spaces and conflicting interests between vendors and more authoritative agents, all vendors have to take into account possible trade-offs when choosing their vending site. The most central, most frequented and most profitable vending sites, e.g. a bus station in the city centre, are likely to be the most contested ones and the most insecure, as state agents seek to implement formal rules that prioritise other functions at these sites. By appropriating rather marginal, less valued and less frequented sites, such as a side street in an industrial city quarter, the vendors might be able to elude conflicts with other vendors and with the state for the price of having a less profitable business.

Particular styles of appropriating public spaces, which relate to all the five dimensions of appropriation (see Table 1), can be discerned. As temporality plays an crucial role in appropriation processes of space (Bourdieu 2005: 118), the broad range of vending practices that was witnessed in Dhaka can be subsumed into five major styles of vending, ranging from an only temporary to a rather permanent appropriation of space. Mobile street vendors do not have fixed premises, but sell their products by walking around with a basket, tray or flask. Only temporarily, they squat on footpaths, streets or other public places (20% of vendors in our survey). Semi-mobile vending units are push-carts and rickshaws that are moved occasionally to reach consumers at different places at specific times (36%). Semi-permanent vending units, like large tables or heavy push-carts, are set up for the day, but can be moved or dismantled quickly (13%). Permanent, but not consolidated vending units, such as food stalls made of bamboo, are built illegally in small niches right next to a footpath or encroach onto the street (21%). And lastly, permanent consolidated shops (11%) are solidly built structures, which require larger capital

investments.[8] Which style of vending is employed by a vendor depends on his financial capacities, on the food he has for sale and, most importantly, on the available spatial niches and the vendors' social access to them.

Appropriating Vending Sites and Views on local Modes of Governance

The style of vending is not only a material practices in the sense that it relates to spatial appropriation, but it is also a social practices that relates the respective position of an actor in the field. Below are three examples of how some vendors became street food vendors in Dhaka, how they got access to their respective vending site and how they are adapting to local modes of governance in order to sustain their livelihoods. The case studies show that the rights of access to urban public space are crucial livelihood assets for the urban poor (cf. Brown 2006a; Hackenbroch et al. 2009).

Mustak is a 26 year old mobile vendor who sells tea, some biscuits, cake and cigarettes by walking around in front of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). He came to Dhaka at the age of 15, looking for a job in the city. At the time of our interview, he had been a part-time street food vendor for only five months – normally he works in a large printing factory, where he earns 3000 BDT per month. He sees street vending as an easy activity to earn some extra-income (approx. 150 BDT per day) on the two days in the week he is not working in the factory. Moreover, he enjoys passing his time on the street and talking to people. When asked how he got started as a street vendor, he replied:

> "One day, I asked one vendor how they are doing this business. Then they told. After that I got this idea that I can also start something like this as a side income. First time I went to Mr. Taijul's shop [the owner of nearby food stall where several mobile tea vendors get hot tea in flasks in order to sell on the street] with one of the vendor. I told him that I will take tea for business from you. Then he answered I don't know you how should I trust you? Then he was asking for five hundred taka as a deposit for flask. Otherwise I will not give you the flask. After one day by giving him 500 taka I started this business. If I have less pressure from factory work then I come here to sell tea"
>
> (interview with Mustak, mobile tea vendor, DMCH, 11.04.2009).

The interview section shows the `ease of entry´ to the arena of street vending for Mustak. He did not have specific personal contacts at the vending site, but only asked other tea vendors he did not even know how they got access to street vending. They introduced him to their supplier of prepared tea, who also lends tea flasks to the mobile vendors for their business. The only `investments´ Mustak had to take to enter the arena were 500 BDT as a deposit for renting the flask and the advance payments for the tea, the biscuits and cigarettes.

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[8] Tinker (1997: 17) defined "a street food business as one selling ready-to-eat foods from a place having more than three permanent walls." The vendors, who sell from permanent and consolidated structures, are therefore not considered as `real´ street food vendors in this study, but rather as comparison group.

As he is only temporally occupying vending spots in the arena, for instance by squatting on the footpath, the `rules of the game´ that apply to the more permanent vendors do not bother him. He does not have to pay *Chanda*, the informal `security payments´ to local power-brokers who grant or deny more permanent access to the vending site and who negotiate the modes of governance in effect with the patrolling policemen. When asked whether anybody just can start selling food in front of the hospital in a mobile manner, he answered that there is "nobody to take permission. I just have to move around and sell. This is my business. Nothing more." However, he only has temporal access to this public space and often has to leave or cannot sale at all in front of the hospital. He said quite frustrated: "There is so many people who always create some problem. Police, Gateman [security guards] of DMCH. Comparatively the gateman disturb more. [...] They don't allow me to sit here. It is tough to sell without sitting somewhere." And the more permanent vendors who sell tea and snacks from push-carts or tables also drive the mobile hawkers away. Referring to the semi-mobile vendor Shishir, Mustak noted that "he don't allow any vendor who sell tea by carrying flask. [...] Among all of the vendors he is most disturbing. He always tells that he is paying to sit here, so he has right." Interestingly, he referred to one of the simplest rules in that arena: the more permanent vendors have to pay *Chanda* to the local *Mastaans* in order to be allowed to stay, but in turn they have an informal `right´ to their vending site, which the mobile vendors do not have. Other interviews and the Venn Diagramm with Mustak also showed that the mobile vendors cannot change or challenge the very local modes of governance in their arena, because they are less well connected to other more powerful agents. Moreover, among all the vendors they are in a marginal social position, they are less respected and seen as poor and disadvantaged – they have only little symbolic capital. They therefore have no other option, but to except and adapt to the dominant mode of governance in the arena. And yet, their mobility allows them to enter other arenas and their flexibility enables them to evade conflicts and still sustain their livelihoods – although with less economic success.

Taslima, a 32 year old woman, came to Dhaka at the age of 12 in search of a better life. She first worked as a domestic maid, then as labourer in the plastic industry in Islambagh, one of Dhaka's most densely populated quarters. Six years ago, she started her street food business beside a heavily used road in front of one of the local plastic processing factories. At that time, her husband, who used to work as a rickshaw puller, could not support the family sufficiently, because he fell ill. Moreover, while she was working in the plastic factory there was nobody to take care of their child. Now, she operates a small permanent shop, just a very small wooden table, a bucket of water and three clay stoves (not even taking up one square meter), with the help of her 10 year old son. For two taka she sells little rice cakes (*vapa/chitoy pitha*) to the local plastic laborers, who value this tasty, nutritious and cheap snacks that are quickly available for

them in the short breaks that they have. If she sells all day, she earns about 100 taka (not even 1 Euro). It is extremely difficult for her to survive by this little money.

She started the little *pitha* business with money from her husband, but the most crucial asset for her access to a vending site is her (linking) social capital, i.e. her local network relations to more powerful `patrons´. Conducting a Venn Diagramm[9] with her, we asked whether there are any important persons for the success of her business. She replied the following:

> Taslima: "There is a house owner who is helping me to stay here. […] he is a powerful man here. We know each other, because I had worked for him [in his plastic recycling factory]. This two storied building [and] this place where I am doing business; it is now occupied by him. It is in front of his factory.

> Interviewer: Is there another person who is also helping you to continue your business? For whom your business is running well?

> T: There is one another person. He has the business of raw material [plastic trader]. He knows me as a neighbour of this area and helped me for my *pitha* business. [..] Several time people tried to force me to close my shop or to change places. Then he negotiated with the people and helped me in this way. For me, he is the best in Islambag.

> Interviewer: Now, can you tell about other people?

> T: No, I don't know the name of all other people. These two person helped me most of the time. The rest always tried to evict me from this place. I know very well that they helped me a lot. I can't tell about the others because the other didn't help me"

> (interview with Taslima, permanent pitha vendor, Islambagh, 03.03.2009).

The street vendors in Islambagh do not face evictions by the police regularly. But instead, they are confronted with local informal politics of power. There are disputes about the use of the limited public spaces between factory owners, plastic traders, other businessmen, local political leaders and criminal gangs (see Hackenbroch et al. 2009). As a consequence of these very local conflicts over the appropriation of public spaces Taslima was forced to shift her small business three times since starting her shop. In order to keep her vending spot and sustain her livelihood in the longer run, she has to try to be on good terms with more powerful people at her site. The first person, the house and factory owner for whom she has previously worked, gave her the permission to sell *pithas* right in front of his factory. Taslima, in turn, sometimes helps this mans family with household work or cooking. The second man, a neighbour and close friend, protects her against assaults of other local people, in particular also against the spatial claims by other street vendors.

Taslima does not need to pay `security man´ to local criminal gangs, maybe because she is `protected´ by two rather powerful men, or maybe because nobody wants to harm a

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[9] The aim of a Venn/Institutional Diagram is to map actors' relative positions of power in local arenas, their social relations and interactions, their webs of exchange and support and the access to services (cf. Kumar 2002).

vulnerable woman like her (the reason could not be detected). From her perspective she has attain to one most basic rule of conduct in order to continue her street food business: "First thing I have to behave well with all the people. Otherwise people will not come in my shop." Even if some men harass or assault her and show no respect, she mentioned "I can not say anything. I have to maintain my business here. This is my main concern."

6. Street Food Governance and the Informal Politics of Exploitation

In Dhaka, formal laws on street vending normally do not define the everyday social practices of the vendors, but rather the informal arrangements between them and the powerful agents at the vending sites (Etzold et al. 2009). The contradiction between formal rigour in terms of violent evictions and informal tolerance of street vending can thus be explained through the social network relations in the local arenas. Research in India (cf. Corbridge et al. 2005; Zimmer 2009; Anjaria 2010) has shown that bureaucratic actors are on the one hand part of the state apparatus and ought to enforce the formal regulatory framework, but on the other hand, they are also often deeply embedded in the very local "politics of the street" (Bayat 1997). In Dhaka too, wholesale traders, street vendors or slum dwellers are `protected´ through good personal relations, political affiliations and `security payments´ to representatives of city authorities, service providers, elected politicians or policemen (cf. Siddiqui & Ahmed 2004; World Bank 2007; BRAC University 2008). Without this ambivalent protection, it is difficult – if not even impossible – to do business successfully or simply to organize everyday life (cf. Keck 2010; Hossain 2011). Extracting security money (so called *chanda* payments) from the street vendors is thus one facet of the informal operating rules in Dhaka's arenas of street vending. Vending spots are allocated to individual vendors, and each spot has its specific price. Most street vendors pay in between 10 and 500 BDT per day to so called *linesmen*, who hand this money over to the local muscle men (*mastaans*), who are often also part of the formal system of political parties or trade unions (Siddiqui et al. 1990: 339; World Bank 2007: 67ff). The bigger the shop and the higher their business volume, the more the vendors have to pay (on average 97 BDT). The least successful mobile vendors have to pay less (42 BDT) than the semi-mobile (105 BDT) and than the semi-permanent vendors (160 BDT), whereas most of the permanent vendors (91 BDT) did not even admit that they pay anything. In turn, the *mastaans* allow the vendors to sell at `their´ usual spot, provide them with information regarding police evictions and serve as middlemen in negotiations with more powerful actors, such as the police or local political leaders, who also get their share of the extracted money.[10]

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[10] While only 70% of the vendors admitted *chanda* payments in our structured survey; our in-depth interviews and media reports, however, clearly proof the existence of these payment and the general trend with the amounts they have to give everyday. The investigative report "City walkways freed from hawkers" in the local newspaper `Daily Star´ (19.01.2007) reported that the eviction drives against street vendors at the very beginning of the Caretaker Governments rule was

Immediately after a more brutal eviction drive, some more established vendors, the *linesmen*, the *mastaans*, local political leaders and the police start to negotiate about the duration of the total vending ban, about the possible return of the confiscate equipment, or the release of the vendors who have been temporally arrested and taken to a police station. The vendors' social (or political) capital is, thus, not only the key to getting access to a specific vending site, but also a crucial aspect of their coping capacity in times of crises. As the vendors are interested in securing their business in the longer run they are willing to invest in their social capital. **Monir**, another semi-mobile tea vendor, explained the obligatory rules for all the vendors in front of the hospital as follows: they have to "maintain a close relationship with local powerful persons and political leaders" and "pay *chanda* to police officers for being allowed to continue vending", but they are also obliged to "build a strong community with other vendors so that we can help each other in difficult times" (interview September 2008).

Whether the police carry out the eviction drives brutally or not, whether equipment is confiscated or not, whether strict street vending bans take one hour or one month, in the end, the street food vendors always re-appropriate `their´ public space. The aim of such raids, which resemble a cat-and-mouse game, does not seem to be to effectively discourage the street trade, but rather to demonstrate the power of the state and to remind the vendors of the necessity to pay the regular bribes that are expected of them (see also Keck 2010). In these asymmetric power relations, the subordinate actors are clearly exploited by those in power. However, it also needs to be noted that bribes are a normal part of the everyday life in most cities of the Global South and could be seen as routinized social arrangements that are potentially beneficial to both parties (Illy 1986: 70): Although being highly dependent on few local patrons, the street vendors have at least some limited tenure security that increases their resilience to disturbances such as the evictions, while the powerful – both formal state actors and informal power-brokers – can extract substantial benefits from the street economy that amount to an astonishing sum of 12.5 million Euros per year (own estimate).[11] According to the logic of the "politics of illegality" that Anjaria (2010) described vividly for the case of street vendors in Mumbai, the state actors are not interested in finding a permanent solution to the contested hawkers issue, for instance, by legalizing street vending or declaring

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very likely to affect "a section of the law enforcers, local unit political leaders, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) staff and the organised criminals [among whom are many lower tier leaders of the, then, ruling party BNP] that collect tolls from the illegal street vendors. [...] Each street vendor had to pay a daily toll ranging from Tk 30 to Tk 200 to these elements and they would be driven out otherwise. [...] Around 50 per cent of the tolls go to local political kingpins' pockets, 15 per cent to party activists, 15 per cent to police and the rest to the `linemen´- the ones employed to collect the tolls for their bosses."

[11] If my own estimate of the numbers of street food vendors in Dhaka and the results from our survey are taken as a base, it can be rightly assumed that each day 9.2 million BDT are extorted from Dhaka's street food vendors everyday. That amounts to an astonishing sum of 3.3 billion BDT (31.9 million Euros - exchange rate at time of survey, Dec. 2009) that is illegally collected yearly from street food hawkers.

permanent vending zones, but rather seek to criminalize street vending or keep "their legal status in a constant state of flux" (ibd: 82). It is no surprise then, that police raids in Dhaka do not succeed in driving the hawkers off the streets permanently:[12] the prevalent informal mode of governance in the arenas of street vending is not only efficient in terms of providing cheap food to the customers, but also creates a capital surplus that contribute to the persistence of the hegemonic local governance structures and thus to a continuous exploitative political economy.

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[12] "A nexus between the police and local mastaans for sharing the toll collected from hawkers is a major reason behind the failure of the authorities to evict the hawkers permanently from the city footpaths. The tolls collected from the hawkers are shared by local mastaans, influential political leaders like ward commissioners and the patrol police. […] At every police station there is even a 'cashier' who is unofficially appointed to keep account of the money collected from illegal shops and settlements" (The Daily Star, 05.02.2007, Hawker Eviction - Why drive fails again and again).

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