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Gendered Spaces in India

Processes of Claiming Space through
Feminist Street Art in Delhi

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1. Introduction

In December 2012, 23-year-old student Jyoti Singh was on her way home with a friend in Delhi when she was gang raped on a bus (Chamberlain). She suffered from severe injuries that caused her death shortly after. As of today, Singh is better known by the public alias 'Nirbhaya' which was given to her by the media and which translates to 'Fearless' (Bhattacharyya). Aliases for rape victims are common in India because by law the identity of victims of rape has to be kept anonymous. However, Jyoti Singh's parents decided to name her publicly in order to take away the idea of shame that befalls victims of sexual assault (Rajaram). While justice for her murder has only been partially served, her death has since sparked a nation-wide debate on women's¹ safety in public spaces². Accordingly, Singh's death can be seen as a catalyst for a new awareness of patriarchal structures in society that limit women's movement in space. She became a symbol for resistance and gave urgency to several national movements that have been actively claiming space ever since. Several of those feminist movements and organizations were founded or organized themselves as a direct response to her murder. Among them the street art collective *Fearless* stands out as they use their art to reclaim public space for women* in South Asia. Consequently, this thesis argues that feminist street art facilitates processes of claiming public space for women* in India.

The particular place of interest in this thesis is the megacity Delhi³, where Jyoti Singh was murdered. Delhi will become the highest populated city in the world by 2030 with an estimate of nearly 39 million people living within its agglomeration by then (United Nations). Therefore, Delhi's future development poses numerous challenges for all aspects of urban life. One particularly challenging aspect is gender-based violence because Delhi has long become associated with fear. As Mehrotra and Viswanath have pointed out, one third of all reported rapes in megacities worldwide and 23% of all incidents of molestation have occurred in the city of Delhi in 2005 (1542). Accordingly, it has also been deemed 'rape capital' of India. In 2012 approximately two in three women* have suffered from sexual assault or any other kind of gender-based violence (Bhattacharyya 1345). To put this into perspective, "a woman is raped every 22 minutes" (ibid.) there. While most incidents of rape and sexual assault against

¹ Since this thesis focuses on gender identity, I will use '*' to indicate that the concepts of woman/man themselves are questioned within this thesis. In line with Butler's understanding, the attribution of any characteristics to either category furthers the conceptualization of these binaries; thus, it contributes to patriarchal gender norms and its accompanying stratification. Furthermore, '*' also attempts to include cis-women* as well as trans-women* and non-binary people in the narrative.

² As understood by Phadke, et.al. including "streets, public toilets, bus stops, railway stations, marketplaces and modes of public transport, such as buses and trains, as well as recreational areas, such as parks, maidans, waterfronts and promenades." (65)

³ Delhi as per definition provided by the UN includes the entire agglomeration. Moreover, megacities are those with over 10 million inhabitants.

women* take place in private space, these examples of violence show that the city is not equally accessible for all. Due to looming threats of violence, women* alter their movements in public space or restrict their use of it.

In order to understand the nature of how women*'s movement is restricted in space, this thesis examines the conceptualization of *space* that embeds patriarchal mechanisms of power. Based on the theories of Henri Lefebvre, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Michel de Certeau the construction of social space and spatial practices are used as a basis for analysis. In this, the particular spaces of interest are gendered spaces as theorized by feminist geographers Daphne Spain and Doreen Massey. Here, the particular focus point lies on the way in which gender and gendered spaces are constructed in India and how they function to ensure the (patriarchal) status quo. Moreover, feminist movements and visual activism will be examined as to their potential for claiming said space and for creating representation for women*'s issues in public. A spatial practice and form of visual activism that serves this purpose can be found in street art. To analyze street art's potential for claiming space and the way in which it can subvert dominant ideologies, examples of (feminist) street art in India will be given with regard to the creation of representation and the production of meaning in viewers' interpretations. For this reason, two specific examples of feminist murals in Delhi will be analyzed closely by applying Roland Barthes' semiotic approach of *Myth*. Moreover, with a focus on the second mural, some conversations with pedestrians will be decoded using a revised version of Stuart Hall's *Encoding/Decoding* model. This is followed by a discussion of the findings and a reflection of the research process and finally a conclusion.

2. Cultural Geography

As power and meaning are deeply inscribed on to the surface of the world (4), "geography [is] an interpretative art" (11) that aims to make sense of them. Accordingly, the specific field of

Cultural geography looks at the way different processes come together in particular places and how those places develop meanings for people. cultural geography is about the diversity and plurality of life in all its variegated richness; about how the world, spaces and places are interpreted and used by people; and how those places are interpreted and used by people; and how those places then help to perpetuate culture. (Crang 3)

Rooted in cultural geography, the following chapter will have a closer look at conceptualizations of *space*, how they can be linked to the social construction of *gender* and how they ultimately form the basis for theories on gendered spaces. Subsequently it will shed a light on the way in which gender and gendered spaces are (re)produced within Indian culture.

2.1. Conceptualizations of Space

One of the key concepts in geography is *space*. Yet among the other related key concepts *place* and *scale* it is arguably the one that appears to be the most abstract (Uhlenwinkel). This notion becomes particularly apparent when trying to define the term 'space' itself. There is no universally applying definition of *space* that can serve as a basis for any analysis in academic contexts. Therefore, this chapter aims to clarify what *space* entails by contrasting it with the key concept *place*, which is followed by different conceptualizations and approaches to tackle this ambiguous term. It then focuses in-depth on the theories of scholars such as Lefebvre, Foucault, de Certeau and Bourdieu who in their respective fields have conceptualized space and whose works we can categorize under the umbrella term "social space", a term mainly coined by Lefebvre and Bourdieu. This conceptualization forms the basis for the analysis in this specific thesis. At last, their theories will be used to understand the construction of gendered spaces.

2.1.1. Initial Approaches to Conceptualizing Space

A first step towards clarifying the concept *space* is to contrast it with the concept of *place*. Place is seemingly easier to pin down and invokes "a sense of 'belonging' to human beings" (Crang 102). In that way place is more than anything a contributing factor in forming an identity because "[t]he place is standing for a set of cultural characteristics; the place says something not only about where you live or come from but who you are" (Crang 103). Ever since the 1960s and 1970s, however, discussions about the meaning of space in contrast to place have become crucial in the social sciences. Essentially these discussions revolved around defining geography as "the study of distribution in space rather than particular places" (Crang 101) and declared it a spatial science. This way of rethinking geography is widely known as the so-called *spatial turn*. Furthermore, two movements in geographical thought could be observed by the end of the 1970s. On the one hand, the evolution of human geography moved from studying places as entities towards questioning the manner in which people related to spaces (ibid.). On the other hand, concerns outside the discipline were voiced with regards to "the idea of 'social laws' and a science of society [that] was being used as, or unintentionally becoming an instrument of social control and domination" (ibid.).

In German academic and educational debate, four approaches to *space* from distinct theoretical positions can be identified⁴. I) The world as a *container* with a focus on natural-physical processes at its core. This notion of space emphasizes the relation between natural and anthropogenic processes. However, it is widely agreed upon that this concept has long been outdated because it does not grasp the complexity of human interaction and the world.

⁴ As presented in Arbeitsgruppe Curriculum 2000+ der DGfG

Therefore, it has become obsolete. II) *Space as system* of the relative position of material objects. This approach focuses on the complexity of processes within society by emphasizing the importance of how objects and locations are connected. III) *Space as category of sensory perception*, i.e. “assumptions that aid the integration of individuals’ and institutions’ perceptions to differentiate spatial action in the world” (Arbeitsgruppe Curriculum 2000+ der DGfG 8). IV) *Space as constructed* by social, technical and societal processes, the essence of which questions “*who communicates how, under which circumstances and with what specific interest about space; and how do they produce and reproduce spaces through repetitive, everyday practices*” (ibid., own emphasis). Especially this last approach of constructivism is a focus point of this thesis as it questions the idea of an absolute truth and rather focuses on individual predisposition and experiences as basis for understanding *space* and all the processes including representation and the production of meaning within it.

In order to approach the concept of *space*, feminist geographer Doreen Massey makes three significant propositions. Firstly, she proposes that space is “the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions” (Massey, *For Space*) which range from the global scale to the local one. Secondly, there is plurality of coexisting entities at any given time, a coexisting heterogeneity. In that sense, Massey speaks of multiplicity constituting space and vice-versa. Thirdly, the production of space is never finished or complete but constantly evolving and changing.

2.1.2. Social Space

Space is constituted and constructed by all the social interactions within it. French sociologist Henri Lefebvre conceptualized space from a neo-Marxist perspective (Kajetzke and Schroer; Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*; Massey, *For Space*). While acknowledging the existence of physical space, he emphasized a space of social interactions. However, as opposed to Marx and other theorists before him, he did not think of social space as a separate entity but as linked to physical space (Kajetzke and Schroer). Within social space, Lefebvre points out three different yet interwoven levels as categories for analysis (Kajetzke and Schroer; Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*). Lefebvre calls this “the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived [space].” (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 39)

1) The ‘perceived’ refers to *Spatial practice*. It “connects agents and their perceptions inseparably with the material world.”⁵ (Kajetzke and Schroer 12). Simultaneously, it “embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation” (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 33). Spatial practice is defined by its agents’ “daily reality” or routine as well as their “urban reality (the routes and networks which

⁵ Translated by Sandra Hesse, original: „verbindet Handelnde und ihre Vorstellungen untrennbar mit der materiellen Welt.“

link up [...] places" (38). Due to this recurring nature, space is produced by spatial practices which assume and appropriate it in a dialectical manner.

2) The 'conceived' or *Representations of space*, which are the dominant spaces of societies. They are imagined by scientists, planners, architects, i.e. all agents of knowledge. Hence, representations of space are inextricably linked to relations of production and power hierarchies, as well as to the distribution of knowledge.

3) The 'lived' space incorporates *Representational spaces*⁶. These are the ones that the conceived space tries to dominate and which is, therefore, passively experienced. It is "directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some *artists* [...], who describe [it]" (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 39, own emphasis). *Representational spaces* are filled with symbols that are occasionally coded (33). Moreover, they can be linked to obscurer forms of spatial practice such as subcultures as they incorporate "all other real and imagined spaces simultaneously" (Soja, *Thirdspace* 61).

Unlike Lefebvre, Pierre Bourdieu particularly emphasizes the hierarchical structures that are enforced in space, e.g. through spatial segregation. Bourdieu argues, that "[t]here is no space, in a hierarchical society, that is not hierarchized and which does not express social hierarchies and distances in a more or less distorted or euphemized fashion" (Bourdieu, "Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space" 107) In his line of thought, agents construct the world from their specific and fixed position in social space, hence, from their individual point of view. This is an opinion Massey shares by emphasizing that, "relations of space are experienced differently, and variously interpreted, by those holding different positions as part of it." (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 3). This process happens under the influence of "structural constraints" (Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power" 18) without the agents – especially those dominated in society - necessarily noticing their oppression. Accordingly, an Indian woman* living in Delhi might not be aware that she avoids certain areas of the city at specific times or that her movement through urban space due to obscure factors is different from other person's. This unawareness is due to the assumption that one's own perception of the world is an accurate, unbiased depiction of the "real" world. Bourdieu calls this effect of not questioning the status quo *naturalization* of said hierarchical structures. This effect of *naturalization* is also achieved by *habitus*. As defined by Bourdieu, *habitus* serves as a system through which agents in space perceive and appreciate practices and through which they structure their own actions due to their respective positions in society over time and space (Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power" 19). Accordingly, *habitus*

⁶ For clarification purposes, Soja calls this category 'spaces of representation' as the most common translation 'representational spaces' seems somewhat misleading to him (*Thirdspace* 61).

also produces practices and representations (ibid.). Furthermore, the conscious and subconscious exercise of power within social space can also be identified as an appropriation of said space. Accordingly, in appropriated spaces this process takes place “under the most invisible form, that of symbolic violence as unperceived violence.” (Bourdieu, “Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space” 108)

The argument on power and social space is incomplete without addressing Michel Foucault's theories as one of the biggest influences on feminist and postcolonial conceptualizations of space. Linking Lefebvre and Foucault may seem controversial because they have criticized each other's work immensely (Soja, *Thirdspace* 149). Nevertheless, the concern with Foucault is inevitable for the argument of this thesis due to his substantial influence on contemporary geographical thought. Anyone concerned with Foucault is familiar with his central ideas on power/knowledge, as well as the concepts of panopticism, and biopower (Sturken and Cartwright 106), all of which predominantly emphasize the relationship between power and knowledge. Yet, Soja argues that, “for Foucault himself the relationship was embedded in a trialectic of power, knowledge, *and space*.” (*Thirdspace* 148, original emphasis). While the link of power and knowledge itself will be picked up in more detail later on in chapter 3.2.2., it is necessary to highlight the relevance of Foucault with regard to mechanisms of power in space, as well as introducing the notion of *heterotopias* at this point.

According to Foucault's theories, there are certain spatialized mechanisms that regulate the way in which we navigate space. An architectural feature that exercises power over agents is the panopticon (Foucault, “Panopticism”). As Foucault argues in the example of prisons, the panopticon regulates the behavior of prisoners because they never know whether a guard is watching them or not. As Sturken and Cartwright point out, surveillance cameras in public space can function as a modern, non-architectural version of this panopticon because people self-regulate their movements in public space in the presence of cameras (107). In this situation, it does not matter, whether someone is actively watching them in real-time or not because the possibility of being watched is enough to control one's own behavior. In addition to the panoptic power, “[m]any of the relationships of power in the modern political state are exercised indirectly on and through the body” (Sturken and Cartwright 109). For this concept, Foucault employs the term *biopower*. Therefore, the way in which subjects and their bodies are regulated in any given space reproduces dominant ideologies and reinforces power structures in societies and economy.

Foucault also highlights the potential for resistance against mechanisms of power in space (Kajetzke and Schroer). He conceptualizes spaces that allow resistance as ‘other spaces’, so-called ‘heterotopias’⁷, because they have specific functions. Some of these

⁷ As opposed to utopias (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 24)

functions work in opposition to the dominant spaces of society. There are two types of heterotopias “that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 24). The *heterotopias of crisis* that are, based on culturally-specific definitions of that word, for people in crisis, e.g. adolescents, menstruating women*, pregnant women*, the elderly (ibid.). However, they are mainly found in pre-industrial cultures and have more recently been replaced by *heterotopias of deviation* (25). Examples of such heterotopias are psychiatric hospitals, rest homes, nursing homes, and prisons. Moreover, heterotopias function in various ways connecting many real and imagined spaces at the same time. Within heterotopias time can be perceived differently from general perceptions of time. Such *heterochrony* of time means that time within heterotopias may be accumulated and/or seem to be endless, e.g. in libraries and museums. In contrast to that time can also be experienced as something short-lived or even as a limiting factor that enables transformation as is the case with festivals. Additionally, the nature of heterotopias is regulated by their accessibility. In that way, “systems of opening and closing” play a huge role in the way heterotopias work because they are generally “not freely accessible like a public place” (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” 26). Furthermore, heterotopias can also become spaces of illusion or compensation. While the former “exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory” like brothels, the latter “create[s] a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.” (27) In line with Foucault’s argument on heterotopias, anything could become a heterotopia that exhibits certain features. For example, while technically a public space, the street functions as a space of fear, in the way that it regulates women*s movement and even excludes women* from using them at certain times or for certain purposes. Hence, as they are not accessible by all, their public nature can be questioned.

As already established, space is inherently structured and hierarchized through mechanisms of power. Yet, it is also created and altered through spatial practices. However, as opposed to Foucault’s construct of disciplinary power mechanisms regulating agents in space, French sociologist Michel de Certeau emphasizes every day practices in space (Kajetzke and Schroer). Some of them (re)affirm it, and some of them subvert it. For de Certeau “spatial practices refer to a specific form of *operations* (ways of doing); they reflect ‘another spatiality’” (126). Correspondingly, the way in which space is used contributes to the creation of “the determining conditions of social life” (129). Moreover, various usages of space create “a theory of daily practices, ... a theory of experienced *space* and of the disturbing familiarity of the *city*” (ibid.). In this, spatial practices do not necessarily have to follow the rules of dominant space but are still exercised within its realms,

Within de Certeau's argument the city, i.e. urban space, plays an important role. As a result of processes of transformation, *urban reality has become the concept of city*:

While in discourse the city acts as a totalizing and almost mythic gauge of socio-economic and political strategies, urban life allows what has been excluded from it by the urbanistic plan to increase even further. The language of power is 'urbanized', but the city is subjected to contradictory movements that offset each other and interact outside the purview of the panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme of political epic ... Beneath the discourses ideologizing it, there is a proliferation of tricks and fusions of power that are devoid of legible identity, that lack any perceptible access and that are without rational clarity - impossible to manage. (de Certeau 127-128)

As indicated by this quote, the city is a multi-faceted space that both encourages participation and creates exclusion. Thereby, the interactions of different agents within space are always subject to and regulated by dominant ideologies and mechanisms of power. Furthermore, de Certeau addresses the significance of marginalized groups in and for urban space to some extent. As he points out, "it is where [...] visibility ends that the city's common practitioners dwell. [...] These practitioners employ spaces that are not self-aware; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of one body for another" (124). Thus, more than anything the way in which space is used by marginalized groups holds potential to subvert dominant ideologies.

A spatial practice de Certeau specifically emphasizes in the creation of (urban space) is walking, or in fact all pedestrian activities (utterings) in space because they "cannot be localized: they spatialize" (129). He compares the significance of walking for urban space to that of speaking for language use (ibid.), wherein which walking functions as "a process of *appropriation* of the topographic system by the pedestrian [...] a spatial *realization* of the site" (de Certeau 130, original emphasis). Walking also highlights the relationship between its agents to certain places and their respective positions in space. Furthermore, it offers characteristics that distinguish it from the spatial system. Within the spatial order, there are a variety of possibilities but also interdictions that are *actualized* by the pedestrian. This means that the walker simultaneously lets them be and disappear through continuous actions. However, he/she can also create a *discontinuity* between possibilities and interdictions within space by the way in which he/she uses, chooses and/or alters them. Further, de Certeau highlights the phatic nature of walking that includes "the function of terms that establish, maintain or interrupt contact" (131).

In line with de Certeau's argument, street art functions as a spatial practice aiming to alter spatial boundaries and claim space. He points out, "[f]igures are the gestures of [the] stylistic metamorphosis of space" (137), using the example of graffiti in the New York subway as a manifestation of said impermanent metamorphosis. In this context, de Certeau also points out the relationship between spatial practices and signifying practices. He claims that there are

"three symbolic mechanisms [that] arrange the *topoi* of the discourse on/of the city (legend, recollection and dream) in a way that is also beyond urbanistic systematicity" (Certeau 141). These symbolisms have the function to make space *believable*, *memorable* and *primitive*. They function in a way that they enable and establish spatial appropriation, structure space and work repetitively. This relationship becomes particularly apparent in street art, because in this sense it is both spatial practice and signifying practice. Therefore, its capability as a means to undermine spatial hierarchies and mechanisms of power as well as its role in increasing visibility and representation for certain subjects will be established further in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

2.1.3. Gendered Spaces

It is now widely accepted, "that the social and the spatial are inseparable and that the spatial form of the social has casual effectivity" (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 255) and that "social relations and material social practices" (254) establish space itself. Therefore, another aspect of space and its construction was voiced by feminists, particularly feminist geographers⁸, who have pointed out the link between space and the social construction of gender. As Massey points out, "Geography matters to the construction of gender, and the fact of geographical variation in gender relations, for instance, is a significant element in the production and reproduction of both imaginative geographies and uneven development" (*Space, Place, and Gender* 2). In that sense, the rendition of belonging to the category 'woman*' can be seen as a form of creating "spatially based homogeneous groupings" (Bourdieu, "Social Space and the Genesis of Appropriated Physical Space" 106) to enforce power structures in space. Correspondingly, the separation of 'woman*' from 'man*' in certain spaces can be seen as "segregation that is both cause and effect of the exclusive usage of a space" (ibid.). In the following, theories and examples of how space and gender interact will be given to illustrate the cause and effect of so called gendered spaces as instruments for the enforcement of patriarchal power.

According to feminist theory, gender is a social construct. In the sense of Butler's definition of gender, voiced in her publication *Gender Trouble*, the biological or supposedly natural sex assigned at birth is just the first step of many in the cultural and social construction of gender. In its essence, Butler's approach to gender denies the existence of a biological sex because the binary categories assigned at birth effectively lead to the production of gender through discourses surrounding femininity/masculinity in the upbringing of a child in society⁹. Throughout a person's life these discourses are reinforced and naturalize gender. In that way,

⁸ Shows reference to feminist claims in academic debate, however there is no fixed definition or approach as to what exactly a feminist geographer is (cf. Wastl-Walter).

⁹ In a more radical approach, Butler even questions the employment of the category 'woman' by feminists (4-5).

they reproduce patriarchal hierarchies and heteronormativity¹⁰ that further gender stratification. On the level of the body, at least on the surface, gender constructs act to regulate and produce heteronormative subjects. In that way, "acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler 138). Following this assumption, performativity leads to an internalization of gender identity and all that this entails and is constantly reaffirmed through repetition. Bodily acts that aim to subvert this notion of gender can be found in cross-dressing, drag, and butch lesbian identities (138). Accordingly, spaces are also constituted by and through performative actions. Therefore, "heteronormativity has spatial consequences. Constant repetition of relationships between humans constructs spatial contexts of exactly these specific social relations"¹¹ (Wastl-Walter 76).

Space comes into existence through performative acts, yet there is also an interrelation between the social construction of gender "and the visible and invisible boundaries that affect how women use urban space" (Rieker 1). However, there is not just one way in which space can be gendered as this concept is strongly influenced by time and culture (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 186). Moreover, gender identity and sexuality undeniably intersect with the categories race, ethnicity and nationality. Accordingly "any corporal identity that falls outside the established parameters for personal identity will encounter disciplinary force, the same disciplinary force that produces heterosexual men and women" (Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* 166).

The gendering of space is most notable in the distinction between public and private, in which the public domain is generally perceived as male space and the private as female space (Spain; Storey). Echoing neo-Marxist ideas, the respective importance of public and private spaces "separate[s] spheres of production from spheres of reproduction and assign greater value" (Spain 7) to the former, i.e. the public male space. The particular spaces Spain attributes to these spheres and in which gender is consequently constructed are the home, the workplace, and the community (ibid.). Accordingly, the distinction between public and private has "resulted in social practices which see certain activities and certain spaces as male preserves" (Storey 160), e.g. gentlemen's clubs or going out alone at night. In this way, women's movement in public space is restricted and only justified by a specific purpose for being in space and comes with the requirement to follow certain rules (Paul and Raju; Phadke

¹⁰ A term also introduced by Butler referring to any individual's subjection to heterosexuality and discursively produced "traditional" gender roles as the 'norm(al)' and anything that does not fit into this categorization as the other, the deviant.

¹¹ Translated by SH, original: „Heteronormativität [weist] auch räumliche Handlungsformen auf. Die stetige Wiederholung von Beziehungen zwischen Menschen konstruiert eben genau diesen sozialen Beziehungen entsprechend räumliche Kontexte"

et al.). As Massey claims, "The hegemonic spaces and places which we face today are not only products of forms of economic organization but reflect back at us also - and in the process reinforce - other characteristics of social relations, among them those of gender" (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 183). Therefore, the division of space "acts to transmit inequality" (Spain 4) and is held in place by "patriarchal systems of power [which] have tended to reinforce male dominance" (Storey 160). In this way, gender segregation ultimately contributes to the subordination of women*.

All people experience space differently depending on their respective positions in society. Therefore, spatial segregation according to gender reproduces hierarchies of power. Linking Bourdieu's *effect of naturalization* to the concept of gendered spaces, the dominant group, in this case men*, constructs what the dominated group, women*, perceive as reality. Hence, women* subconsciously accept their subordinate position by abiding to rules of gendered spaces and indirectly enable men* to reaffirm their advantage in society (Spain 15). Accordingly, Spain points out that societies with greater inequality between genders, tend to have more distinct spaces for gender segregation. However, the question of cause and effect of gendered spaces and their construction as a contributing factor in gender stratification and power relations is not an easy one: "While it would be simplistic to argue that spatial segregation causes gender stratification, it would be equally simplistic to ignore the possibility that spatial segregation reinforces gender stratification and thus modifying spatial arrangements, by definition, alters social processes" (Spain 6–7). On these grounds, neither necessarily causes the other but both influence each other. Therefore, making certain spaces more accessible to women* could lead to the implementation of gender equality in other areas of life.

This notion of accessibility to certain spaces, can also be found in the potential connection between gendered spaces and the access to knowledge and resources. For example, the separate areas for women* and men* in mosques, synagogues, and early churches can be interpreted in this way (Morgan and Welton 107). By controlling access to knowledge and resources the dominant group is able to reinforce their privileged position in society (Spain 15). Spain describes the nature of this link between power and knowledge by pointing out that, "[m]asculine spaces [...] contain socially valued knowledge of theology, law, medicine, while feminine spaces [...] contain devalued knowledge of child care, cooking, and cleaning" (Spain 10–11). Hence, Spain argues that spatial structures would have no effect on gender stratification if knowledge and access to it were equally distributed between men and women* (27). By accepting and abiding to rules that restrict women* from access to knowledge and power, they are consequently "as engaged in upholding gendered power differentials as [are] men." (Spain 18) However, while men do so because "it serves their interests" (ibid.), for women* this might be caused due to lack of alternative.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, cities are important in the production of space. Correspondingly, cities and urban space also play an important role for gendered spaces. "Cities and the built environment provide the artefactual settings where gendered meanings are developed and represented as well as reproduced. The built environment not only evokes experiences and behavioural responses, but also reproduces and structures institutional norms and social relations" (Paul and Raju 128). Going back to the modernist period, Massey argues that the spaces "mostly celebrated are the public spaces of the city" (*Space, Place, Gender* 233). Yet, most of the cultural products of that time dealing with urban space were created by men for men, in and about male spaces. One reason for that is the restriction of access for women* to certain spaces of gathering but also because women* were not allowed to just 'be' in space. In this context, she points out the existence of the term *flâneur* and contrasts it with the absence a female counterpart *flâneuse* "because 'respectable' women simply could not wander around the streets and parks alone." (*Space, Place, Gender* 234) This was partly because of the social construct of respectability but also because of a restriction of movement due to "the threat of male violence" (Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* 233). Accordingly, "[t]he city has been perceived primarily as a male place in which women and other underprivileged social groups and minorities have survived in its interstices in their own particular way." (Paul and Raju 128) To this day, city and its spaces functions as an important context in which gendered spaces are created. Their contribution to the construction of gendered spaces, is probably even more current today, because the society of the future will be predominantly living in urban settings. By 2030, the UN estimates that 60% of the world's population will be living in urban agglomerations (United Nations). Therefore, Rieker points out three fundamental facts that need to be agreed upon in order to understand the gendering of urban spaces today: "First, women's and men's experiences in the city are different and ... these differences center largely on relations of inequality; second, that women's active use of space and time often results in changes to the spatial and social structure of the city; and third, that structural changes can alter gender relations within the city" (Rieker 1). Therefore, these propositions are crucial for understanding how gendered spaces influence women's movement in the city and their perception of security; and how this can ultimately result in the reinforcement of gender stratification.

2.2. Perception of Gender and Space in India

To understand the nature of gendered spaces in India, it is necessary to understand the construction of gender and gender roles first. A common conception within the reviewed literature is that Indian culture is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures and mindsets "which consider 'women as a class' subordinate to men" (Bhattacharyya 1346) and that "Indian society witnesses a culture of misogyny" (1345). Accordingly, women* are considered as a category

inferior to men*. Practices that emphasize the subordinate status of women* are female feticide and dowry death. This latter practice means that marriage is accompanied by the payment of a dowry¹² that can be very high for the parents of the bride (Fernandes). Dowries reflect the overall lower status of women* in India, because they suggest that women* are property, which is transferred from the natal family to the family of the husband after marriage (Bhattacharyya; Fernandes). After marriage, a woman* is no longer responsible for taking care of her own parents and siblings but is expected to “abide by the habits, customs and practices” of her in-laws (Bhattacharyya 1342). In some cases, this sense of ownership and a greed for higher dowry payments by the family of the husband can result in violence against the woman* and can even lead up to her murder, coining the term dowry-death (Rudd). Thus, for some parents having male offspring outweighs that of having female offspring in order to secure their own future and potentially spare themselves pain. This is a contributing factor in the practice of female feticide, which refers to the abortion of female fetuses and the killing of newborn girls – a practice not limited to India but of pressing importance there. Aside from the general assumption that any kind of gender-selected abortions are a form of gender-based violence, female feticide is already affecting Indian society and will impact it even further in the future. As of today, a demographic imbalance due to female feticide in many parts of the country can be observed. This imbalance can also be linked to an increase of violence against women* and a declining birth rate (Gupta). The deficient sex ratio due to female feticide also mirrors the difficulties of raising a female child because of other practices such as the payment of a dowry and more limited opportunities for work and education. By now, female feticide is an issue that transcends the individual level as it affects the general social security system. In order to prevent female feticide, the PCPNDT¹³ Act was passed in 1994, which forbids prenatal chromosome-determination in order to prevent prenatal abortion of female fetuses. The law also comes with punishment, i.e. fines for doctors and parents (Gupta). However, up until now cases rarely get convictions and the sex ratio is still declining.

In order to discuss the construct ‘woman*’ further, it is useful to look at Indian feminism over time. In this, it is elemental to understand Indian feminism as divergent from feminism in the Global North and to establish that women* in India as well as generally in the Global South are neither a homogenous group, nor viewed as “sexually constrained, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, family oriented, victimized” (Ghosal 808). The difference in feminism, is partially due to mechanisms such as (post)colonialism and religious aspects rooted in the Hindu caste system. During colonial times, feminism, like all social movements, mainly focused on the upper caste by “dispossessing lower caste women of their rights in attempts to homogenize the women as a group renouncing caste and community specific

¹² While dowry payment has long been officially illegal, it is still practiced throughout India.

¹³ Preconception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act passed in 1994 and modified in 2003 (ibid.)

practices and problems" (Ghosal 794). During the emergence of a national identity to become independent from the British in the late 19th century, the creation of an ideal of Indian womanhood rooted in tradition became an essential aspect of the independence movement (796). This new understanding of womanhood put "emphasis [on] caste morality and [the] concept of purity" (797) and was accompanied by a sense "of extremely fragile feminine moral vulnerability" (ibid.), which also ultimately aided the reinforcement of the upper and middle caste domination. Ghosal points out that, after independence from was gained in 1947, feminist movements grew rather quiet until the 1970s. The new spark in feminism can be attributed to a report issued by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), founded in 1971 by the UN, which revealed stark gender inequality for women* in all positions of society (Ghosal 799-800). Consequently, this led to an increase of women*'s studies in academia and the foundation of NGOs that aimed to tackle inequality. Since the 1980s, topics such as gender-based violence have become more prominent in feminist debate as they identify violence against women* as a key factor in fostering inequality. In the 1990s, a radical feminist group based on fundamentalist Hinduist ideas emerged. They resorted to violence in their actions and viewed all men of other religious backgrounds as rapists. However, this was of course not the only feminist group in the 1990s. Other groups peacefully fought for a variety of causes, among them the equal access to education, clean water, the abolishment of child marriage and for the compensation of gas victims (806-807). As for feminist movements since the beginning of the millennial and its various forms, contemporary examples will be given in chapter 4.

In recent years, a new conceptualization of the Indian woman* has evolved. Raju and Paul call this the 'New Indian Woman', who is predominantly middle class, works in white-collar service jobs, and manages to find a "balance between (deep) tradition and (surface) modernity. Thus, the new Indian woman marks the locus of contestation between the Western and the India [sic], tradition and modernity" (Paul and Raju 131). For these women* this new self-conceptualization is also expressed through fashion choices such as wearing jeans. These fashion choices can be interpreted "as a marker of joining the progressive class, a way to propound power" (Bhattacharyya 1349). However, in light of the current Hindu-fundamentalist movements, this recent reconceptualization of woman* and a certain independence is already under scrutiny. There are already statements in effect urging women* to dress 'decent' and prohibiting women* to wear jeans by institutions such as the *Women and Child Development Department* and the local council in Uttar Pradesh (Bhattacharyya 1349).

Patriarchal structures and similarly rooted gender roles can also be observed in employment. In her study from 1997, Fernandes observes patriarchal structures in a jute mill in Calcutta. Here she observed, that there are only few female employees because in the traditional, middle-class understanding a woman has to take on a "socially acceptable role

within the family" (Fernandes 538) and work within the household. In order to seek employment a woman* has to prove that something outside of her influence, e.g. death of the husband, prevents her from occupying this role. However, as Fernandes points out, this ideal of the middle-class woman* as housewife and mother does not apply to poor women* who have always had to work outside of their own household. As this study was conducted over twenty years ago, it is to some extent clearly outdated. Young middle-class women* in India today seek employment and generally find it in the new service sectors, i.e. in communication and information technology such as call centers or engineering (Raju and Paul 132). These employment opportunities should thus provide and foster equal access to public space for women*. However empirical research suggests otherwise (133). Furthermore, despite working in these new highly technological sectors, women*'s careers are still considered to be of secondary importance after their responsibilities in the family. Therefore, Raju and Paul argue that despite employment outside of the household and an accompanied increase of public male space, "the spatial boundaries of new urban spaces in India are actually being reconstituted and redrawn in a manner that does not challenge traditional gender roles and gender relations" (Paul and Raju 132).

Feeling unsafe and vulnerable in public space is not just an exclusively female* problem. However, the "ordinary and continuous nature" (Mehrotra and Viswanath 1542) of violence against women* and its normalization leads to the incorporation of a sense of vulnerability in such spaces. Particular forms of violence against women*, are domestic violence in private space and sexual assault in public space (Bhattacharyya). However, these categories are not just self-contained categories but influence each other. While domestic violence can occur in other places outside the home too and can also happen to other genders, Bhattacharyya points out that mostly women* are affected by it in India. An estimate of 60% of Indian women* suffer from various degrees of domestic violence (1346), yet, the actual number might be even higher as many cases do not get reported due to the "deeply embedded cultural practices" (Bhattacharyya 1341) of gender-based violence and its obscure nature. Additionally, domestic violence and sexual assault influence each other in a circular manner. Boys who grow up in households witnessing domestic violence are more likely to accept it as normal behavior (1347), a notion that is reflected in Bhattacharyya's empirical research¹⁴ from 2013. The most common form of sexual assault experienced in public space, is 'Eve teasing', which refers to "comments on the physical beauty of women* or the way they dress, whistling, staring, stalking, singing songs or even some form of physical assaults such as groping, fondling and

¹⁴ A questionnaire-based survey conducted with 300 women* aged 18-50 in Delhi, Kolkata and Varanasi (1344-1345)

pinching” (Bhattacharyya 1345). The name of this particular form of harassment is already problematic because it undermines the severity of this problem as approximately every 51 minutes a woman* is harassed in public spaces in India (1346). Therefore, harassment in the form of Eve teasing needs to be recognized “as an exertion of power to influence the male-dominated and heterosexual nature of public spaces” (Bhattacharyya 1346). Ultimately, it limits the way in which women* navigate every day spaces of their life and leads to a certain disempowerment. Especially “as these perceptions [of violence] bear no boundaries, often roll over and manifest patriarchal oppression in the public spaces where women are ‘objectified’, maltreated and sexually abused” (Bhattacharyya 1342).

One of the biggest factors which influence women*’s sense of security is the presence or absence of light. Therefore, gendered spaces also work differently depending on the time of the day because there are times "when it is more acceptable for women to be seen and be users of public spaces." (Mehrotra and Viswanath 1545). Especially at night, “women can feel out of place in public spaces” (Bhattacharyya 1348). In addition to this feeling, Raju and Paul establish "the nightscape as a male domain [regulated] through legal sanctions" (135). An example for this institutionalized regulation, can be found in the *Indian Factories Act 1911* that prohibited women* from working night-shifts in factories (ibid.). Particularly striking in this day/night duality is the absence of light as a main fear factor. In their survey from 2007, Mehrotra and Viswanath also found that public spaces such as streets and bus stops are often insufficiently lit (1545) and that this contributes to the manner in which women* experience and maneuver these spaces. Apart from fear and feeling out of place at night, women* seem to regulate their bodies by adhering to dominant rules of space. This also pays tribute to the prevention of potential victim blaming. This term means that victims of sexual assault and rape are blamed for whatever crime were perpetrated against them instead of the actual perpetrator being held responsible for their violation and criminal actions. According to this reasoning it is the victim’s fault because they went out at night or “they [broke] the tacit taboo and [wore] clothing that is considered revealing or provocative” (Bhattacharyya 1348).

In a broader sense, women*’s perception of danger and threat of violence, particularly in public, can be closely linked to concepts of honor, respectability, and stigma. Comparing the nature of violence against men* with that against women*, Phadke et.al. point out that while equally unacceptable, the consequences for their respective social status are different. When men* are assaulted in public space their families will be agitated but “their social status will remain unaffected.” (Phadke et al. 59) However, if women* are assaulted or even just seen having fun in public space “by the wrong people [it] could adversely affect not just their own reputation, but also that of their families” (ibid.). So in the case of an attack against women*, Bhattacharyya argues that it seems to be less about the “basic right of a woman to live in dignity” (1349) but instead these attacks “are subject to disapproval because the affect the

honour of the family" (ibid.) In order to prevent this loss of reputation and to keep their honor "intact", many Indian women* either limit their movement entirely or "maintain a delusion of a safety barrier by drawing on boundaries to their bodies and personal spaces through the practices of Indian femininity while accessing and negotiating public spaces" (Bhattacharyya 1347). Said Indian women*'s femininity is expressed by "self-accessorised practices such as a bindi (a dot on the forehead), nose rings, mehendi and henna (painting kits for the hands), and for a married woman by her mangalsutra (long gold chain with black beads) and sindoor (vermilion)" (ibid.). As Bhattacharyya interprets them, they aim to manufacture a sense of "respectability" in on-lookers and are, therefore, aimed to ensure a woman*'s own safety. Women*'s strategies of avoiding sexual assault does not stop there though. In order to prevent stigma and the loss of respectability, they alter their everyday activities, restrict their use of public space, and even carry small weapons for self-protection (1343). Therefore, the fear of assault and the construction of respectability are means "to control and confine women, with respectability used as a mechanism operating between identity and space and producing gendered subjectivity, spatial knowledge and, ultimately, gendered space." (Paul and Raju 136)

To prevent violence against women*, safe spaces have been established all over Indian cities. One prominent example is the implementation of women*'s compartments in the Delhi and Mumbai Metro. Paul and Raju argue that they offer "a sense of security, claim and control over [...] a space that endows women" (131) and that this helps women* to identify as a group as opposed to men*. "Such an identity lets them exercise power in situations when this 'other' group tries to impose upon them" (ibid.). As they point out, this compartmentalization of the Metro may seem like another form of limiting women*'s movement and enforcing patriarchal structures/paternalism. However, it is actually regarded as a form of empowerment by most women* using them because it gives them the opportunity to use public transport without fear of assault. Yet, even though it is perceived as empowering, this compartmentalization of the metro still aids notions of othering. Furthermore, the empirical data provided by Paul and Raju lacks information as to how women* legitimate users experience the other parts of the metro when leaving the safe space. Another example for segregation under the guise of a safe space is the gendered housing system for students. There are general dorms and those dedicated only to women*, which men* are only allowed to enter up to a certain point, e.g. the lobby, and only at specific times. While the women*'s compartment has been received very positively and as a form of empowerment, the segregated housing system and its restrictive rules for women* has come under scrutiny and is heavily protested against by the student group Pinjra Tod (Sharma). This is due to the fact that it imposes strict rules on its female inhabitants like curfews, which limits their free movement and imposes moral policing. Furthermore, most aspects of their lives are under constant surveillance as they cannot enter their own home

whenever and with whomever they want because of (male) security guards at the gates noting down whenever they come and go. While there certainly is some validity to and necessity of providing safe spaces for women* in public, the line between actual safe spaces and yet another instrument to limit women*'s movement and undermine their status by exercising power over them is easily crossed. Moreover, safe spaces become problematic, when they are perceived as the only option for women* (Phadke, Khan et al.). When women* choose to transgress the boundaries of spaces that are assigned to them and anything happens to them, it easily results in victim blaming.

While the Global North emphasizes the binary of public/private with regards to gendered spaces (cf. Spain), Paul and Raju propose that this does not grasp the complexity of gendered spaces in India. They argue that spaces in India are not as hermetic as in the West due to an overall higher fluidity between oppositional binaries in Asian countries. Moreover, they point out that "[t]he complexities of Indian society in terms of caste-class-gender milieu" (Paul and Raju 130) need a different approach to spatiality altogether. Therefore, they propose that said gendered spaces with the binary of public/private should be less thought of as fixed categories but that we should make room for a more continuous conceptualization of the two of them. Accordingly, there is a rise of pretend "emancipatory spaces in the public sphere in urban India" (132), for example employment opportunities in call centers. However, these spaces cannot be mistaken "as indicative of women's empowerment" (ibid.) because women's movement is still restricted "and the spaces they occupy are closely monitored" (ibid.). Another type of semi-public space they identify, are "newly emerging consumption spaces in terms of shopping malls, departmental stores, coffee shops, [...] [d]iscotheques [sic] and pubs" (Paul and Raju 136). These spaces are semi-public because they are often closely surveilled and provided with additional (male) security guards.

3. Visual Culture and the Production of Meaning

Visual culture is omnipresent, yet, simultaneously it eludes our full awareness (Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*). As defined by Sturken and Cartwright, visual culture includes "the shared practices of a group, community, or society through which meanings are made out of the visual, aural, and textual world of representations and the ways that looking practices are engaged in symbolic and communicative activities" (3). In this way, visual culture serves as the basis for examining ways in which meaning is produced within any society. Accordingly, the following chapter focuses on the production of meaning and will outline some of the ways through which this production of meaning can be analyzed. For Hall, cultural meanings are not just imaginary: "They organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects. [...] we give objects, people and events meaning by the frameworks of interpretation which we bring to them. [...] we give things meaning by how

we *represent* them" ("Introduction" xix, original emphasis). Such a framework of interpretation is necessary for understanding and interpreting any social or cultural exchange, because "[w]here the framework of our understanding overlaps with that of the message, meanings can be produced" (Morgan and Welton 55). Meaning is also the product of "complex negotiations that make up the social process and practices through which we produce and interpret images" (Sturken and Cartwright 49). Therefore, the production of meaning implies a certain level of struggle between participants in any social situation or context and between their own thoughts and experience with what is the dominant meaning or ideology in society (Sturken and Cartwright).

Moreover, meanings are never fixed but ever changing (Hall, *Representation*; Sturken and Cartwright). In culture, meaning is not an array of stable entities but a "set of processes" (Sturken and Cartwright 88) – a set of cultural practices (Hall, "Introduction") – through which "meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction." (Hall, "Introduction" xix) However, trying "to fix meaning is exactly why *power* intervenes in *discourse*" (xxvi). Due to this general instability of meaning, representation and the production of meaning do not work in a linear manner but circular or dialogical (Hall, "Introduction"). Similarly, in the context of visual culture, Sturken and Cartwright identify three elements apart from the image and its producer that make up meaning, "(1) the codes and conventions that structure the image and that cannot be separated from the content of the image; (2) the viewers¹⁵ and how they interpret or experience the image; and (3) the contexts in which an image is exhibited and viewed" (49). With special emphasis on the viewer here, the production of meaning does not just happen in a passive way of merely "describing an experience with images" (Sturken and Cartwright 89). It is rather an active process in which meaning is produced "through reordering, redisplaying, and reusing images in new and differently meaningful ways in the reordering of everyday life." Therefore, the viewer is not just a passive receiver but active agent in the production of meaning.

Hall identifies three approaches for analyzing the production of meaning¹⁶ particularly through language. 1) The reflective approach, where meaning is manifested in the object itself and "language functions like a mirror, to *reflect* the true meaning" ("The Work of Representation" 10, original emphasis). While holding some truth, this approach cannot wholly grasp the relationship of an object and its representation in language. Therefore, it does not qualify for further the analysis in this paper. 2) The intentional approach focuses on the author's intended meaning. This approach assumes that "Words mean what the author intends they

¹⁵Viewers as opposed to audience, emphasizing the "individual who looks" rather than "a collective of lookers" (ibid.)

¹⁶ Which Hall calls "representation of meaning". However, this thesis employs the term 'representation' in the sense in which Mirzoeff as well as Sturken and Cartwright use it.

should mean" (ibid.). Thus, in this approach meaning is created by the author, who presents his individual perspective on the subject-matter as the true meaning. While this approach is commonly taught in schools, it also does not fully grasp the meaning of any image or text. In "The Death of the Author", Barthes proposes to abolish the idea of the author's intention altogether, as meaning is produced by the readers (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*). While Sturken and Cartwright acknowledge that "most if not all images have a meaning that is preferred by their producers" (Sturken and Cartwright 53–55), they argue that "texts are produced in the act of reading them and that these acts are performed from the cultural and political perspectives of readers and never fully according to the intentions of the author." (Sturken and Cartwright 53) Therefore, the preferred meaning of the author/producer may vary significantly from the reception of its viewers. Because the producer does not control the context in which their product is viewed and interpreted by viewers who "are active agents in the production of meaning" (ibid.). Rather, "meanings are the product of complex social interaction among image, viewers, and context" (55). Accordingly, the terminology 'author' can be questioned, which is why Sturken and Cartwright, as visual culture scholars, employ the term 'producer function' to point out that the term is linked to "a set of beliefs that lead us to have certain expectations about a work with regard to the status of its producer" (Sturken and Cartwright 53). Neither of these two approaches to the production of meaning serves the purpose of this thesis, because as has been pointed out already, meaning cannot be fixed to anything – not the object itself nor its producer's intention, rather "we *construct* meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs" (Hall, "The Work of Representation" 11, original emphasis). Therefore, the approach that is most relevant for this thesis is 3) the constructivist approach¹⁷. While moderate constructivists do not renounce the existence of physical space, Hall argues that "it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts." (ibid.)

Furthermore, within constructivism, there are two distinct interpretations of the production of meaning, namely *semiotic* and *discursive*. While they correlate in some ways, they also diverge distinctly in others. As Hall fittingly summarizes in the "Introduction" of *Representation*,

The *semiotic* approach is concerned with the *how* of representation, with how language produces meaning [...] the *discursive* approach is more concerned with the *effects and consequences* of representation [...] how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practised and studied. (xxii)

¹⁷ Hall calls it both 'constructivist' and 'constructionist' approach, but emphasizes the latter (ibid.). However, in line with the earlier theoretical framework on spatial theory, I will settle on the term 'constructivist' and 'constructivism'.

Therefore, the following subchapters will provide a closer look at both these approaches, which will serve as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the chosen feminist murals and the discourses that surround them.

3.1. Semiotics

Semiotics serve as a tool to understand the way in which representation works. In general, it can be defined as the study of signs and how they produce meaning (Hall, "The Work of Representation"; Morgan and Welton; Sturken and Cartwright). One of the pioneering researchers within the field of semiotics was Ferdinand de Saussure, for whom meaning is produced through language use, i.e. a system of signs made up of the *signifier* and the *signified* whose relationship is arbitrary fixed by our cultural and linguistic codes" (Hall, "The Work of Representation" 16). Therefore, they are rooted in our individual and communal experiences. However, as critics have noted, de Saussure's focus was mainly directed at the *signifier* and *signified*, leaving out the relationship between these two and how it relates to *reference*. Moreover, he did not pay any attention to "questions of *power* - for example, between speakers of different status and positions" (Hall, "The Work of Representation" 19) which is a crucial for the act of interpretation.

Based on de Saussure's concept of the signifier and signified, Roland Barthes took semiotics further, refining its approach to the production of cultural meaning. He used the semiotic approach to analyze popular culture "treating activities [such as wrestling] and objects [e.g. clothes] as signs, as a language through which meaning is communicated." (Hall, "The Work of Representation" 21). The process, in which *signifier* and *signified* are linked and create the *sign*, happens on the basis of culturally specific *codes*. Accordingly, for Barthes, a next step in the production of meaning is to look at these signs from the perspective of "broader, cultural themes, concepts or meanings" (Hall, "The Work of Representation" 23). In this step he identified two levels, which he called *denotation*, the descriptive level, and *connotation* (ibid). Morgan and Welton point out that, "[a] sign *denotes* that to which it explicitly refers" (Morgan and Welton 35). On the second level, the *connotations* of a sign are linked to processes of decoding it on the basis of cultural context and codes, as well as based on individual knowledge and experience by the "recollections evoked by [the sign]" (Morgan and Welton) The *connotations* are no longer just descriptive but are already interpretations "of the wider realms of social ideology – the general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and value systems of society" (Hall, "The Work of Representation" 24).

In 1957, Barthes also introduced the concept of "myth" into his theoretical debate on how meaning is produced. The term 'myth' in this case refers to a proposition or statement. Unlike the common use of the term as saga or fairytale, "any statement can become a myth that is attributed to discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its meaning, but by the

manner in which meaning is articulated”¹⁸ (Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags* 85). In this sense, Barthes argues that myth “includes two semiological systems that shifted in relation to each other” (*Mythen des Alltags* 93)¹⁹. He visualizes his conceptualization of myth as a secondary semiological system as follows:

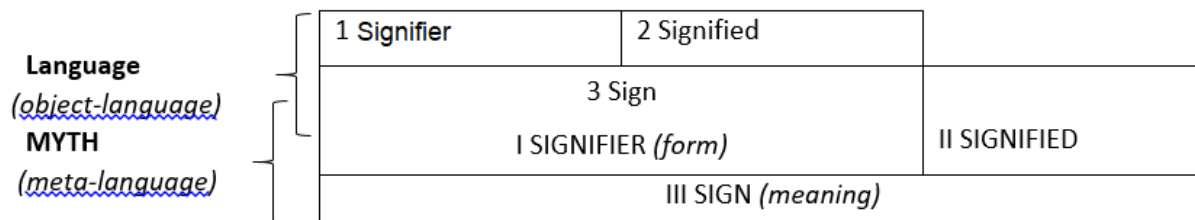


Figure 1: Schematic Representation of Barthes' Myth, adapted by Sandra Hesse

He identifies the first system as a linguistic one and calls it language or the language of the object itself (I-order interpretation). The second system is that of the myth and functions as a meta-language (II-order interpretation). As figure 1 shows, the signifier and signified form the sign, which resembles de Saussure's approach. However, to produce meaning, the sign of the first system then serves as the basis for the second process by becoming its signifier. In this process, the sign loses its original meaning and becomes part of a larger message (Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags*). This message takes into account sets of or combinations of reading signs that lead to a particular message based on its viewer's own context and the application or ability to decode cultural codes through which the meaning is produced.

Furthermore, interpreting images is a complex, culturally specific process. We make sense of the world from the perspective of the culture in which we learned to perceive it in the first place. As we are conditioned by our culture “we can often fail to imagine that alternative perceptions are even possible” (Morgan and Welton 77). As Hall argues, people who belong to “the same culture [...] share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world.” Therefore, “They must also be able to read visual images in roughly similar ways” (Hall, “Introduction” xx). Accordingly, a person who is not part of the culture in which an image is presented, will struggle to grasp its full meaning when decoding it. This process is called aberrant decoding and happens “whenever the code used by the receiver differs markedly from that of the sender” (Morgan and Welton 49). The codes differ especially when sender and receiver “are from cultures separated by time, distance, religion or ideology” (Morgan and Welton 49–50). However, as Morgan and Welton point out, the concept of ‘aberrant decoding’ suggests that there is such a thing as “a real meaning which some people

¹⁸ Translated by Sandra Hesse; original (official German translation): “da der Mythos eine Aussage ist, kann alles, wovon ein Diskurs Rechenschaft ablegen kann, Mythos werden. Der Mythos wird nicht durch das Objekt seiner Botschaft definiert, sondern durch die Art und Weise, wie der diese ausspricht.”

¹⁹ Translated by Sandra Hesse; original (official German translation): “Man sieht, daß im Mythos zwei semiologische Systeme enthalten sind, von denen eines im Verhältnis zum anderen verschoben ist“

[...] may fail to grasp" (ibid.), an idea that has been particularly questioned in post-structuralist thought "to the point where the notion of 'real meaning' itself becomes unacceptable" (Morgan and Welton 50).

3.2. Discourse and Ideology

In order to look at the production of meaning, the discourse theory is central in order to analyze the effects meaning has and in which way they can be linked to the production of knowledge and power. Discourse for Foucault includes more than language use. It is understood "as the broader variety of institutions and practices through which meaning is produced" (Sturken and Cartwright 102). Accordingly, all subjects are produced within discursive practices that are based on subjective experience; therefore, it is impossible to know if and how they would exist outside of discourses (ibid.). In this way, "representations of human subjectivity are enacted" (ibid.) within discourse too. Moreover, discourses are indicators for how structures of power work as, "In any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (Foucault, "Two Lectures" 93). This implementation of power through discourse is also closely linked to the production of knowledge. In this sense, discourses are also indicators for how knowledge is represented within a society and discourses in themselves are effectively "a body of knowledge that both defines and limits what can be said about something" (Sturken and Cartwright 105). For example in academia, the ones that hold power decide which discourses and theories are reproduced and prevail (Foucault, "Two Lectures" 85). However, the distribution of power does not constitute of binary opposites - the haves and have nots, the dominant and the submissive - as it is not linear and static but rather circular, interlinked like a chain or net where "individuals are the vehicles of power not its points of application" (Foucault, "Two Lectures" 98). Furthermore, the possession of power and hierarchies of power happen on subconscious levels and are, therefore, not obvious or intentional (Foucault, "Two Lectures" 97).

Integral to power and discourse are ideologies²⁰ because they are the "representational means through which we come to experience and make sense of reality" (Sturken and Cartwright 70). This means that anyone in any given society is subject to ideologies "and systems of representation are the vehicles" (ibid.) for implementing and negotiating ideologies. Sturken and Cartwright further insist that when speaking about ideologies, it is crucial to use the plural. There is not just one mass ideology but rather a dominant ideology that is subject to challenge and resistance by "economically and socially disadvantaged" (ibid.) groups within

²⁰ Ideologies as defined by Sturken and Cartwright as a "shared set of values and beliefs through which individuals live out their complex relations in a range of social networks." (23)

any society. As for the various characteristics ideologies can have, the concept of cultural hegemony by Gramsci serves as an essential concept for analysis. *Hegemony* refers to the possession of power not by just group dominating all other groups in society but rather hegemony is accomplished by the struggle for power between all groups at all levels of society (QUELLE). According to Sturken and Cartwright, there are two particular points of interest with regard to visual culture within Gramsci's theoretical framework. For one, dominant ideologies are naturalized by being assuming them to be 'common sense' and they "are in tension with other forces" (70) as well as never fixed but always in motion.

In addition to discourses, it is necessary to acknowledge that images "are produced within dynamics of social power and ideology" (Sturken and Cartwright 22–23) when trying to analyze their meaning. Consequently, visual culture does not just represent ideologies and power relations but is inextricably a part of them. In the postmodernist period it was argued that medial representations aid the naturalization of ideologies, yet nowadays, it is widely accepted "that images are on par with and at play with naturalized ideologies" (Sturken and Cartwright 23).

Just as images are both representations and producers of the ideologies of their time, they are also factors in the power relations between human subjects and between individuals and institutions. When we look at images, we look within a field that includes ... among other things, the medium through which we see the image ... and the architectural, cultural, national, and institutional contexts in which we see the image (Sturken and Cartwright 93).

Breaking this down to the example of street art, this art form produces meaning on multiple levels and on the basis of numerous aspects. It represents and produces ideologies, yet traditionally ones that counter the dominant-hegemonic discourses. Moreover, questions surrounding (il)legality and censorship between artists and institutions in its production, as well as the interpretative process in its reception by viewers, exhibit the potential street art has within the field of visual culture for further analysis.

A way to decode discourses within media is Stuart Hall's *Encoding and Decoding*. Within this model²¹, he identifies three positions from which discourses in mass communication can be decoded. The dominant or hegemonic code is the first position from which viewers decode "the preferred or dominant meaning ... in precisely the way in which it has been encoded by the producer" (Hall, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" 9) and therefore, on the basis of the dominant discourse in society. However, as Sturken and Cartwright argue "few viewers actually consume images in this manner, because there is no

²¹ As in Sturken and Cartwright's *Practices of Looking*, the explanation of the entire model will be left out because the main focus lies on the decoding positions.

mass culture that can satisfy all viewers' culturally specific experiences, memories, and desires" (Sturken and Cartwright 73). The second position is the negotiated one (Hall, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse"). From, this viewers "'haggle' with the dominant meanings of an image" (Sturken and Cartwright 73–74) during the interpretation process based. Hall argues that "the great majority of so-called 'misunderstandings' arise from the disjunctures between hegemonic-dominant encodings and negotiated-corporate decodings" (Hall, "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" 15). The third, the oppositional position, in which viewers detect the dominant-hegemonic decoding but act or argue against it. In this sense, "An oppositional reading can take the form of dismissal or rejection ... But it can also take form of ... making a new use for, the objects and artifacts of a culture ... strategically altering their meanings to suit our purposes" (Sturken and Cartwright 76).

Even though Hall's theory has been ground-breaking in its way, there has been criticism as to the reduction of decoding processes to three separate positions albeit "the viewing practices of most viewers fall along a continuum of negotiated meanings" (Sturken and Cartwright 75). In addition to that criticism, the model Hall proposes mainly focuses on television discourse; therefore, the encoding of meaning presumably happens within the dominant-hegemonic discourse. This leaves out other possibilities of encoding (Ross). Thus, with regard to street art as an art form based in subcultural contexts, Hall's model needs to be adapted for the purpose of this thesis. Accordingly, Ross proposes two modified typologies in *Encoding/Decoding Revisited*, one that is bases decoding on ideologies and one based on the text only. Relevant for the analysis in this thesis is mainly the first, whose encoding/decoding matrix can be seen in figure 2.

		ENCODING POSITIONS		
		Dominant-hegemonic encoding (Hall's assumed mode)	Negotiated encoding (partly critical text)	Oppositional encoding (a radical text)
DECODING POSITIONS (ideological)	Dominant-hegemonic position	Dominant-hegemonic reading of dominant-hegemonic text	Dominant-hegemonic reading of negotiated text <i>=Neutralization</i>	Dominant-hegemonic reading of oppositional text <i>=Neutralization</i>
	Negotiated position	Negotiated reading of dominant-hegemonic text	Negotiated reading of negotiated text	Negotiated reading of oppositional text
	Oppositional position	Oppositional reading of dominant-hegemonic text	Oppositional reading of negotiated text <i>=Amplification of critique</i>	Oppositional reading of oppositional text <i>=Agreement with oppositional text</i>

Figure 2: The Modified Encoding/Decoding Typology (Ideology Version)

In addition to Hall's dominant-hegemonic encoding that can be seen in the first column, Ross introduces a negotiated and oppositional encoding in the form of partly critical or radical texts. Depending on the encoding of a text as partly critical of the dominant ideology or radically opposing dominant ideologies, there are different effects these texts can have on a viewer within the ideological framework. This means that for example a message that is encoded in opposition to the dominant-hegemonic ideology can be neutralized by a decoder whose process takes place from a dominant-hegemonic position. Similarly the encoded message decoded from an oppositional position will agree with the oppositional texts.

4. (Re)claiming Space through Visual Activism

Chapter 2 has already established that access to space is not equally distributed but is inherently limited and structured by mechanisms of power, which are exercised and naturalized by dominant forces in society. Therefore, this chapter aims to illustrate how dominated groups (re)claim public space and their right to access them. It will give specific examples of how feminism has claimed space to this day and all around the world with a focus on India. Moreover, this chapter also introduces Visual Activism as a way to claim space and create representation for marginalized groups.

In "The Right to the City" Lefebvre argues that all groups of a society have equal rights to participate in urban life but that some of them are prevented from exercising this right. There are several rights Lefebvre identifies: "the rights of the ages and sexes ... , rights of conditions ... , rights to training and education, to work, to culture, to rest, to health, to housing." (The

Right to the City” 157, own emphasis) Lefebvre further assumes that “only groups, social classes and class fractions capable of revolutionary initiative” (Lefebvre, “The Right to the City” 154) can actually solve arising urban problems and, thus, the problem equal access to these rights. Hence, the restricted use of public, urban space for women* can be interpreted in this way. Lefebvre claims that the solution to such a problem can be achieved through a “defeat [of] currently dominant strategies and ideologies” through urban reform and “the reconstruction of centrality destroyed by a strategy of segregation” (Lefebvre, “The Right to the City” 154). In any culture, the dominant ideologies need to be reaffirmed “because people can work against them. This concept also allows counter-hegemonic forces, such as political movements or subversive cultural elements, to emerge and to question the status quo” (Sturken and Cartwright 71). Therefore, with regard Lefebvre’s concept of representational space, above all others this conceptualization of the lived space is full of potential to undermine dominant ideologies. This space “embod[ies] complex symbolisms, sometimes coded ... linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art ”(Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 33). As demonstrated in this quote, representational spaces are filled with symbolisms which enable the production of meaning within its realms. So in conclusion, these spaces are:

filled with politics and ideology, with the real and the imagined intertwined, and with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and other material spatial practices that concretize the social relations of production, reproduction, exploitation, domination, and subjection. They are the 'dominated spaces', the spaces of the peripheries, the margins and the marginalized, [...] in the corpo-reality of the body and mind, in sexuality and subjectivity, in individual and collective identities. (Soja, *Thirdspace* 68)

Based on this assumption, in the following examples will be given that try to illustrate how especially patriarchal structures, politics, and ideologies can be subverted through spatial action and how this offers the potential to alter social relations in society by creating visibility and representation for marginalized groups, i.e. in this case women*.

Claiming public space has always been a central aspect of feminist movements. As early as first wave feminism over a century ago, the Suffragette movement in the US and UK was accompanied by public action and highly publicized marches on the streets, in order to achieve women’s right to vote. A more recent example of how women* claim public space to this day is the performance piece “Un Violador En Tu Camino”²² created by Chilean collective *Lastesis*²³, whose aim is to stage contemporary feminist theories for public audiences (Rodríguez). It was created at the end of last year in light of the massive protests against the political and economic situation in Chile that shook the country for several weeks. The lyrics of

²² Trans. by SH: “a rapist in your path”

²³ Founded by Dafne Valdés, Paula Cometa, Sibila Sotomayor y Lea Cáceres from Valparaíso, Chile (ibid.).

the song are a direct response to the sexualized violence and fear the female protestors experienced by police and other state officials (ibid.). Said fear was consequently institutionalized and used to prevent women* from protesting. The song and its choreographed performance has quickly gone viral via social media and was adapted, partially translated and enacted by protestors throughout the world. In that way it became a powerful tool in sparking public debate on women*'s right to access public space safely regardless of time, place, and what they were wearing and a powerful tool to denunciate institutionalized patriarchal structures in societies around the world. Due to the employment of social media and its acts of self-representation, this is also a form of visual activism.

However, forms of claiming space do not always have to be voiced as loud as is the case with protest marches and viral performance pieces like the ones mentioned before. As an act to claim space and increase women*'s visibility in public space, Phadke, et.al. propose loitering as a means to simply exercise women*'s right to linger in space. Countering medial urges that women* should be safe within private space and merely maneuver public space when commuting or for a specific purpose, they propose that women* should be allowed to take risks without being questioned. They should be able to just be in public space in order to normalize their movement and to empower them. In their line of thought, it is a necessity that women* are allowed and even encouraged to take risks in order to "maximize their access to public space" (60) Because only taking risks allows for the potential to subvert "a sexist structure where women's virtue is prized over their desires or agency" (ibid.). Another more subtle form of protest in India can be observed in the feminist actions of the Blank Noise Organization initiated by Jasmeen Phataya. Blank Noise was founded in response to *Nirbhaya's* death in 2012 and aims to create a network of what they call "Action Heroines. Action Heroines. Action Theyroes; citizens and or [sic] persons taking agency to end sexual and gender based violence" (Blank Noise). Under this objective, the organization has started several campaigns. Using the hashtag #meettosleep, participants, predominantly women*, organize themselves and meet up to sleep in parks in order to fight the fear of being there alone at night. In this way, they collectively claim their right to be safe in public space. In 2023, Blank Noise plans the exhibition of clothes women* were wearing when they fell victim of sexual assault and rape in public sites of interest. The campaign *I never ask for it*, therefore, serves the purpose to end victim blaming as it is never the victim's fault no matter what they were wearing, or where/when/with whom they were when assault happened to them. This project even received the *The Visible Award* 2019, which "recognises and spotlights socially engaged art practice from across the world"(Blank Noise). Another recent example of protest in India was the formation of a human chain in Kerala in early 2019 (Küçük and Monecke) This chain was formed in protest of the treatment of female pilgrims to the Hindu temple Sabarimala. Up until 2018, women* did not have access to said holy site for the entirety of their fertile age.

The lift of the ban per law was followed by heavy protests and a general strike by Hindu nationalist groups. An estimated 5 million people participated in the human chain; it had a total length of 620 km. Nonetheless, it did not only serve as a means of protest for access to the temple and the accompanied abuse female pilgrims experience. It also serves as a means to address women's oppression and issues in all other areas of life in India.

Another way to claim space is through visual activism as an attempt to achieve self-representation. Within visual culture studies, a shift from passive to active representation has been observed in recent years. Studies of visual culture started off in the 1990s by analyzing "how identity, especially gender and sexual identity, was represented in popular culture" (Mirzoeff, *How to See the World* 289). Back then, this was primarily exercised by focusing on consumer goods, such as Barbie, and popular culture, e.g. Madonna, Star Trek, etc. However, due to the change in media use normal people can now easily and actively participate in the way the world is seen and how they represent themselves and other subjects within it. This process is also enabled and was sped up by the global network of the internet and its increasing popularity of social media use (Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*). Consequently self-representation in space and through social media also plays a significant role in contemporary protest, coining the term *visual activism*. Mirzoeff points out several movements in which this tendency can be observed. He mentions Spanish protesters' demand for self-representation in 2011 as one of the starting points for visual activism because, "the implication of 'they do not represent us' (in all the senses of that term) is that we must find ways to represent ourselves. Visual activism, from the selfie to the projection of a new concept of the 'people', and the necessity of seeing the Anthropocene, is now engaged in trying to make that change" (Mirzoeff, *How to See the World* 293). Other examples, Mirzoeff brings forth with respect to how visual activism enabled change, is the spread and employment of social media in the examples of the Arab Spring and Occupy movement in 2011. In all of these movements, there is a connection because they aimed to find ways of self-representation for "people, who participated both as individuals and as 'the people'" (Mirzoeff, *How to See the World* 258). Furthermore, the employment of visual activism made it possible for them "to look and be seen, online and in city space." (ibid.) For this, activists use tools like "smart phones, graffiti, websites, social media, demonstrations and occupations" (ibid., own emphasis).

As a tool of Visual Activism graffiti and street art are a way to actively claim space and achieve self-representation. An example for claiming space through graffiti can be found in the marking of territory between gangs in the United States. Gangs mark their territory through gang-specific symbolisms, e.g. tags (Storey). Moreover, street art is not only a form to express territoriality but also a way to create representation during protests. As part of the global participatory *Inside Out Project*, French artist JR traveled through Tunisia shortly after the revolution in 2011. He photographed ordinary Tunisians and placed their portraits in public

sites of interests that had significant importance to the revolution and where previously only portraits of former president Ben Ali dominated (Brinkley) (see appendix, fig. 6 & 7). By doing this, he aimed to achieve a representation of society and thus create an “‘inside out’ representation of Tunisia, putting the formerly invisible people into public space.” (Mirzoeff, *How to See the World* 194). Therefore, the public nature of JR’s project and its accessibility to the public contributed to the movement by emphasizing the individual people affected in the country instead of representing them as a faceless mass. Accordingly, the following chapter will look at street art as a means to create representation and (re)claim public space. Specifically, how street art can serve the purpose of overcoming gendered spatial boundaries and creating representation for women* on the streets of Delhi.

5. Street Art

Much like the rise of punk music from subcultures to mainstream consumption in the late 1970s and 1980s, street art has experienced an increase in popularity in recent years. Household names like Bristol-based artist Banksy are no longer just known to few but famous and admired around the world (Baldini 1–2). This development from subculture to popular culture comes at a time when museums are no longer the epitome of high culture but rather offer a “museum experience” to their visitors (Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* 3). Therefore, the public nature itself or artistic intervention of public space that street art embodies may be the key to its success. By exhibiting various art forms on the streets, artists make their work available not just to an educated elite but to all, especially at a time when the concept of high culture itself can be questioned (Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*). The public nature of street art and its availability to all is also the reason why it offers a lot of potential as a means of claiming space and to increase visibility for marginalized groups, here women* in India.

5.1. Defining Street Art

Defining ‘street art’ can be difficult. Magda Danysz has even gone as far as to argue that it is impossible and even problematic to define street art because of its ever-changing and continuous nature. Giving it a fixed definition would resemble an act of reduction of this art form (Dana and Danysz 12). However, Baldini counters this opinion, pointing out the necessity for at least a working definition for a cultural phenomenon like street art is (4). For Baldini, street art is an art form that is “essentially subversive” (5) in the sense that it combines both aesthetic and political value. “It is a function of its capacity to question acceptable uses of public spaces. Street artists challenge dominant spatial politics by appropriating the visible surfaces of the city through the use of colors, shapes, and witty designs that disrupt common assumptions about the appearances of the urban landscape” (Baldini 6). These criteria

mentioned in Baldini's definition seem to fit the purpose of this thesis well. However, he intentionally excludes art forms like murals²⁴ and aerosol art categorizing them as urban art (8 f.). His definition seems to revolve around the idea of illegality and legality. Aligning with this argument, these two forms serve as public art, which are "officially sanctioned and often locally negotiated with members of the communities of reference. For this reason, public art – though possibly politically significant – is not subversive" (8). While this point seems valid, this thesis argues that the murals presented in the following chapters can be interpreted as subversive even with the involvement of politics and community. Murals, particularly feminist murals, can be subversive. In the way that they indirectly question and challenge the status quo and patriarchal power structures in society, they can subvert dominant ideologies. Further, the negotiation of space and content with dominant powers of society and a potential engagement of (marginalized) communities can empower the latter by creating representation for them, while putting their issues into focus for the former.

The use of the term street art in academic and non-academic discourse is not fixed either. Different scholars have used the term both synonymously with graffiti²⁵ (Mirzoeff, *How to See the World*) or simply as an umbrella term that includes various art forms from graffiti to sculptures or stencils (Baldini 9)²⁶. Regardless of these issues of terminology, its omnipresence and aesthetics in the public sphere has an important effect on people. In this way, street art as an everyday practice (Mirzoeff, *How to See the World*) makes art accessible to all and intervenes in public space in a way that can subvert dominant ideologies.

5.2. (Feminist) Street Art in India

One of the biggest street art organizations and influences in India is the *St+art India Foundation*. This non-governmental organization was founded in 2014 by five people from interdisciplinary fields with the goal "to make public spaces more vibrant and interactive for the people who use them the most, and to make art more democratic as a medium" (Nauriyal²⁷ in Langar). While their origin can be clearly traced to social and visual activism, "they mark a significant moment in the historic timeline of the application of street art in cities: ... engagement between street artists and the government" (Langar). By engaging the public as well as political instruments, they are able to create a large platform for both international and national artists; thus, they increase the reach of street art in public space. As Akshat Nauriyal, the content

²⁴ Murals are paintings that typically cover large areas - usually entire walls. They often form an own perspective and address viewers by telling a story. Therefore, Stahl argues that murals have a tradition to politicize, instruct and educate (278).

²⁵ The oldest form of street art that goes back to the Roman Empire (Stahl). In this thesis, the term 'graffiti' will only be referred to when talking about "the traditional style of writing (tags, throw-ups, and pieces)" (Baldini 9).

²⁶ Baldini introduces street art as "a conceptual umbrella [...] for graffiti, stencil-graffiti, yarn-bombing, street culture, etc." comparing it to the relationship of literature to poetry, novel, short story etc. However, he ultimately points out that "[he] does not distinguish between graffiti and street art".

²⁷ Interview with Akshat Nauriyal, Content Director at St+Art India

director for St+Art India, admits not all of the murals created with the help of St+art India are politically motivated, granting a possibility of the purely aesthetical purpose street art can have. Nonetheless, St+art India helps to put diverse topics into the public realm, hence it fosters representation for different matters in society. St+Art India has since become both platform and catalyst for national and international artists. They even offer community workshops addressing issues such as gender diversity and overruling gender norms.

St+Art's first big project in India was a street art festival in the neighborhood Shahpur Jat, in South-Delhi. Within this fast changing residential area, 25 artists from India and other countries created their art between January and February 2014. For this, the St+Art Foundation obtained permits to create murals both by a bottom-up approach, in which they directly asked residents whether they could paint their walls, as well as through a top-down approach, in which they tried to obtain official permits from the authorities ("Shahpur Jat"; Langar). The Foundation also states that even back in 2014, "unlike in the west, street art in India didn't have any negative connotations. It didn't come attached with a sense of vandalism, mainly because the street art scene in India was still in a nascent stage" ("Shahpur Jat"). One example of the murals that were created as part of this festival is the *Rebel* mural (see fig. 4), which will be analyzed in chapter 5.3.3.

Their biggest urban intervention to this date (Langar) was the creation of the Lodhi Art District in January 2016, when 30 street artists created a variety of different murals ("Lodhi Art District"). Intended as "an open walkthrough gallery" (Nauriyal in Langar), they chose this neighborhood in South-Delhi due to its location and because as a government-owned residential area it is less susceptible for gentrification in the future. This attempt to avoid gentrification in the future is due to their aim, to make art accessible to all because:

We feel that art, at least the way it exists as an industry, has become marginalized only to a very small section of society, almost a novelty of the rich and the elite. We wanted to somehow break out of the regular gallery structure ... if you ... look at public spaces as places to experience art, then you have thousands of people crossing these areas every day, and just in terms of the reach that the artwork can have, it's tremendous, exponentially larger than what it can have in a closed environment [like in a museum]. (Nauriyal in Langar)

This shows that St+Art India is aware of the reach that street art has. They want to use this to put art into people's lives, especially those who would normally be excluded from it. For this they employ #artforall. The festival has also contributed to the enhancement of the neighborhood itself. As St+Art state, "The project built a sense of community pride, encouraged maintenance of the neighborhood, enhance [sic] its visual identity" ("Lodhi Art District").

Therefore, street art in the case of the Lodhi Art District increased the quality of life for users of this space.

As for feminist street art in India, one of the most prominent examples is *The Fearless Collective* founded by artist Shilo Shiv Suleman from Bangalore after Jyoti Singh's murder in 2012. The tragedy and brutality of Singh's death was followed by the media urging – even warning - women* to avoid public spaces to prevent a potential repetition of similar attacks. However, the media coverage of the attack led Suleman to counter this disproportionate spread of fear by going out on the streets in order to create public art. By doing this, she wanted to overcome fear in such spaces by reclaiming them and by publicly exhibiting women*'s stories (The Fearless Collective, *About Us*). As of today, the core team of the *Fearless Collective* consists of four “young feminists, artists, and activists” (ibid.). They have worked in more than ten countries (ibid.) with the aim of

reclaiming spaces, carving out public depictions of women and their significance in societies around the world ... Fearless' work is to show up in spaces of fear, isolation, and trauma and support communities as they reclaim these public spaces with the images and affirmations *they* choose (ibid., original emphasis).

In that way, the work of the collective is an active and self-proclaimed way to take back public space by increasing representation of and for women* and their issues. They try to achieve this by simply being present as well as by creating art through communal engagement. Whereby the name of the collective itself already pays tribute to Jyoti Singh's legacy as well as indicates how the collective aims to overcome threats exercised on women* in public space – fearless - Nirbhaya.

As their second project in India, *The Fearless Collective* collaborated with the NGO *Sewing New Futures* to create a mural in Lodhi Art District. *Sewing New Futures* is a project helping women* by providing them with education, healthcare, and social support as employees of their ethical and sustainable business (Sewing New Futures). Thus, they try to help break the cycle of intergenerational sex work in communities in and around Delhi. In such communities with a low socio-economic status, sex work is often forced onto adolescent girls* and women* after they have been married off at a young age. The aim of the collaboration was to increase “visibilty [of] communities that have traditionally engaged in prostitution in Najafgarh²⁸, through a participative process that sought to illuminate the blocks placed on [them] by society and by [themselves]” (The Fearless Collective, “From Your Strength, I Weave Beauty”). The collaboration took place over two days. On the first day, they held a workshop with twenty girls between seven and nineteen years old. The purpose of this first workshop

²⁸ In South-West Delhi

was to create an atmosphere of trust in order to give the girls the opportunity to speak about their individual experiences. "Many spoke of being expect [sic] to cover their bodies, their sadness, their insecurities. They expressed how they felt this creates an inability for change: 'how can we make progress if we don't talk about the things which make which create sadness [sic],' one girl asked" (ibid.). This quote shows the rare opportunity these girls* have to talk about their concerns and how rarely their problems are taken seriously. It also illustrates how they all share the mutual experience of being expected to dress and behave in a certain way, especially in public space, and thus, how this can be a limiting factor in their progress in life. On the second day, having learned the basics of street art, the girls were taken to the Lodhi Colony, where they created the mural *From Your Strength, I Weave Beauty* (see appendix, fig. 8). On each side, the mural shows a woman from the community. An older woman and a younger woman who are connected by a thread forming the word "fearless". In that way, the mural is intended to shed light on the issues of these women* and create visibility for their struggles in public space. Through the representation it creates and the communities' active involvement in its creation, it serves as a means of empowerment to them.

Only recently a group of women* have resorted to peaceful sit-in demonstrations to protest the *Citizenship Amendment Bill* implemented by the current Hindu-nationalist government, which fosters inequality towards Muslims. In light of the accompanying riots all over India, "Shaheen Bagh, a middle-class Muslim-majority neighborhood in South Delhi" (Raj) became the hub for this movement which is thousands of women* strong. It has since become a multi-generational space of peaceful resistance and protests for equal rights for all groups of the Indian society. As part of their protest they engage in hunger-strikes as well as providing a platform for "a rotating cast of protesters [who] reads poems of resistance and talks about togetherness, freedom and peace" (Raj). In an act of solidarity with the women* in Shaheen Bagh, the Fearless Collective has joined their protest by creating a mural (see appendix, fig. 9). In an Instagram post from February 26, they state alongside an image of said mural:

In this temporary (yet immortal) space @fearlesscollective joined these women to create a permanent monument to their resistance. Painted in shades of Laal, Gulaab, and Gold are two women- the younger girl Khushboo (fragrance) holds the Constitution of India firmly in her hand. She is six years old and has come to the protests everyday. Beside her, an elder sits fire-eyed and immovable with a falcon. They are here fighting for a collective imagination- an imagination of our country that was invoked into a reality 72 years ago. (Shilo Shiv Suleman)

As this example shows, protest and street art can go hand in hand, and in this amplify their mutual effects. By providing a mural of this temporary way to claim space, they do not only

create representation for this cause but also help to elevate these women*'s claims for equality in other contexts.

5.3. On the Streets of Delhi

The following subchapter focuses on two specific examples of feminist street art in Delhi and how they potentially influence public space. For this purpose, two murals will be analyzed that I have encountered during my stay there, on the basis of Barthes' idea of myth. The analysis follows the methodology he used in deciphering the example of the Panzani ad (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 33-35) and that of a black French soldier on a magazine cover (Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags* 95-112). In order to see in what way feminist street art claims public space in Delhi, I will add some viewer's interpretations and receptions of both murals as this helps to understand how space and everyday practices are perceived and altered in the viewers' reception. For this purpose, I will analyze some of the on-site conversations I had with pedestrians in front of the murals by applying Ross' revisited typology of Hall's *Encoding/Decoding* of meaning in discourse.

5.3.1. Methodological Approach

From October to December 2018, I went to India as part of the project *Masala Modernities*, an exchange program between Potsdam University and Delhi University. Having written an essay about gendered spaces as part of everyday life in India, the general topic of this thesis was already established from the beginning. My initial research interest and approach was also already focused on possible ways to transgress the boundaries of such gendered spaces upon arrival in Delhi. However, the interest in (feminist) street art as a form or way to (re)claim²⁹ space developed as the result of wandering through the city and experiencing these gendered spaces myself.

Street art is omnipresent in the cityscape of Delhi. It comes in all forms and addresses topics such as environmentalism, national heritage, and feminism – to name only a few. Feminist street art in this sense means various forms of representation of women* and women*'s issues in public space, e.g. domestic violence, sexual assault, gender (in)equality, (traditional) gender roles etc. While certainly not all street art which addresses such issues must be intentionally feminist by its producers and some viewers, due to its subversive nature the act of creating representation of marginalized groups in public space qualifies as a feminist act in itself in my interpretation of said murals.

²⁹ 're' in parentheses because it suggests a certain level of repetition. However, there is a lack of information as to whether and, if so, in which way women* have possessed unlimited access to public space in India at any point prior to recent debate on gendered spatiality.

I discovered the first mural *Female Feticide* by chance when I was on my way to university in November 2018. It was created as part of a competition, and covers an entire wall separating the department of zoology from general public access³⁰. The competition took place little more than a month prior to the interviews, which were held in December 2018, so these murals were relatively new (interview with P13, 04:20). From said competition, three murals spoke to me because they seem to address women's issues and therefore, I classified them as feminist. Ultimately the mural *Female Feticide* (see chapter 5.3.2., fig. 4) because the words used to underline its message were in English and not Hindi, unlike the mural *Victim/Goddess* (see appendix, fig. 10). Moreover, it seemed to offer more potential for interpretation than the mural *Violence* (see appendix, fig. 11) for me personally. The location of *Female Feticide* is next to a busy street (see appendix, fig. 12). The constant honking and air-pollution of the traffic does not invite pedestrians to linger and admire the artwork along the street. Most people passing-by are commuters – like students and faculty staff on their way to or from work, motorized and bicycle *rikshas* and cars maneuvering the city for work and leisure. Across the street a few food stalls offer snacks and refreshments, but the general atmosphere is rather restless and hectic.

The process of finding the second mural was as different from the first as is its location. I found artist and scholar Isha Yadav by searching Instagram using the hashtags #streetartdelhi and #feministstreetart. I found a picture of her painting a “clit” (interview with Isha Yadav, 05:40, see appendix, fig. 13) on a wall. This painting is her answer to the middle finger, which she interprets as a phallic symbol for “fuck you” (interview with Isha Yadav, 05:44), an idea she got from an Indian television show (ibid. 6:00). I reached out to Isha via the direct message function on Instagram and she kindly responded to my request so we set a meeting for an interview at Ambedkar University, Delhi, for the 30th of November. The interview lasted 12:21 minutes and took place in a rather rushed manner because Isha was in between classes. However, it provided me with useful insights on her art and her way of performing art on the street. During the interview, Isha's account of painting her first mural *Rebel* in Shahpur Jat, South Delhi, as part of the festival organized by the St+Art Collective in 2014, caught my attention. I only had the rough location next to a bakery, which cannot be found on Google Maps, and a picture of said mural when I went to the neighborhood to search for it in early December. After unsuccessfully asking riksha drivers and several pedestrians, I finally found a barista in a coffee shop, who recognized the mural and took me right to it through a maze of alleys and narrow streets. The mural is located in a small alley way next to a quiet street at the edge of Shahpur Jat and painted on the side of a building (see appendix, fig. 14).

³⁰ The campuses or faculty areas are usually guarded compounds/enclosures, regulating/restricting access to the general public – a remnant of colonial rule and its architectural plans.

The area is residential, quiet and not many people pass-by – a stark contrast to the location of the first mural.

The naming of the two murals for further analysis can already be considered as an act of interpretation in itself and an individual attribution of meaning. Therefore, by naming the first Mural *Female Feticide*, I suggest my interpretation of the message of said mural. As the follow-up conversations I held with pedestrians show, my interpretation correlates with their interpretation of the same mural. Nevertheless, I didn't name the second mural completely unbiased. This mural was discovered after talking to its artist Isha Yadav, who referred to it as 'rebel' several times during our interview. Therefore, my interpretation and the name I chose in this thesis were heavily influenced by the artist's intention and preferred reading of her work yet also reaffirmed by my interpretation that will be pointed out in 5.3.3.

In addition to a semiotic analysis of the murals themselves and an observation of the way people reacted to them, I wanted to find out how people were interpreting them. For this purpose, I held conversations in front of each mural and asked passers-by a set of questions to find out if and how the murals affect their viewers; thus, whether the murals' representation of women's issues facilitates processes of claiming space that goes beyond the (potentially female) artist's physical presence in public space while creating them. I held fifteen interviews in total (full list in appendix) on four consecutive days in early December. Out of those fifteen, nine were held in front of Mural A and six in front of Mural B. This difference in quantity reflects that it was harder to find people in the location of Mural B because fewer people passed by and some who did were unable to speak English in this residential area. The language barrier also motivated me to ask a friend who studies in the German department at Delhi University to accompany me for a day. He helped to translate from Hindi to English. As he is not an official interpreter and had no prior knowledge of the topic, it is granted that some information may have gotten lost in translation. However, the step of asking him to help me was still a good decision because it opened up deeper conversations with people that I wouldn't have been able to communicate with otherwise.

5.3.2. Mural A: *Female Feticide*Figure 3: *Female Feticide*, DU Campus, Nov 2018

Mural A (see figure 3) shows a multitude of signs on the first level, the language – the order of which does not matter because they are not linear (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*). The most obvious and most suggesting sign that immediately draws the viewers' attention is the phrase "There Is No He Without *She*" putting emphasis on the 'she' by writing it in black unlike the other words, which are written in red. The phrase serves as the caption of the image and consists of verbal and pictorial signs. The code that links signifier and signified here is the English language and, therefore, the knowledge required to decipher it is the ability to speak and read English. While many Indians possess this ability to a certain degree, Hindi is still the dominant language spoken in Northern India. English is usually used in more formal contexts and especially in education, a common feature in postcolonial nations (Schneider). Thus, this linguistic sign cannot be understood by all pedestrians but only those with a certain level of education. On a denotational level we can identify the phrase itself "There Is No He Without *She*". The phrase itself is grammatically incorrect as it would have to be "her" instead of "she"; therefore, the employment of "she" here may be used to highlight the connection between the two binaries he/she because on a purely observational level "he" is part of "sHe"³¹. Therefore, on a connotation level these binaries he/she, male/female, men/women, seem to presuppose each other as one cannot exist without the other. Hence, as a second order interpretation of

³¹ Although this might be a coincidence because they are not connected in any historic-linguistic way (personal correspondence Patrick Kühmstedt).

this sign, the message of the myth could suggest that a balance between those two binaries needs to be established.

Other pictorial signs include, the dark, faceless silhouettes of pregnant women* framing the mural. They seem to look down and hold their pregnant bellies as if they were sad (connotation). Another sign for the first level of the myth can be found directly in the center of the mural. We can see a baby girl surrounded by a yellow circle. The yellow circle (denotation) could be interpreted as a light or maybe a halo (connotation, sign I-order, option 1) surrounding her and thus it gives her an angelic feature or suggesting enlightenment. Because the interpretation process is not linear but signs will be interpreted at the same time, with regards to the pregnant women* this sign could also suggest another connotation. With regard to pregnancy and birth, it could be interpreted as a womb (connotation, sign I-order, option 2) out of which she is trying to climb because she wants to be born (sign II-order). However, there is also a sharp object – a sword or syringe – thrust into the yellow circle and a lot of red paint dripping down from it. This could signify blood and consequently maybe even death. Beneath the child, an arm comes out of the yellow circle holding a paint brush from which red paint (signifier)/blood (signified) is dropping down again. This evokes the connotation of painting a brighter future for girls. According to Barthes, the aforementioned set of signs now become the signifier of the second order sign. Their multitude suggests the signified of the myth to be female feticide, which draws on knowledge surrounding this practice as introduced in chapter 2.2. Therefore, all the aforementioned signs and forms suggest the message of the myth to emphasize that female feticide is a gender-based form of violence which contributes to inequality and imbalance in personal lives and Indian society as a whole.

At last, the use of color in this mural catches the recipients' attention and can be read it as another sign. Because "[i]n Hinduism, colours play a very important role and have deep significance, transcending purely decorative values. Hindu artists use colours on the deities and their dresses signifying their qualities." (Sanskriti Magazine) The dominant colors here are black in the form of the child's hair color and particularly the silhouettes of the pregnant women*, red for the blood, writing and the women*'s hair color and yellow which surrounds the child in the center of the image. Additionally white makes up the background but should not be seen as a mere backdrop. Against the grey background of the surrounding wall, wall seems to be arguably deliberately used by the painter to achieve contrast. The approach of interpreting the color-use as a sign requires the knowledge of the significance of different colors in Hinduism, which someone with a different cultural and religious background and no prior knowledge of this issue like myself will generally fail to grasp at first glance. The colors are the signifiers of this sign, the signified I will try to explain to the best of my knowledge by granting the possibility of misunderstandings due to my inevitable aberrant decoding. White, black and

red could be interpreted in the way of the three Gunas³² - "three qualities that comprise and provide a balance to the natural world" (Sanskriti Magazine), each of which is represented by one of the colors. White represents Sattva, which stands for the concepts of spirituality, "light & purity, truth, desirelessness, wisdom, peace and calm". Rajas signified by red for the "worldly, intermediate, passion&desire, ambition, action and restlessness." And black for Tamas signifying "evil, dark[ness], inertia, indifference, ignorance, laziness." (Theosophy) The Gunas are attributed to the "diversity of nature and each of them can be found in humans; however, to varying degrees because their dominance depends on each individual's spirituality (Jayaram V). In the context of reproduction and the creation of life, their "individual souls come under their influence and begin their onward journey into the world of matter and death" (ibid.).

In conclusion, all of these aforementioned signs, highlight that female feticide is not just an illegal and immoral practice but also destroys the balance in society – politically, individually and spiritually. Accordingly, female feticide will affect every Indian person in the future and needs to stop. Therefore, the mural contributes to making this issue present in pedestrians' minds by conveying its message clearly through the employment of rich symbolisms.

5.3.3. Mural B: *Rebel*



Figure 4: *Rebel* by Isha Yadav

The analysis of this second mural (see figure 4) will be slightly different from the first because I heard the thoughts of the artist on its production before even seeing the mural.

³² Which are explained in the Bhagavadgita (Jayaram V).

Therefore, I had them in mind when I saw it for the first time and was never fully unbiased in the interpretation process. Furthermore, some of these signs are impossible for me to decode due to my lack of knowledge of Indian culture; thus, my aberrant decoding renders me unable to grasp the full potential of the meaning of this mural. The target group, which is Indians, will be able to decipher the signs based on their own experience and knowledge of and within their culture and its accompanying gender roles. I will approach this analysis as a duality of my own interpretation and the description of the mural and its preferred reading as suggested by its producer, Isha Yadav. While there are certainly uncountable possible interpretations depending on the various contexts of its viewers, I will present three connected but slightly different interpretations of the *Rebel* mural's message.

The first way I would read this mural is as a representation of the duality of modernity and tradition in Indian society or even women* rebelling against traditional ideas of fashion and beauty (sign II). The denoted message of the object language (II) is: *an Indian woman wearing a saree, bindi, nose-ring, make-up, with short, purple hair, a tattoo and a pierced eyebrow, who also smokes*. The image draws on knowledge about Indian dress-codes and concepts of popular culture. The clothing and fashion choice of the saree, bindi and nose-ring (denotation) connote the wider cultural meaning of 'tradition'. Simultaneously, the eye-brow piercing, tattoo, short and colored hair, make-up and arguably even the cigarette would then function as a connotation for the concept of 'modernity'. So the combination of tradition and modernity in one person is the first set of signs. At the last stage of the myth, two possible connotations come to mind. For one, the mural expresses the message that modern Indian women* can combine or mix-and-match aspects of tradition and modernity as they please and meanwhile express their own individuality, in any way they like. Moreover, they can also challenge the traditionalist or patriarchal concepts of how an Indian woman* should be and what she should look like, e.g. tradition-obeying, passive, submissive, beautiful in the heteronormative sense with long hair etc. This interpretation echoes the concept of the New Indian Woman as introduced in 2.2.

The second interpretation, relies mainly on the interview with the mural's artist. Hence, this interpretation is in line with the author's preferred reading of her work. The set of signs pointed out in the first interpretation still have validity for the second interpretation. However, Isha Yadav emphasizes particular signs and attributes a slightly different connotational meaning to them. For her, the mural shows, "an Indian woman, who has cut her hair, who has changed the hair color to pink and purple. is wearing the traditional nose ring but on the opposite site, she is wearing a red saree but also a dragon tattoo is peaking out ... she has her eyebrows pierced and she is smoking a *Beerl*" (personal interview, 02:58-3:23). Some of the signs she points out, I read differently in my first interpretation. For example, the cigarette, *Beerl*, is actually a custom at Indian weddings, traditionally smoked by men* only (03:24).

Therefore, this hints at the concept of 'traditionalism' but also 'rebelliousness' because the woman* in the mural defies gender rules by smoking it (Sign II). As becomes apparent through this particular sign, not all signs can be read as something self-evident in the second order analysis of the myth. Other signs show traditional customs but put a twist on them. For example, the nose-ring is traditionally worn on the left but displayed as worn on the right in the mural. The artist herself called this mural *Rebel* because for her it "is basically a rebellious image of an Indian bride" (personal interview, 03:13-03:18). This is the overall meaning and message the artist would like the mural to convey; however, this connection is likely to be less obvious to pedestrians as the woman* does not bear many signs that would suggest that she is a bride. For example, only a small part of her saree, the Palla, is red, which is the color traditionally worn by Indian brides at their weddings.

The last interpretation is probably the least obvious and draws heavily on my own experience, knowledge and focus point, i.e. the topic of this thesis - gendered spaces and claiming public space. All of the above still applies to the rebellious Indian woman* represented in the mural but I would like to add further signs. Her eyes are directed at the viewer and she is not smiling, which suggests determination and fearlessness, and adds to the notion of the rebel. Furthermore, there are silhouettes of skyscrapers in the upper left-hand corner and the bottom right-hand one. Some of the windows are lit; some are just dark. They appear as a backdrop, significantly smaller than the Indian woman*, who catches most of the viewers' attention. Their paint is running down. For me, they represent the city and suggest a level of anonymity and obscurity, even darkness and insecurity. This can be experienced in urban spaces especially at certain times like the night when only some of the houses and streets are lit. As for the message this mural sends, the woman* is not just a rebel by dressing and expressing herself the way she does, but also because of the urban context in which she is represented. The *Rebel* does not adhere to the common dressing rules for women* in order to stay safe in the public spaces of the city. Her presence and appearance dominate the scene and accordingly she defies fear and patriarchal restraints.

5.3.4. Decoding Conversations with Pedestrians

In order to look at the potential influence of feminist street art in public space further, this subsequent sequence highlights some of the receptions of the viewers of the murals. Where applicable, Stuart Hall's three decoding positions as introduced in chapter 3.2. will be used to structure some of the responses and interpretations. Further, for the purpose of the analysis³³,

³³ This analysis is not based on standards of analyzing empirical research in the field of geography. It merely serves the purpose to give another perspective for the dimensions in which street art influences public space and potentially subverts dominant ideologies.

the categories female/male³⁴ indicated by the pronouns she/he. They are used to indicate a fraction of the respective position the interviewees hold in society and which accordingly influences their individual interpretation process of the particular mural.

While nine interviews were held in front of the mural, these do not provide a wide range of interpretations, which makes it difficult to decode them by applying Hall's decoding positions. Except for P3, for whom the message of the mural is that: "The male sections should respect the women's. ... this mural indicates crime" (0:43-0:49), all others identified the message of Mural A to be female feticide. In addition to this more or less direct assumption, they were mainly providing background information about the topic and their own experiences with it, as well as attitudes towards this issue. This somehow uniform approach to the issue of female feticide can also probably be linked to the urban and academic context in which the mural is set. All of the interviewees were affiliated in some ways with the university; therefore, they represent an educated elite within Indian society. Furthermore, it is not entirely clear, on which position the encoded message falls in the first place. The ideologies surrounding female feticide all argue against this practice. It may be granted that a dominant-hegemonic approach to the issue will probably more likely focus on the aspects concerning society at large and the consequences of an imbalanced sex ratio in the future; however, this is not clearly identifiable in any of the interviews. In line with this thought, an oppositional decoding position may focus on the underlying patriarchal structures and gender inequality that cause this practice. Accordingly most responses fall on a spectrum of negotiated approaches to the matter.

The analysis of the conversations with pedestrians in front of the *Rebel* mural offers more potential for an in-depth analysis, because it triggered a greater variety of interpretations. As already mentioned numerously, a producer's preferred reading of their work, does not reflect its true meaning because such a concept in itself does not exist. However, the artist's intention and the way she included different signs in her work, proves useful at this stage because it actually reflects the encoding process to a certain extent. In this way and due to the potentially subversive nature of street art that can but does not necessarily aim to please purely aesthetic pleasure, the mural can be interpreted as an oppositional encoding. The woman* portrayed in the mural is rebelling against heteronormative ideas and concepts of the Indian woman*, therefore the encoded message is a kind of radical³⁵ text because it is opposing patriarchal gender roles. Even though, the artist refers to the mural as a "rebellious bride" (Interview with

³⁴ In this chapter, the categories male and female are used to describe pedestrians I had conversations with. As the hectic, impersonal interview settings did not provide the atmosphere of enabling a self-identification of their gender identity, the categories used here are assigned on the basis of whether a person was perceived as either of these binary categories by me.

³⁵ As per Ross' terminology

Isha Yadav, 03:15) none of the interviewees connected the painting of the Indian woman*, as whom all six identified her, to a wedding.

In total, six interview-type conversations were held in front of the mural. However, P7 had never noticed this particular mural before and stated that it does not have any effect on him. He further did not provide any interpretation so there is no grounds for further analysis. P6 did not provide an interpretation of the mural's meaning either. Yet, she stated that she appreciates all the street art around the neighborhood, including this one, for their beauty and colors. To her street art merely serves as something that increases the aesthetics of the neighborhood and makes her happy (P6, 04:16). Therefore, neither of these conversations qualify for further analysis as they did not provide their interpretation of the mural's message.

As for the other four conversations, all three decoding positions proposed by Hall can be identified. P5's interpretation reflects a dominant-hegemonic decoding position because during our conversation he seemed taken aback by the image and confused as to what the message of this mural may be. He identifies the mural as an Indian woman but to him "This is looking so scary ... Something is wrong. She is smoking. ... She's little ... upset or what? ... Violence is there, something like that ... a little depressed" (00:50-01:56). Unfortunately, he would not give reasons or point out particular signs other than the *Beeri* that lead to his feeling of unease when looking at the image. Furthermore, he was particularly interested in who painted this mural and why, looking for either validation of his interpretation by the producer's intentional meaning or maybe to validate the mural through the producer's status. With a focus on his unease, it seems as if this radical depiction of an Indian woman* is so far removed from his own experience that it makes him feel uncomfortable and hard for him to decipher the purpose of such a mural at all. Therefore, the oppositional encoding of this message is neutralized due to his dominant-hegemonic decoding position.

There are also two negotiated decoding positions. P8's first reaction was to point out that "Womens [sic] are strong actually" (02:47) and that as an "Indian woman [the *Rebel*] is strong. She is very brave" (03:30). P8 based this assumption on examples of Indian women* she knows in her personal environment, hence, her own experience lead her to this interpretation. However, once she becomes aware that the woman* in the image is smoking, her attitude changes. She describes this as follows:

P8: "She is wearing a saree and a nose-ring and smokes a cigarette. That is very bad. I don't think this is correct [sic] image of an Indian woman. ... Because, you know a cigarette is not good for health. ... [Hindi translation: for everyone that is harmful] she is a *proper* Indian woman, she is smoking a cigarette. Not a good thing. ... It sends the wrong message. For women especially. ..."

SH: "Why especially for women?"

P8: "Well for everyone but woman is like married [...] very harmful for childrens [sic] so that's why not good for woman [sic]." (6:50-8:35)

P8's shift in interpretation is due to the fact that she did not recognize the *Beerī* as such in the beginning. However, due to the fact that she is a personal trainer in a gym, her own experience and life choices amplify her aversion to this particular sign. While in the beginning she saw this mural as a representation of "a strong Indian woman", she ended up criticizing the overall message that smoking is bad. Here, she particularly emphasizes that it is bad for anyone but especially for women* as wives and mothers. Hence, in her criticism of the mural's message, she resorts back to the patriarchal gender-roles this mural's encoding position tried to subvert.

Another example for a negotiated decoding position is P9's response to the mural, in which he goes back and forth between patriarchal gender-roles and more liberal revisions of them.

P9: "Picture is beautiful but she is smoking"

SH: "Why but?" [Translation]

P9: "Indian looking, hairstyle is good ... She looks like a modern Indian woman ... picture is really awesome and beautiful but ... when the cigarette is removed it would be more beautiful. ... It would be fine if she were smoking and wearing a jeans and T-shirt because she would be an Indian girl but now she is wearing a saree, representing Indian woman."

SH: "And Indian women are not supposed to smoke?"

P9: "there is nothing [incomprehensible] for girls and men and this is only what we want the woman is [incomprehensible] and for men also."

SH: "So women can smoke only not when they are dressing traditionally?"

P9 "because of our culture we don't expect that the Indian woman is supposed to smoke ... but [I have] also the opinion that this is the modernization so it is no problem now. ... because we boys also smoke ... so who are we to stop them? Because we are also smoking they have the right to smoke also." (01:35-6:55)

As this short transcript of his interview shows, he is going back and forth between his original impulse to deem smoking as something unacceptable for a traditionally clothed Indian women* and the acceptance that women* can in fact smoke *now*. This shows how he negotiates the mural's meaning in his interpretation his process based on dominant-hegemonic, i.e. patriarchal, ideologies and ideologies of progress. While he appreciates the unconventional hairstyle, the sign of the saree in combination with the sign of the *Beerī* poses a dilemma that he tries to resolve by revaluating his own attitude towards women* who smoke. However, it is not clear, whether the final reconsideration of his gender-based bias on smoking is due to his own reflective process on the matter or whether my numerous questions lead him to assume

that this is what I wanted to hear. While these assumptions of what a woman* can or cannot do are re-evaluated and somehow overruled in P9's thought-process, in the next step of his interpretation he resorts back to heteronormative ideas of this particular woman*. In a way he even objectifies her as something beautiful that he wants to possess through marriage:

P9 "if she is [sic] a real girl, I would propose [to] her ... If I marry my partner ... I would like to *have* a kind of girl like this."

SH: "Why?"

P9: "Because she is *beautiful*." (07:12-08:50)

The idea of marrying the representation of a woman* who embodies all the things he reads into the mural, is also enhanced by his interpretation that "this picture presents Indian culture and Western culture combined" (8:40), which seems to be an aspect of high value to him from his particular position in society. Hence, he also implements the concept of the 'New Indian Woman'* in his interpretation. Moreover, this can also be understood as a marker for his pride in India being a vital part of globalization because he identifies the overall message (myth) of this mural as "industrialization" (P9, 10:55). Which means for him that "our culture is also going the flow and we don't stop here, we have to move on" (11:15-11:22).

An oppositional decoding position can be identified in P4's interpretation because it is agreeing with the mural's portrayal of an Indian woman* as opposed to the dominant-hegemonic ideologies surrounding what an Indian woman* should look and behave like. Her initial response to the mural is:

P4: "The woman is Indian and she is holding a joint in her mouth ... and you don't usually see that so it's working against stereotypes because people mostly judge women when they smoke or anything ... and she is wearing Indian clothes so I think, it's very creative like that. ... And she has a tattoo also and she is wearing a saree. In India when you smoke a joint or you have joint people judge you too yeah." (00:25-01:08)

Similarly to P9, P4 points out the sign of the traditional Indian clothing, i.e. the saree, in combination with the *Beeri* and the tattoo. However, unlike P9, to her this combination does not create confusion but actually makes her acknowledge the creative potential of this mural even more because it counters gender-based stereotypes. In a way, this interpretation also reflects how from her position as a young, modern, liberal Indian woman*³⁶, she appreciates

³⁶ This is a subjective assessment based on her appearance and the way she presented herself. She was also accompanied by a professional photographer who was taking pictures of her in front the mural after our conversation.

the representation the mural creates for this particular group in society. As for the overall message of the mural and how it makes her feel, she points out:

P4: "It is basically breaking stereotypes. That a woman can do anything a man can. ... It makes me feel *empowered* for sure. [...] Because if a man was doing it, it would be too normal here. But it is woman doing it. She is smoking. She has a tattoo. And she is wearing the traditional Indian dress. So you don't normally see it here." (1:45-2:10)

For P4, the *Rebel* mural succeeds in the subversion of patriarchal gender-roles because it creates representation. Through this, she feels "empowered" in the way that women* can do anything men can and should be allowed to in Indian society. Therefore, her interpretation is in opposition to the dominant-hegemonic ideologies but in agreement with the oppositional text's encoding position.

6. Discussion and Reflection

6.1. Discussion of Findings

According to Sturken and Cartwright, there are other elements that produce meaning in addition to the producer and the message of the image itself. First, the codes and conventions that structure the images; which generally is that they both address women* in society. Mural A focuses on the issue of female feticide, and indirectly suggest, what the lack of women* will mean for future generations and thus the Indian society as a whole. Mural B implies a certain struggle of traditional conceptualizations, customs and expectations of/for the Indian woman* deeply rooted in patriarchal hierarchies with modern and self-fulfilling ideas of individuality. Second, the viewers, some of which we have had a closer look at in chapter 5.3.4. And third, the context, in which the images are presented to their viewers, i.e. generally in public/on the streets. On a more specific note, this would mean the specific locations, their atmosphere and the interview situation as other contributing factors to how viewers have given meanings to the images on these specific days and in these specific settings. In addition to that, for the presented examples of the conversations with pedestrians, it would also make sense to add the dimension of acceptability at least when presenting one's own interpretation to another person, in this case me. Most of the interviews in front of mural A responded to the message of *Female Feticide* with objection; however, it is unclear whether this objection was voiced because it is what society at large expects, especially from educated people like the interview partners. Moreover, as already pointed out, the back and forth between P9's responses to mural B with regard to gender roles and whether women should smoke, it is unclear whether these responses truly reflected his thought process or whether they were just meant to stop the interviewer's questioning.

The spatial practice street art alters public space in numerous ways. Firstly, the murals enhance the cityscape with their pure aesthetics as was appreciatively pointed out by some of the pedestrians. Secondly, artists “being” in public space to create art work that is available to all, already influences public space in a way to become more inclusive. This effect of just “being” on the streets is particularly important if those artists are women* who help shape this male-dominated space with an art form whose scene is also mainly male-dominated. However, once the street art stands for itself, it certainly acts in favor of representation but does not necessarily alter thought processes in its viewers. To some extent, this is reflected in the interpretations that were presented in 5.3.4. Various factors could be a reason for this. For one, some pedestrians do not consciously look at the artwork but just perceive it as background or as something that is just beautiful. Other than that, patriarchal thought structures are so deeply rooted and naturalized in viewers’ thought processes that interpretations will likely be read in a way that supports dominant-hegemonic ideologies to some extent, e.g. P9’s objectification of the image of the woman* in the *Rebel* mural.

As Mirzoeff has pointed out, the internet and social media play an increasingly important role for (self-)representation, particularly as part of visual activism. While street art itself can already create representation for marginalized people in public space, the example of the *Fearless Collective* shows how the use of social media can increase the reach of protests like the sit-in currently happening in Shaheen Bagh. Moreover, as the methodological approach of this thesis shows, the systematic use of hashtags has also immensely helped to find artists and artwork, as well as aided to reach out to them for interview purposes. In this way, social media and the internet also contribute to make feminist claims heard around the world and overcome space.

6.2. Reflection

Despite the aim of intersectionality, this thesis does not fully grasp all of these aspects. Neither race, caste, class, nor education are part of an in-depth discussion because these categories in themselves are very complex – particularly in India. However, both the literature used and the artist Isha Yadav herself suggest the importance of these components as essential to understand gendered spaces and street art in India. When creating art in the streets, Isha has been approached by pedestrians several times questioning what she was doing. She claims that her class status and education has helped to convince these people that she had a right to be there and that her work was legal. However, due to the complexity of these categories, it would have gone beyond the scope of this thesis and its methodology to try and cover them sufficiently. Furthermore, even though the original aim was to include gender on a spectrum, it was not possible to grasp the entirety of gender as a societal construct within this thesis. Despite the intention of inclusivity, I am aware that it does not work as simply

as adding a '*' to 'womxn' as the experiences and spatial vulnerabilities of trans-women* and non-binary people are arguably similar yet also distinctly different to that of cis-women*.

As intersectionality and a lack thereof was already addressed, there is no way around reflecting my own appearance and identity as a contributing factor to the research process. I am a cis-woman who, even though attempting to dress culturally conscious, is perceived as someone heteronormatively feminine. Furthermore, I am particularly aware of being a white feminist. Thus, I argue from a position of privilege and am perceived as such in public. Having been born and raised in Germany, my different cultural and religious background has undeniably influenced and shaped my view of the world and the social processes within it. Therefore, this thesis is written from my point of view and own experience as a white woman* and feminist in India. Therefore, I hope, I am not imposing my perspective on this topic as the truth or the Western way as superior in any way. While I was trying to treat the topic as sensitively as possible due to my appreciation and respect for Indian culture, my perspective on gendered spaces in India will always be that of an outsider who cannot fully understand and evaluate its full complexity. Accordingly, I would be interested to know how a feminist of color or an Indian feminist would have approached this research or whether this topic is worth researching for them at all.

As a geography student, I have conducted a number of interviews throughout my studies. However, it was never as easy to start conversations with people or find interview partners as it was in front of the murals in Delhi. This might be in part because Indian culture seems more open and welcoming towards strangers than is the case in German culture, where people tend to stick to themselves - especially in public space and even more so in cities. And it may be partly due to my aforementioned appearance and status of privilege. Some people approached me purely because they observed me talking to people, were curious to know what I was doing and saw an opportunity to ask me questions about my experience in India. Consequently, I was also asked for my telephone number or social media contact - two men even asked for coffee dates after the interviews. Therefore, on occasion I felt that the line between me as a researcher and me as private person got as blurry as Paul and Raju suggest the boundary of public and private space in India to be.

Another aspect to reflect upon in the context of the research methodology, is my (cis-male) friend's presence as a translator for some of the interviews. His presence as a man* probably influenced the interview situation not only in a linguistic way but also because his different status and identity may have influenced the responses of the pedestrians due to internalized processes – both positively and negatively. Moreover, the process of translation can already be considered as an act of interpretation in itself because his wording and the way he asked questions is possibly different from the way I would have. Moreover some things may have

gotten lost in translation because he did not regard them as important – something I won't be able to proof because I don't speak Hindi.

Furthermore, I cut off the process of conducting interviews after only having done 15 because, at the time in late 2018, it felt like I was not getting any new information. Many participants went directly into the message even when asked about emotions evoked by the stylistic means used in the mural. Particularly for Mural A, each person kept on explaining the dominant message, i.e. Female Feticide, and their (honest or pretend) attitude and experience towards that instead of addressing the mural as such as much. The refocusing of my approach to the conversations by applying Hall's encoding/decoding model was a later decision; therefore, the interviews would certainly have been conducted differently and with a different set of questions at this moment in time and research. Nevertheless, they still serve their purpose as a good first approach towards this topic, even though they may not be as representative as empirical research normally needs to be.

7. Conclusion

On the basis of the concepts *space* and *gender* as social constructs, this thesis provided an overview of the ways in which particular spaces are gendered. Respectively, the argument of this thesis shows how gendered spaces serve as an instrument of power to enable dominant groups in society to reaffirm their position. As illustrated, India provides a variety of ways in which public spaces are gendered and how these gendered spaces thus aid patriarchal hierarchies and gender stratification. Old and new conceptualizations of how an Indian woman* should behave and present herself in public space, aid to enforce gender-bias and patriarchal gender roles further. Additionally, issues like gender-based violence and the notion of honor and respectability also play an important role as to how gendered spaces restrict women*'s movement in public spaces.

As examples like Lastesis in Chile and Blank Noise in India show, feminist movements around the world actively reclaim public space to question the status quo, create visibility for women* and demand equal rights. By exercising their right to the city, these movements give urgency to matters of gender equality and shed a light on gender-based violence. As another form of protest, visual activism also aids these kinds of protest movements by enabling self-representation for individuals, groups, and their claims. In this, the internet and social media have been highly influential. As a tool for visual activism, street art exhibits great potential to subvert dominant structures. Therefore, with a focus on women*'s demand to be equal users of public space, especially feminist street art provides a way to create representation for women*'s issues in public space.

In this way, the feminist street art collective *Fearless* is a good example for the way in which feminist street art can facilitate processes of claiming space. As was pointed out in the example of the creation of the mural *From Your Strength, I Weave Beauty*, their communal approach gives a voice to marginalized groups of society, i.e. in this case women* with a low socio-economic status. In this, they help to empower these women* to embrace their right to claim public, urban space. However, not all feminist street art necessarily achieves this process to the same extent. While both of the murals introduced in chapter 5.3. certainly create representation for women* and their issues, the viewers of these murals do not necessarily take away the same sense of empowerment. As meaning is always produced in the process of interpretation, individual knowledge, experience, and a certain degree of awareness with regards to gender inequality is necessary to further feminist ideas in the viewers' interpretation. Because patriarchal hierarchies and their effects are naturalized, they are also embedded and intertwined in the production of meaning. In this way, some feminist murals can even emphasize underlying gender bias and heteronormative thoughts. Therefore, the initial thesis that feminist street art facilitates processes of claiming space only proves to be partially true. The extent of these processes aided by feminist street art would require further research.

Overall, this thesis shows a variety of ways in which feminist street art aims to create access and to subvert dominant ideologies. This movement of visual activism through street art has only just begun and exciting times lie ahead. To conclude with the words of the *Fearless* collective: "We are dreaming of women on the streets, brushes in their hands, facilitating critical social justice conversations with communities, transforming it into art and claiming public space" (The Fearless Collective, *About Us*). Because, only when women* have equal access to all spaces at all times and for all purposes, gender stratification can be abolished and equality in society will be achieved.

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Figure 3:

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Figure 4:

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Figure 7:

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Figure 8:

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Figure 9:

Hesse, Sandra. *Victim/Goddess*, own picture, Delhi University campus, Nov 2018.

Figure 10:

Hesse, Sandra. *Stop Violence*. Own picture, Delhi University campus, Nov 2018.

Figure 11:

Hesse, Sandra. Location of the Female Feticide Mural. Own picture, Delhi University campus, Dec 2018.

Figure 12:

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Figure 13:

Hesse, Sandra. Location of the Rebel Mural. Shahpur Jat, 06 Dec 2018.

Appendix

Interviews (including notes and relevant transcriptions)

All interviews/conversations were held on location in Delhi and recorded with the standard recording App of the Samsung Galaxy Series. All but the first interview with the artist Isha Yadav are anonymised for academic purposes and renamed in the order in which the conversation were held, i.e. P1-P15. The use of these recordings for the purpose of this thesis was granted by the interviewees, who signed a form provided by the interviewer on site. These forms can be reviewed upon specific requests. Interviews P6-P12 were done with the help of Ravinder, a student of German studies at Delhi University, who accompanied me to the location of the *Rebel* mural and interpret/translate my questions and the pedestrian's answers. This decision was reached because the language barrier proved to be rather difficult the first time I attempted the interviews in the residential area of Shahpur Jat.

Interview with Isha Yadav, 30.11.2018, Ambedkar University, Delhi, duration: 12:21 mins

List of Interviews (including notes and relevant transcriptions)

With translator present

P1, Mural A: duration: 6:10 mins (did not ask the demographic questions)

- Message: female feticide
- Language barrier, he switches to Hindi a lot and it is difficult to have a conversation

P2, Mural A: Female, student (English) duration: 5:26 mins

- "It's significant ...female feticide is very significant in India" (-0:40)
- "This girl child and the expression on her face. And the dagger – it's a dagger I suppose. ... Killing of the female child in the womb. And the paint brush that the girl has in her hand might be like she can [incomprehensible] her future, like she is allowed to take birth. That is a very basic thing. And two women there and they are like very upset and forced to do something"
- P2, is an only-child and her parents were asked when she was growing up "Who is going to take care of you when you get old?"

P3, Mural A: Female, student (faculty of arts), duration: 1:55 mins

- Message: "The male sections should respect the women's. ... this mural indicates crime" (0:43-0:49)
- Has never noticed this mural before

P4, Mural B: Female, 22, sport leader at Decathlon, duration 2:29 (was there with a photographer)

- She has lived in Shahpur Jat and has seen it before
- "The woman is Indian and she is holding a joint in her mouth [...] and you don't usually see that so it's working [against] stereotypes because people mostly judge women when they smoke or anything [...] and she is wearing Indian clothes so I think, it's very creative like that."
- "The colors are really vibrant and nice" that is why she stopped in the first place
- "And she has a tattoo also and she is wearing a saree. In India when you smoke a joint or you have joint people judge you to yeah." – "So what do you think is the message this mural sends?" – "it is basically breaking stereotypes. That a woman can do anything a man can." [...] "I feel *empowered* for sure. [...] Because if a man was doing it, it would be too normal here. But it is woman doing it. She is smoking. She has a tattoo. And she is wearing the tradition Indian dress. So you don't normally see it here. (2:10)

P5, Mural B: Male, 35, works with a company in the area, 3:50

- "Indian woman. She is looking so scary. Something is wrong. She is smoking. (long pause) Who draw this?" "That's the artist's name down there." – "Isha? Isha, Isha" – "Yes but it doesn't really matter who draw this, it's more about...why do you think she is scary?" "She's little...err something...err little upset or what?" – "I don't know, it's like your own..." – "Violence is there or something"
- "I looks like she's a little depressed and err around violence and something like this."

P6, Mural B: Female, 34, housewife, lives there/walks this way every day, 5:15

- Stopped before because it was beautiful
- "picture is beautiful and who made it is probably also beautiful" (1:45) was there when it was painted and saw the artist, 2:45 → Isha's privilege?
- overall in the area there are many pictures in the area and it's beautiful
- "we feel really happy because [...] she didn't expect someone to make this on a wall"

P7, Mural B: Male, 34, breakfast items supplier

- Has never noticed the mural before

- Has no ideas what he sees, he came there only to work and it does not have any effect on him 2:53
- Picture changes nothing for him

P8, Mural B: Female, 27, fitness trainer at a gym, resident of the house with the mural on

- She does not know the picture and only moved in when it was already there
- Has not actively looked at it before
- "Sorry sweetheart" x3
- "Womens [sic] are strong actually" (2:47) "Indian woman is strong. She is very brave." (3:30) "because she knows strong women but seriously [she] has no idea", why she comes to this conclusion(4:40)
- Cigarette: "what is that in her lips?" "I: a cigarette" "ah that is a negative point, no?" 6:15
- "She is wearing a sarree and a nose-ring and smokes a cigarette. That is very bad. I don't think this is correct image of an Indian woman. [...] Because, you know a cigarette is not good for health. [...] [Hindi translation: for everyone that is harmful] she is a *proper* Indian woman, she is smoking a cigarette. Not a good thing. [Hindi: I was just confused, what was in her lips]. [...] It sends the wrong message. For women especially. [...]" "Why especially for women?" "Well for everyone but woman is like married [...] very harmful for childrens [sic] so that's why not good for woman." (6:50-8:35)

P9, Mural B, 27 years old, occupation: water supplier, total length of interview: 11:49 mins

- has never noticed it before because there are so many "pictures" all around and every picture is "beautiful and creative"
- "picture is beautiful but she is smoking" - "Why but?" - "Indian looking, hairstyle is good [...] She looks like a modern Indian woman" [...] "picture is really awesome and beautiful but [...] when the cigarette is removed it would be more beautiful. [...] it would be fine if she were smoking and wearing a jeans and T-shirt because she would be an Indian girl but now she is wearing a saree representing Indian woman. – "And Indian women are not supposed to smoke?" – "there is nothing [incromprehensible] for girls and men and this is only what we want the woman is [incromprehensible] and for men also." - "So women can smoke only not when they are dressing traditionally?" [...] "because of our culture we don't expect that the Indian woman is supposed to smoke" [...] but he has also the opinion that this is the modernization of a problem so it is no problem now. [...] because we boys also smoke [...] so who are we to stop them? Because we are also smoking they have the right to smoke also" (xxx-6:55) – own idea or does he think this is what I want to hear because I've been asking so many question?

- “if she is [sic] a real girl, I would propose [to] her” (7:15) 7:50 If I marry my partner [...] I would like to *have* a girl like this.” – “Why?” – “Because she is beautiful.” And also “because this picture presents Indian culture and Western culture combined” (8:40)
- Message of the mural (10:55): “industrialization” “our culture is also going the flow and we don’t stop here.”

P10, Mural A: male, 17, student of commerce, 10:09 (spoke without translation)

- “The saying that is written ‘There Is No He Without She’. That is a really common thing. It’s a true fact ... it something we can relate. We can understand it directly and we can remember it.” (1:40-2:00)
- Points out the colors red and black, red for blood “female child killing” (3:22) the girls eyes she is feared and maybe hoping for something. It’s real representation. ... And the women they are looking at their wombs. ... there is nothing we cannot get we cannot relate in this mural. ...very understandable.”
- “now the sex ratio is improving ... it has really improved ... they do not look at the big picture. They just see: women [sic] what is she going to give us?” (-4:50)
- “You Indian or what? ...Then you don’t know us, you don’t know much about our society.” (4:50-5:09)
- “So there is a saying, a daughter is not ours, one day she has to go. ... So they think like this the whole time. If one day she has to go, why are we doing things for her, what is she giving us back? ... they give more importance to boys.”
- “Girls are closer to mothers. That’s a fact. Emotionally they understand. The contradiction here is that they give more importance to the boys.”
- From Jaipur, new in Delhi: more conservative than Delhi, Delhi is free
- Street art influences unconsciously, indirectly it affects

P11, Mural A: 4:50

- for him it doesn’t make a difference the wall is painted or not, walked this way many times
- message: female feticide; government wants to prevent, but people have to follow it
- He has one female and one male child and for him it does not make a difference he never went through the procedure of sex checking, does not look good, everyone has a right to live

P12, Mural A: Male, 26, preparing CSC (government job) 6:07

Woman and child and what type of India we want to make

P13, Mural A: Female, 24, student (MPhil in Mathematics): 5:00 mins

P14, Mural A: Female, 32, grad student (Sociology), duration: 2:58 mins

P15, Mural A: Female, 26, student (PhD in zoology), duration: 4:04 mins

- Female Feticide
- "I personally think that it's bad and I preach that to women going for abortions"
- Killing with Injections: Sign = Syringe
- People subconsciously get influenced by street art

Further Pictures



Figure 5 Porte de France by JR, Tunis, March 2011



Figure 6: Burned down Police Station La Goulette by JR, Tunis, March 2011



Figure 7: *From Your Strength, I Weave Beauty* by the Fearless Collective, Lodhi Art Colony, 2015



Figure 8: *Ishq Inqilab Mohabbat Zindabad* by Shilo Shiv Suleman, Shaheen Bagh, Feb 2020



Figure 9: *Victim/Goddess*, DU Campus, Nov 2018



Figure 10: *Stop Violence*, DU campus, taken Nov 2018



Figure 11: Location of the *Female Feticide* Mural, DU campus, Dec 2018



Figure 12: *I Could Be a Guerrilla Girl, What Do You Know* by Isha Yadav, April 2018



Figure 13: Location of the *Rebel* Mural, Shahpur Jat, Dec 2018

Zusammenfassung

Im Dezember 2012 ging ein Aufschrei durch Indien und um die Welt, als die Bevölkerung von dem brutalen Mord an der 23-Jährigen Studentin Jyoti Singh erfuhr. Sie starb an den Folgen einer Vergewaltigung und gewaltsamer Peinigung mit einer Eisenstange durch eine Gruppe von Männern* in einem Bus nachts in Indiens Hauptstadt Delhi. Ausgelöst durch Singhs Mord, die den Alias Nirbhaya³⁷ erhielt, folgten mediale Aufforderungen, dass Frauen* öffentliche Räume fortan meiden sollten. Dies wurde wiederum durch lautstarke Proteste im gesamten Land gekontert, weil eine Restriktion der Art und Weise, wie sich Frauen im öffentlichen Raum zu bewegen haben, patriarchale Machtstrukturen unterstützt und zu sogenanntem Victim Blaming³⁸ beiträgt. In diesem Sinne wurde Singhs Mord somit zu einem Katalysator für nationale Proteste und feministische Bewegungen, deren Gemeinsamkeit das Hinterfragen patriarchaler Strukturen in der indischen Gesellschaft und die Forderung nach Gleichberechtigung für Frauen* ist. Eine Organisation, die sich im Zuge dessen gegründet hat, ist das feministische Street Art Kollektiv *Fearless*, dessen Ziel es seither ist, öffentliche Räume zurückzuerobern und ihnen durch die Schönheit ihrer Kunst die Angst zu nehmen.

Basierend auf dem Konzept der Gender³⁹ Räume als soziales Konstrukt und gesellschaftliches Machtinstrument ist das Ziel der hier vorliegenden Forschungsarbeit demnach, jene Raumkonstruktion und die Instrumentalisierung dessen am Beispiel Indiens zu betrachten. Des Weiteren wird ein besonderer Fokus auf feministische Raumaneignungsprozesse und Raumaneignung durch Kunst im öffentlichen Raum gelegt. Vor dem Hintergrund der Repräsentationsschaffung und Bedeutungsproduktion werden hierbei zwei konkrete Beispiele feministischer Murals⁴⁰ in Delhi anhand von Roland Barthes' *Mythos* analysiert. Abschließend werden einige Passant*innengespräche zur Rezeption derer in Hinblick auf die potenziell subversive Wirkung des feministischen Street Arts als Raumaneignungspraktik mithilfe von Stuart Halls *Encoding/Decoding* Modell dekodiert und diskutiert.

³⁷ Zu Deutsch: furchtlos

³⁸ „Victim Blaming“ ist eine Praktik, bei der Opfern von Gewalttaten eine Mitschuld an jener gegeben wird. Dies basiert u.a. auf dem Aufenthaltsort zum Tatzeitpunkt oder der Art und Weise, wie sie bei der Gewalttat gekleidet waren, statt die volle Schuld beim eigentlichen Täter zu suchen.

³⁹ Impliziert die soziale und diskursive Konstruktion des Geschlechtsbegriffs

⁴⁰ Kunstform des Street Arts, im weitesten Sinne Wandgemälde

Selbständigkeitserklärung

Ich versichere hiermit, dass ich, Sandra Hesse, die vorliegende Masterarbeit „Gendered Spaces in India“ selbstständig und nur mit den angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmitteln (z. B. Nachschlagewerke oder Internet) angefertigt habe. Alle Stellen der Arbeit, die ich aus diesen Quellen und Hilfsmitteln dem Wortlaut oder dem Sinne nach entnommen habe, sind kenntlich gemacht und im Literaturverzeichnis aufgeführt. Weiterhin versichere, ich, dass weder ich noch andere diese Arbeit weder in der vorliegenden noch in einer mehr oder weniger abgewandelten Form als Leistungsnachweise in einer anderen Veranstaltung bereits verwendet haben oder noch verwenden werden.

Die „Richtlinie zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis für Studierende an der Universität Potsdam (Plagiatsrichtlinie) - Vom 20. Oktober 2010“, im Internet unter <http://uni-potsdam.de/ambek/ambek2011/1/Seite7.pdf>, ist mir bekannt.

Es handelt sich bei dieser Arbeit um meinen ersten Versuch.

Ort, Datum

Unterschrift