

1 Introduction

The expression of solidarity can be understood as a core element of living together, through which togetherness, characterised by acceptance and support, can be promoted. However, solidarity can also demonstrate a unifying oppositional attitude toward political and social conditions. Solidarity, in the sense of a feeling of devotion and commitment of the individual to others in a collective, is also one of the defining characteristics of social movements. It is considered an essential motivation for joint action, since it collectivises what would otherwise remain individual experiences and emotions (Stewart & Schultze 2019, 100251). Due to the interaction of media and society, media practices play an essential role in this context, in that they can support both social disruption and the propagation of social cohesion. In the recent pandemic situation of physical distancing, solidarity was expressed through media even more than before – via social media, television, internet news or radio.

The research for the case studies that this book brings together originated in the framework of a joint research project titled ‘Beyond Social Cohesion: Global Repertoires of Living Together’ (RePLITO) that took marginalised and neglected repertoires of living together as its starting point to rethink social cohesion from a transregional perspective. Central to our approach is a critique of social cohesion as a normatively loaded term that continues to be primarily linked to nationally or territorially defined collectiveness. This inevitably raises the question of boundaries and the exclusivity of community concepts as well as the cultural and historical narratives that promote or counteract them. Which concepts, historical narratives and actions do they employ or bring back to envision a fresh communal existence and to (re-)establish connections based on mutual trust, recognition and attachment? RePLITO’s emphasis lay on the realms of imagination, creativity and individual agency within environments where individuals are already engaged in productive activities and actively seeking solutions for the various challenges, crises and changes they are currently facing (Schneider 2022). This is where the relevance of social movements and their visions and practices of ‘living together’ come into play.

In their introduction to a collection of essays in the RePLITO Digital Knowledge Archive on 'Imaginations, Narratives and Mediated Performances of Solidarity and Community' that emerged from an experimental exercise in collaborative publishing between graduate and PhD students from Delhi and Berlin, Schneider and Chaudhuri (2021) state that the collection is 'less interested in solidarity as theory or pedagogy, but rather in exploring the changing solidarity reasonings and legitimising narratives of whom "we" should be solidarity with'. Using the example of cow protection campaigns in India, they highlight that calls for solidarity can 'promote very different, even contradictory kinds of political subjectivities and citizen activism; they can deepen a feeling of solidarity among a majoritarian group' and not necessarily lead to an improvement of 'living together'.

Recent years offer numerous case studies of different protest movements in India, in the context of which people have shown solidarity with and among protesters in diverse and creative ways. The aim of many such movements has been to highlight the challenges and shortcomings of Indian democracy and work towards a more just, equitable and sustainable society. In all cases, digitalisation has played a major role in visibility and mobilisation and, thus, also in the creation of solidarity. Among others, the highly publicised anti-corruption protests in 2011, led by Anna Hazare and his team, motivated people across the country to show solidarity with the slogan 'Main hun Anna Hazare' (I am Anna Hazare) by adjusting their profile pictures on social media, wearing Nehru caps with the slogan and participating in nationwide marches. The protestors of Anna's 'India Against Corruption' (IAC) movement employed a strategic blend of religious and patriotic symbols to market their cause, amalgamating images of Bharat Mata or Mother India associated with the Hindu right, posters of revolutionary hero Bhagat Singh, executed by the British in 1931, and Gandhi's iconic caps and photographs. Alongside this, the tactical utilisation of television played a significant role, although many critics dismissed the IAC agitation as an absurd revolution of the middle class orchestrated for and by television. Above all, their strategies cultivated solidarity and fostered identification with historical revolutionaries, drawing on historical repertoires to strengthen their movement's resonance and legitimacy. This multifaceted approach encapsulated the complexities and nuances of their 'revolution', intertwining contemporary media tactics with timeless symbols and historical narratives to garner support and mobilise the masses effectively (Sharma 2014, 366–368).

A year later, the brutal gang rape and subsequent death of a young woman in Delhi in December 2012 led to an unexpectedly high level of attention from national and international media. However, the resulting protests against sexual violence, patriarchal structures and the lack of gender equality not only took the form of demonstrations on the streets but also translated into a digital public sphere made up of various blogs and social media networks such as Facebook and

Twitter. These platforms were used to mobilise for local actions while, at the same time, providing a space for discussion and exchange. The case itself and the protests that followed in the Indian capital and throughout the country in the weeks that followed can, therefore, rightly be described as a media event. I have argued elsewhere that social media debates formed an integral part of the dynamic discourse in which the protest movement was situated (Titzmann 2014).

Since 2014, protest movements have continued around the country's universities, leading to global expressions of solidarity. Despite its topicality, a considerable research literature already exists on the weeks-long protests in Shaheen Bagh in the winter of 2019–2020 against the Citizenship Amendment Act, represented primarily by Muslim women (see [Chapter 2](#)). In 2016, Dalit scholar Rohith Vemula's suicide generated not only a national debate on casteism but also global visibility for caste discrimination as a rampant issue. In an article on the Ravidassia context, Kirchof (2021) explores how 'Dalit pride' as a notion of solidarity has since become increasingly mediated through artists like Ginni Mahi, whose songs and music videos also reflect visions of solidarity *beyond* caste and beyond assertions of 'Dalit' self-awareness.

While, on the one hand, the increasing popularity of candlelight demonstrations and vigils is an aesthetic approach to new global urban forms of protest (Schneider 2014, 9), there is also a constant recourse to historical repertoires and forms of expression of solidarity and social cohesion. A vivid example of this is the revival of the tradition of *langar*² from Sikhism in the context of the recent farmers' protests in India. The forms of resistance of the Indian independence movement – strikes, sit-ins, civil disobedience – are also frequently cited and serve a wide variety of actors as a frame narrative for their respective stagings of protest and solidarity. At the same time, new media are effectively used to document protests in the sense of witnessing and creating a collective memory, to comment on them, to support them artistically and to generate attention on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter (now X). The resulting corpus of sources to be potentially studied is composed of complex text–image–video combinations, increasingly mediated by digital media, that are often parts of trans-medial initiatives. Treré (2018) foregrounds the communicative complexity of contemporary social movements by exploring not only the divergence of media formats but also the activists' merging of the physical and the digital, the human and the non-human, the old and the new, and the corporate and the alternative.

² In Sikhism, a *langar* (Punjabi: 'kitchen') is the communal kitchen of a gurdwara that serves meals free of charge to all visitors – without distinction of religion, caste, gender, economic status or ethnicity.

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A paradigmatic example of the centrality of text–image circulation is women’s participation in the 2020–2021 Indian farmers’ protest against three new agricultural laws in India. A photo widely circulated on social media shows veiled women farmers from Haryana sitting on tractors, joining the protests in the capital. The accompanying text varies by post but suggests an intentional production of iconic imagery and evidences a visual staging of solidarity as a media strategy of the movement. For example, @indianwomenblog writes on Instagram:

By having women ride into the Capital on January 26, which is in itself an empowering initiative in patriarchal Haryana, the farm unions don’t just hope to get media coverage but also send a message that their families stand behind them in the agitation. (@indianwomenblog)

The intentional use of gender as another category thus stages protest and solidarity not only visually but also intersectionally. Similarly, the Instagram channel @media_vs_modi links narratives of empowerment, media attention and solidarity, in which the same photo is accompanied by the following text:

‘Instagram models don’t need your attention women farmers do’ Picture needs to be global symbol for women empowerment. (@media_vs_modi)

Here, the focus is placed strongly on the visual staging of femininity on the Instagram platform, and the actual protest against agrarian reform recedes into the background.

This context gives rise to the following questions, which are addressed in all three case studies:

- How is solidarity with and among activists and protestors medially and artistically staged and performatively realised?
- To what extent is recourse made to shared memories and cultural heritage in order to stage social cohesion – possibly as utopia?
- How are social categories such as religion, social class and gender negotiated in the media discourse of solidarity around social movements?

The focus in this book is on the period from 2014 to the present, during which India has witnessed a surge in protest movements, particularly in its liberal universities, leading to unprecedented expressions of solidarity both within the country and globally. The central aim is to provide a theoretically informed analysis of how media and visual art is utilised in the staging of solidarity within Indian social and protest movements. This objective is pursued through an in-depth exploration of three case studies: (1) the Shaheen Bagh protest in 2019–2020, (2) the farmers’ protest in 2020–2021 and (3) contempo-

rary Indian youth climate movements. By examining these cases, I seek to unravel the intricate ways in which media practices shape and are shaped by contemporary expressions of solidarity in India and to what extent recourse is made to shared memories and cultural heritage in order to stage social cohesion.

Defining Solidarity³

Solidarity is frequently evoked in contexts of resistance to the normative order. The emergence of an ‘oppositional consciousness’ (Mansbridge & Morris 2001, 240) requires an understanding of injustice as systemic, at least a partial identification with unjustly subordinated groups and the drive for collective action. Accordingly, it is one of the defining characteristics of social movements. It is considered an essential motivation for joint action, since it collectivises what would otherwise remain individual experiences and emotions (Stewart & Schulze 2019). However, solidarity creates networks but does not necessarily facilitate egalitarianism: it is a relation that is negotiated across power imbalances (Mohanty 2003). The dynamics are often contradictory. Regarding the media and performative dimensions of solidarity, the social discourse at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic conjured up global solidarity in many ways. At the same time, its exercise has been called into question, for example, by the unequal distribution of vaccines. Also noteworthy is the invocation of transnational solidarity in postcolonial contexts, both in anti-colonial solidaritisation (Craggs 2014) and in the understanding of postcolonial global feminist solidarity (Mohanty 2003).

Solidarity often acts as a conceptual bridge between imagined siblings: “fraternity” was the original conception of political modernity (as per the French revolution) before “solidarity” took its place, suggesting a move away from family and the immediate *Gemeinschaft* [community] towards the broader political community of the *Anthropos*. This wider humanistic sense allowed the imagining and encompassing of remote relations in a polity whose scope transcended immediate, face-to-face allegiances. (Rakopoulos, 2016, 146)

The political origins of solidarity are especially found in struggles of the anti-fascist, anticolonial, antiapartheid and civil rights movements. As noted above,

³ Parts of the introduction have been published in an entry to the RePLITO Digital Knowledge Archive. See Titzmann (2021).

transnational solidarity is often evoked in postcolonial context, e.g. in the Tri-continental that founded the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) (Mahler 2018) or the Non-aligned Movement (Arnold 2010).

According to Hannah Arendt, solidarity is the alternative to pity – conceived by her as the perversion of compassion. It is through solidarity that a community of interest with the marginalised, oppressed and exploited is (deliberately and dispassionately) established. The common interest can be summarised as ‘the dignity of man’ (Reshaur 1992, 724). Terminologically speaking, ‘solidarity is a principle that can inspire and guide action’ (Arendt 2006).

Arendt identifies four categories of solidarity. The first one is *exclusive solidarity*, by which she describes sharing a commonness of situation or circumstance. This form of solidarity comprises joint struggles of the oppressed and marginalised to remove or improve circumstances that place certain groups at risk or deprive them of social and political opportunities. It could be understood as an act of ‘self-help’ (Reshaur 1992, 725). The second form is *inclusive solidarity* and includes those who suffer and those who attempt to make common cause with them. This is perhaps the most widely practised form of solidarity, and recent social research particularly pays attention to it in terms of solidarity with refugees arriving in Europe (della Porta 2018; Sajir & Aouragh 2019, 550–577). The other two categories are *universal solidarity* as a fundamental and unavoidable articulation of the plurality of humankind and the highly contested conceptualisation of *natural solidarity* as based on a given affinity towards one’s ‘own kind’ (Reshaur 1992, 733–735).

Solidarity is often evoked in response to political, social and economic crises in emphasising a new connectedness and politicised claims to reciprocity. It is not an exogenous analytical concept but ‘an idea inspiring people in contexts of everyday life in crisis’ (Rakopoulos 2016, 142). Therefore, Cabot defines solidarity as the ‘other side of crisis’ (Cabot 2016, 152). In a variety of sociopolitical contexts, solidarity strategies reinvent pre-existing repertoires. Practices of resource pooling, community kitchens or mutual aid as a guiding principle of village culture are invoked with the intention of forging solidarity.

Rakopoulos establishes solidarity as a concept that bridges – ‘that is, captures loosely and yet in tension – diverse modes of practices, forms of sociality and mechanisms of envisioning future prospects for people’s lives. It links diverse networks of people and sometimes contradictory meanings’ (Rakopoulos 2016, 142). The emergence of new alliances could be seen within the context of the anti-CAA protests and at Shaheen Bagh, but in particular, the Indian Farmers’ Movement espouses a highly heterogeneous composition of different unions, movements and caste groups that were still united in their rejection of the neoliberalisation of agriculture and their demand of a

different politics. Collins, in turn, emphasises emotions as the ‘glue of solidarity’ (Collins 1990) that is particularly important within contemporary fluid, network-based movements that rely on non-traditional modes of identification and commitment (Juris 2008, 63). Earlier, Hochschild referred to ‘emotion management’ (Hochschild 1979) as necessary to maintain commitment and participation among protesters and supporters, a factor that all three case studies in this book vividly demonstrate. Solidarity in social movements is thus shaped around the public display of emotion facilitated by ways of storytelling – increasingly through social media engagement – and ‘feeling one’s way into events’, creating ‘affective publics’ (Papacharissi 2014).

Until recently, numerous scholars in media studies argued that the growth of online communication fosters democratic principles, openness, connectivity and inclusivity. However, there is a growing trend among scholars to critique this notion as an overly optimistic view of online communication’s systems (Schaflechner & Kramer 2024). Treré (2018) illustrates the ambivalent character of contemporary digital activism, demonstrating that media can be either used to conceal authoritarianism or to reimagine democracy. He thus looks at both sides of algorithmic power: strategies of repression and propaganda as well as empowering appropriation and resistance. Dean adds another layer that problematises the current scenario as ‘communicative capitalism’ (Dean 2021) by looking at communication as a tool for capitalist accumulation.

Nevertheless, the active social media engagement of the Shaheen Bagh protestors as well as contemporary climate activists exemplify the importance of digital networking, curation, circulation and re-mediation. It is crucial to note, though, that Shaheen Bagh as a protest movement did not eventually lead to political success, and many participants ended up in jail. The hope and solidarity circulating were thus bolstered by citizen media activism while simultaneously being countered by mediated propaganda from right-wing groups and the government.

All three case studies are located in a precise historical moment and in a precise geographical location; yet they are orientated towards the future, propagating a vision and actively pursuing collective memory-making and the rewriting of dominant narratives about themselves and about Indian history and the present. Wertsch and Roediger (2008, 319) understand collective memory as a space of contestation over controlling the understanding of the past. The sites of contestation hereby include family discussions, museums, monuments, history textbooks, national holidays, arts and media. They consider it more appropriate to speak of a collective remembering, a constant process intertwined with the present and tied to identity projects. ‘Cultural tools’ such as language, images and technology shape memory in different and fundamental ways (Wertsch & Roediger 2008). The Hindu Right in India

are particularly skilled in appropriating social media through the assembling of facts, figures and treatises as an ideological exercise by net-savvy volunteers. Sahana Udupa (2016) argues that this practice of online archiving constitutes a distinct politics of history-making. She illustrates the importance of archiving as a means of shaping history, especially in the context of religion's interaction with cyberspace and the various ways in which online users participate in religious politics. She points out how people weaponise archives by copy-pasting ready-made 'archived' data and dropping it into conversations to destroy communicative contexts. Thus, online archiving for religious politics challenges certain universal claims often associated with highly praised user-generated content.

In protest movements, the mere production of protest artefacts as well as the circulation of symbols and discourse create a collective memory of protest. This can be described by 'the manner by which movements utilise digital media in order to document, archive and curate cultural memories' (Merrill et al. 2020, 20). The process of memory-making happens quasi-simultaneously with the events through new media affordances. Protestors film and photograph what they see and post it on social networking platforms, sometimes in real time, thereby producing an ever-expanding archive of images and self-representations of protest events (Cammaerts 2012, 125). The visual curation and documentation of the events in Shaheen Bagh by two artists, which I discuss in [Chapter 2](#), is a prime example of collective remembering and memorialisation of a counter-hegemonic narrative of India and a direct response to the history-making of the Hindu Right.

Solidarity, Media and Social Activism

The concept of mediation captures 'diverging articulations between media, communication, protest and activism' (Cammaerts 2012, 118) and enables linking up various ways in which media and communication are relevant to protest and activism. These include framing processes in mainstream media, self-representation and counter-narratives of activists; the use, appropriation and adaptation of media technologies to mobilise for and organise direct actions; and media practices that constitute resistance in their own right (i.e. hacktivism). Despite its asymmetric dynamics, mediation does attribute a degree of agency to those resisting, to those watching or using media by 'meaning-making' (Cammaerts 2012, 118). The Indian farmers' movement's newsletter *Trolley Times* provided an excellent example of a transmedial strategy to mediate a counter-narrative. It aimed at countering mainstream media narratives, informing about the cause and building affective ties among protestors and support-

ers. It did so via a differentiated multilingual transmedia strategy including social media handles, video material, print publications and public performances. It is thus deeply immersed in what Cammaerts describes as ‘meaning-making’.

The discussion on how solidarity is mediated relates in many ways to the aforementioned conceptual approaches. Media, social movements and solidarity are entangled in multilayered ways. Roughly, three constellations are distinguishable:

1. **Mass media representation:** Reporting in favour of or criticising movements can elicit or reduce solidarity.
2. **Activist self-mediation:** The production and circulation of counter-narratives via (independent) media generates collective identity and supports solidarity among participants and sympathisers. Activist self-communication is empowering and signifies the strong interrelation of solidarity and agency.
3. **Mediating solidarity via digital media by (external) sympathisers:** Despite being often dismissed as ineffective, ‘clicktivism’, Cammaerts argues, ‘is highly relevant in terms of mediation and seems to resonate with many citizens who often fail to make time in their everyday lives for “active” activism. From this perspective, such forms of internet-mediated resistance bearing witness to injustice do contribute to the building of collective identities and global awareness’ (Cammaerts 2012, 128). Additionally, social networking sites and mobile technologies are effective tools of facilitating, coordinating and organising resistance and, thus, generating solidarity. While Cammaerts was writing in a moment of internet euphoria, more recent research (Udupa 2016; Tréré 2018; Schaflechner & Kramer 2024) stresses the ambivalent nature of digital media in times of digital capitalism.

For instance, sharing images is functional to activism and solidarity because it illustrates and disseminates the underlying message of those protesting or suffering (Sajir & Aouragh 2019, 560). Practices of remediation (Bolter & Grusin 2002) correspond in this respect with Arendt’s definition of inclusive solidarity as establishing a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited. The circulation of emotionally touching content enables connective emotions which stipulate activism (Sajir & Aouragh 2019, 559). Although some content awakens compassion, it does not all lead to solidarity. This is why Arendt distinguishes between solidarity (principle) and compassion (passion) (Arendt 2006).

In their introduction to an edited volume titled *The Aesthetics of Global Protest*, McGarry et al. (2020, 16) state that the ‘performing of solidarity is created through different voices being heard’. One way of making voices heard

or protests seen is through the aesthetics of protest, which comprise the communicative, material and performative culture of protests, i.e. slogans, art, symbols, humour, graffiti, bodies, clothes, objects, etc. These create an alternative space for people to engage with politics (McGarry et al. 2020, 18f). In the past, almost exclusively mass media representation through protest images shaped ideas about the protesters. In recent years, connected to the rise of social media and citizen journalism, research seeks to shift focus to protesters themselves and how they document and produce protest through aesthetics (Juris 2005; Ahmed et al. 2017; Dey 2018; Bernárdez et al. 2019; McGarry et al. 2020, 17) in a way that Cammaerts (2012, 125) terms ‘self-mediation’. The internet provides extensive opportunities to inform independently, debate internally and link up directly with interested publics in cost-efficient ways and across the time-space continuum. Key expressions of dissent in relation to the anti-CAA protests have become globally visible through media, e.g. the highly visible presence of a local community of Muslim and other women in the physical protest space in Shaheen Bagh, Delhi. Bhatia and Gajjala’s research explores how Muslim women use their physical bodies at protest sites to show resistance and challenge India’s hyper-masculine Hindu body politics (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020, 6286). Their research also highlights how the protestors incorporated social media as a strategy. In the interviews conducted by the two researchers, the importance of social media for planning, organisation and international visibility was highly emphasised: ‘Through social media, protestors, organisers, and leaders contribute to the labour of making the protest visible’ (Bhatia & Gajjala 2020, 6295). The immediacy of information circulation helped to mobilise large crowds in specific locations. Many used social media accounts to share information about protest locations, times and activities and to document events from an ‘insider perspective’. This contributed to the creation of (counter-)narratives that sympathised with Muslim women’s struggle against CAA/NRC. Just like artists Prarthna Singh and Ita Mehrotra (Chapter 2), the intention to create and circulate more inclusive and truthful narratives was instrumental here. This form of social media work is done against the backdrop of a strong bias in local and national media that renders the struggles of marginalised communities invisible and unheard. Bhatia and Gajjala (2020, 6296) state that ‘social media labour contributes to forms of affective exchanges, such as solidarity building, information exchange, and extending support and/or resources both online and offline’.

The emergence of digital social movements entails a complex process rooted in multiple layers of offline engagement. Criticism labelling it as ‘slacktivism’ fails to acknowledge the strategic implementations of digital activists, who craft thoughtful campaigns that synergise with offline strategies (Gajjala

2019, 119). Social media's potential to reach broader audiences and unexpected local demographics can galvanise large groups into action (Gajjala 2020, 120). For instance, the 2006 Jessica Lal case exemplifies how news reports combined with SMS mobilisation sparked mass protests, prompting a retrial of the case. Recognising that digital tools must always complement physical spaces is crucial, and all three case studies in this book illustrate that. Despite debates on whether the term 'activism' aptly applies to social media, Gajjala contends that 'being immersed in the use of digital media is a form of living in a digital place' (Gajjala 2019, 123), highlighting the interconnectedness of online and offline realms in modern activism.

The close interlocking of new digital spaces with sites of physical protest in India also generates immediacy and proximity to a widely dispersed target group, which may foster sympathy and solidarity. In this respect, any protest movement should by now be understood as mediated and always studied as a media event. To do justice to the increasingly hybridised forms of contemporary activism, the crucial role of physical presence in protest movements must be included. Thus, the analysis of staging and performances of solidarity calls for cultural studies perspectives that focus on interactions of media technologies and physical practices.

The Case Studies in This Book

The three main chapters in this book each deal with a case study and are organised chronologically. The perspective is slightly different, starting with [Chapter 2](#), which focuses on visual art as an activist tool to create a legacy of the impactful Shaheen Bagh protest movement, to then focus on a newsletter as a counter-medium in [Chapter 3](#) and issues of social media use and gendered visibility within the Indian climate movement in [Chapter 4](#).

Witnessing in Solidarity: Recording the Legacy of Shaheen Bagh through Visual Art

This case study delves into the transformative power of art and media in shaping narratives of solidarity and resistance within the context of the historic Shaheen Bagh protests that unfolded in New Delhi during the winter of 2019–2020. These protests, sparked by the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), witnessed a unique convergence of Muslim women as protest leaders, redefining the gendered perception of the Muslim minority in India. The movement also introduced innovative forms of feminist solidarity

and non-violent protest strategies, including the use of digital tools for transnational outreach. The chapter spotlights the artistic endeavours of two young women artists who utilised their creative talents to bear witness to the events and craft testimonials for posterity. From one perspective, each act of witnessing necessitates mediation, primarily translating an experience into language to convey it to those who weren't present or who look at it retrospectively. Conversely, every act of mediation contains an element of witnessing, particularly evident when technology steps in as a stand-in for an absent audience (Frosh & Pinchevski 2009). Prarthna Singh's photo book *Har Shaam Shaheen Bagh* (2022) and Ita Mehrotra's graphic novel *Shaheen Bagh: A Graphic Recollection* (2021) serve as case studies to investigate the processes of visually mediating the legacy of the Shaheen Bagh movement. Key questions explored include the production and mediation of solidarity through art and media, the narratives conveyed by these works, prevalent visual tropes within them, the interplay of gender and resistance in their narratives, the new spaces opened up by their artistic interventions and the positioning and framing of the artists themselves.

Mediating Counter-narratives and Solidarity: The Case of *Trolley Times* in the Indian Farmers' Movement

Through the lens of *Trolley Times*, the dedicated newsletter of the Indian Farmers' Movement, this case study analyses the movement's approach to countering mainstream media representations. *Trolley Times* employed a multifaceted, multilingual transmedia strategy that encompassed social media, video content, print publications and public performances. A meticulous analysis of *Trolley Times*' content and imagery unveils several thematic elements within the newsletter's narrative. It prominently features an anti-capitalist critique directed at the new farm laws and the government's policies. Simultaneously, the movement is depicted as a model for an ideal Indian society, emphasising trans-regional and trans-ideological solidarity as well as a commitment to unity and secularism in opposition to the divisive agenda of the BJP government. The notion of secularism in this context aligns with India's unique framework, promoting religious equality and the right to practice one's faith, underpinned by the slogan of 'Unity in Diversity'. The chapter explores *Trolley Times* not as an isolated initiative but as an integral part of the intricate dynamics of political mobilisation, solidarity building and media engagement within the Indian Farmers' Movement. It scrutinises the strategies of mediation, mechanisms of circulation, meaning-making and the creation of solidarity.

Youth Climate Activism in India: Bridging Global Conversations and Local Concerns

The last case study explores the dynamic landscape of contemporary youth climate activism in India, situated at the intersection of global climate justice movements and deeply rooted local environmental traditions. While it may appear to be a recent urban phenomenon, Indian youth climate activism draws from a rich history of environmental concerns and engages in a global conversation about climate justice. The chapter investigates the emergence of global climate movements like Fridays For Future (FFF) in India and their unique characteristics, including their extensive use of social media, increased youth participation and the prominence of a feminised public image. It further discusses the challenges faced by these activists, such as legal pressures and a perceived atmosphere of repression, impacting physical participation in protests. The narrative also underscores the significance of localised activism, rooted in concerns specific to Indian cities and regions, as well as the influence of indigenous and historical movements like the *Chipko Andolan* and *Narmada Bachao Andolan* on contemporary climate activism. An integral research question is the gendered nature of youth climate activism in India, acknowledging the prominence of young women activists and the interplay between climate change, gender and power relations. While the mainstream media often emphasises the youth and feminised public image of the movement, the case study uncovers nuances in the composition of local activist groups, revealing diversity in terms of gender and age.

Notes on Research Praxis and Positionality

The research that led to this book commenced with a distinctive vision, aiming for collaborative exploration alongside activists and artists. I have orientated myself on the principles of a critical, feminist decolonial research ethic, as outlined by Andrea Fleschenberg and Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo (2022) in their editorial to a two-volume special issue on 'Negotiating Research Ethics in Volatile Contexts' (2022/2023). Informed by indigenous, decolonial and feminist perspectives, they conceptualise research ethics not merely as a collection of directives governing research methodology and behaviour but as intricately linked with the dynamics of power and politics within knowledge production. They acknowledge the historical and ongoing potential for research and knowledge production to perpetuate exploitation, extraction, racism and inequality, especially in the relationship between the Global North and the Global South (Fleschenberg & Castillo 2022, 496). Research, states Castillo in a discussion of

‘Critical Research Ethics as Decolonial Praxis’, is ‘simultaneously an epistemological, political and ethical endeavour’ (Castillo 2023, 23). The research we undertake carries significant implications, and as researchers, we hold numerous responsibilities for the knowledge we generate. The research ethics outlined in the discussion correspond to the evolving practice of decolonial action, characterised by a cyclical process of thought, action, reflection and further action. It aims at rehumanising the world, redistributing resources and producing counter-knowledges and counter-praxes (Castillo 2023, 23). It advocates for discovering and cultivating methods that involve collaborating with knowledge co-creators rather than speaking on their behalf or discussing them in isolation. This entails integrating a feedback loop and engaging in dialogue within the research framework with both knowledge co-creators and marginalised knowledge contributors and practitioners (Castillo 2023, 25).

In discussing the rearrangement of research tools and parameters against the backdrop of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, Fleschenberg & Castillo (2022, 498) stress several challenges and concerns in the special issue’s editorial. Among them features the need for sensitivity towards power relations between researcher and knowledge co-producers (who are always more than mere informants or interlocutors), including interview partners and colleagues from the Global South. Critical research ethics also acknowledges and scrutinises the inequitable structures within post-colonial contexts, which have influenced the conduct of research and the production of knowledge about the Global South, even by scholars from the Global South themselves (Castillo 2023, 24). For the context of this book, the social categories of class, gender, caste and religion played a significant role not only for the analysis of discourse but also for the complex positionalities of the knowledge co-producers vis-à-vis the marginalised communities they engaged or solidaritised with. These questions are addressed in the discussion of each case study in [Chapters 2, 3 and 4](#).

Furthermore, Fleschenberg and Castillo emphasise ‘the need to navigate research via digital means, new technologies and spaces while remaining mindful of communication, connectivity, resources and agency divides’ and ‘the need to revisit notions of care, reciprocity and relatedness in research to counter extractive research practices and gazing’ (Fleschenberg & Castillo 2022, 498). Strategies to facilitate decolonial and critical research ethics in order to address these challenges include ‘slow research’, which entails a ‘practice of pragmatic solidarity’ (Backe 2021, quoted in Fleschenberg & Castillo 2022, 499) and a ‘rethinking of authorship’ (Fleschenberg & Castillo 2022, 500). Kramer and Schaflechner (2020) similarly call for ‘slow-paced and multi-mediated research’ in the social sciences and suggest calling this form of critical and creative reflection ‘slow theory’.

Set against the global pandemic, the initial research process for this book adapted to the digital landscape. All interviews except those related to the case study on Indian youth climate groups (Chapter 4) took place via Zoom, and the entire process was complemented by digital analyses. Uncertainty surrounding physical research feasibility underscored the need for adaptability in hybrid and flexible research methodologies. Follow-up interviews were conducted at intervals of around six months with some interviewees to capture evolving perspectives and changes. This temporal lens aimed at adding depth to the research, acknowledging the dynamic nature of the subject matter. From the initial contact and interview followed further collaboration with Prarthna Singh in particular. During a three-day academic-activist-artist gathering in Berlin, Singh's presentation of her book (see Chapter 2) and subsequent discussions enriched the research, adding more details and perspectives (Streva et al. 2022).

Finally, in 2023, with the subsiding of COVID-19-related restrictions, a physical six-week research visit to India was possible. There, in-person meetings with my knowledge co-producers Navkiran Natt, Ita Mehrotra and Prarthna Singh fostered joint reflections on the project, its findings and discussions on the form of publishing. A significant segment of the research visit was dedicated to youth climate groups in Delhi and Mumbai. This involved one-to-one interviews, visits to Youth for Climate India's climate library in South Delhi and participant observation, including group and walk-along interviews in events like the global climate strike organised by FFF in Mumbai. An interdisciplinary academic workshop in Delhi further provided a platform to discuss preliminary findings with Indian and international colleagues, enriching the research through collaborative exchange.

Furthermore, within the RePLITO project, we employed a project-specific practice of collaborative peer-reviewing via PubPub to create our Digital Knowledge Archive.⁴ This not only meant critical assessment of the prior versions of two out of the three chapters in this book but also guaranteed quality assurance.

After data collection and coded analysis of images, texts and transcribed interviews⁵ with the software MAXQDA using a grounded theory approach, the focus shifted to reciprocity. Seeking comments and feedback from my interview and research partners, the process extended to partial co-production of content, hopefully transforming the research into a reflexive and dynamic endeavour acknowledging the interdependence between the researcher and the

⁴ See <https://replito.de/peerreview>.

⁵ I particularly thank Lara Kauter for her support in transcribing the interviews.

researched. I was also deeply inspired by Radhika Gajjala's approach of iterative engagement and collaborative writing (Gajjala 2019).

In essence, the research methodology embraced a holistic and inclusive approach, transcending conventional boundaries by integrating activism, art and academia. It not only navigated pandemic challenges but also fostered a reciprocal engagement with the majority of the knowledge co-producers and attempted to integrate a critical research ethic characterised by decolonial feminist approaches.

Nevertheless, the process of fieldwork also involves the researcher's cultural biography, and it requires an examination of the power relations between the researcher and the people she encounters in during her research process (Parameswaran 2001, 69). Many researchers have written about the limitations of the research process within existing boundaries of nation, race, gender and class (Parameswaran 2001, 71). In the context of this research project, my positionality differed from case study to case study. In general, I established myself as a feminist media scholar in accordance with the objectives and ideologies of the individuals and groups under study. This aspect of my stance facilitated dialogue and collaboration, fostering trust between myself and the participants. However, I occupy a distinct position shaped by my identity as a white female academic at a German university, as well as disparities in age, education and life experiences compared to several interview partners, many of whom were in their early or mid-twenties. The collaboration with the artists Prarthna Singh and Ita Mehrotra as well as with Srijani Datta, who is active in the Indian climate movement, and the former *Trolley Times* editor Navkiran Natt was characterised more by an exchange at eye level due to similar educational biographies and professionalism. Similarities in the social categories of class and gender also facilitated access.

However, reflecting on the implications of my identity as both an ally and an outsider for fieldwork with Indian activists reveals the potential risk of inherent power relations based on the aforementioned hierarchical differences in age, education and, most importantly, social capital due to my affiliation with a research institution in the Global North. This last, of course, provided me with a 'safety net', i.e. I could take a plane back to Germany at any time or lean back in front of the Zoom screen and did not have to deal with the consequences of activism as my knowledge co-producers had to. I recognise that the research process of reciprocity, mutual support and respect described above cannot erase global and individual power imbalances; but it was my approach to ethical research practice in the hope of achieving positive impact, even within asymmetrical power structures and some potentially problematic encounters during the research process.