Mapping Placemaking Practices of Five Young Women at the Intersection of Multiple Marginalizations from Homegrown Neighbourhoods of Urban India

by

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MA, Azim Premji University, 2016

MTech, International Institute of Information Technology, 2010

BTech, International Islamic University, 2008

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək^{w}əŋən (Songhees and X^{w}sepsəm/ Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək^{w}əŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Urban cities in India exclude young women from public life through fear of violence, familial control and patriarchal expectations. Their existence in public spaces is generally looked at through a lens of suspicion and excessive control – emotional and embodied. This research studies the spatial lived experiences of five young women from homegrown neighbourhoods that are defined as lower income, lacking in infrastructure and mutually dependent close-knit communities. The purpose of this research is to offer a platform for the young women to share their spatial lived experiences and challenge a homogenous and normative understanding of their stories. Using a post-qualitative research inquiry, this research studies the ways young women live within their communities and the placemaking practices that they resort to in order to create safe, communal spaces for themselves. The research is interdisciplinary as it is placed within adult education, feminist geography, urban planning, and community-engaged research and contributes to each of these scholarships by offering a nuanced and complex understanding of the stories of young women from urban India. In this research, I argue that even within the bounds of limitation that young women face, they are able to find a sense of belonging and agency within their neighbourhood. These ways include acts of everyday resistances, forming support systems of friends and consistently negotiating their place within their neighbourhoods, home, and schools. The research study (re)stories the lives of the five young women and the places that they occupy through narrative mapping tool called StoryMaps that positions young women's stories and the places that they occupy as central to the research. Through (re)storying, the research highlights the following: (1) spatial lived experiences of young women are determined by their intersectional identities and are constantly evolving; (2) placemaking scholarship should include informal acts of placemaking in order to be inclusive of the lives of marginalized people within their communities; (3) lived spatiality is a constant negotiation that young women engage in through acts of everyday resistance; and (4) lived spatiality and placemaking are paradoxical and embodied and should be examined as such.

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Dedication

I want to thank the five young women – Gauri, Diksha, Yashfin, Ayesha and Sanika for choosing to be a part of the project and showing up everyday for our work together. I hope that I have done justice to your stories through my work.

Thank you, Manisha Didi, the teacher at Matoshri English Medium School for facilitating my data collection process.

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Prologue

Before I begin, I would like to mention that, inspired by the work of South Asian feminist scholar, Sara Ahmed, I plan to use full author names throughout the research to make the gender of the authors a little more visible, ensuring my work remains accessible and feminist. In her book titled *Living a Feminist Life*, Sarah Ahmed (2017) talks about the importance of using full author names as an act of recognition and respect for feminist, queer, Black and Indigenous authors. To her, such an act is a "political commitment" (p. 15). Following in her footsteps, I will be using the full names of authors to cite their work in my dissertation to refuse the erasure and minimization of works of diverse scholars. I also wish to emphasize that I do not use italics for the Hindi words in my dissertation as I believe that italicizing of non-English language in writing leads to othering of those languages. In order to challenge this Euro-centric colonial hierarchy which places English over other languages, I will not be using italics for any Hindi words throughout my dissertation.

Chapter One: Introduction

My parents come from a Muslim community called *Khadim Mohalla* located in a small town in western India. I was not brought up in this community that held strong conservative cultural and religious beliefs, as we lived in North India because of my father's job. Women within *Khadim Mohalla* live extremely complex lives. Within the strict gendered norms of covering up by wearing a head covering, lack of access to public spaces, marriage at younger ages and low bodily autonomy, women have also found joy and freedom through community, social spaces and events and access to education and, for a few, employment. Even though I was not brought up in this space, my parents carried values, beliefs and expectations embedded within their own upbringing in *Khadim Mohalla*. I was taught to fit within the gendered expectation that comes with being a woman -- dress and sit properly, take on a large chunk of household responsibilities, do not question the authority of my father and be submissive. At the same time in my home in North India, I was taught to go out and play, interact with boys my age and bicycle to school. I believe, in some sense, my PhD journey began when I started to struggle with the complexity and dichotomy of the varied beliefs, values and messages I received as a child. The journey also came with the rebellion and push back I consistently attempted, in the hope of finding my own agency and voice.

I have also resisted the norms of spaces and places by behaving in ways that varied from expectations. Syeda Jafar Zahan (2022) points out that "young women attach alternate meanings to public spaces providing them with a sense of belonging, pride and confidence to claim these spaces" (p. 10). As I refused to cover my head while walking through Khadim Mohalla, lived alone in big cities while maneuvering its varied cultural and social norms, using public transportation to find the joys of solo travelling through India in local trains, I reclaimed spaces. These acts of everyday resistance were accompanied by adopting certain strategies to develop a sense of safety in public spaces that women are inclined towards.

These strategies could be viewed as an act of reproducing existing social norms, which made me wonder about how women reclaim spaces in a sustained way. My story is not unique in the way of young women's endeavour to find freedom within the patriarchal confines of the world that we all occupy. Gendering of the world, the patriarchy that allows some people their complete humanity while limiting the same for others, has always fascinated, angered and baffled me. Deep within, I always knew that I wanted to engage with these larger questions of the world.

My journey of research began even before I was aware of research in all its parts -- questions, theories, methodologies or processes. As a software developer, I found no joy in my daily work, and I sought to find meaning in my life's work. This undertaking brought me to quit my job and go back to school to study education. At university, during my master's degree, I was being made aware of my privilege of sitting in a classroom, being able to ask the tough questions and seeking my voice without being reprimanded for the same, a privilege afforded to only a few women in India. However, at the same time, the ideas that I was learning at the liberal arts university were challenging my internal world, which was made up of beliefs that were passed on to me by my family and my external world when I started challenging the gendered norms of my family and community. It was in those classrooms that I decided to delve deeper into understanding the stories and experiences of women, like myself, who lived different, sometimes conflicting lives within their intersecting identities.

I love stories! As a social justice, feminist researcher I believe that you must. My research journey began in 2018 when I was working with young women from public schools across the city of Pune. Every Saturday, I would drive across different parts of the city to meet young women from various schools for a program around creating safe spaces. Collectively with these young women, I embarked on a journey of creating safe spaces and

building community through storytelling. Every week, we gathered to work towards creating safe and inclusive spaces for young women who were otherwise struggling with patriarchal sexist oppression within homes, communities, schools and city spaces. The conversations within these meetings shed light on the gap in my understanding of oppression through the lens of my privilege of being a cis-gender upper-class working woman. It was then that I fully embraced the power of storytelling. In many ways, we are telling stories of people and of the lives they live. As Thomas King (2003) points out in his book *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, "The truth about stories is, that's all we have" (p. 9). Story is one, if not the, fundamental unit that accounts for human experience (Stefinee Pinnegar & J. Gary Daynes, 2007). In those dimly lit rooms of underfunded public-school classrooms, we were stories waiting to be told and heard. A journey into the historical stories tells us whose stories were important and worth being (re)told. As I started mapping the stories of women, I found missing voices. In the limited charting of women's voices, the literature showed a glaring gap of missing narratives of young women with multiple intersecting marginalizations of gender, class, caste and religion. As Audre Lorde (2004) asserts, any discussion of feminist thought, and theory would be incomplete if it does not examine the differences of people worldwide and without input from women who live at intersections of marginalized identities. To tell these invisible, absent stories, I started my doctoral journey.

For my PhD data collection, I went back to Yerwada, the homegrown neighbourhood in Pune, India. Even though the nostalgia of living and working in the city met me at random corners, in 2023, the city had changed a little. And so had I! In 2018, I went into the space with young women thinking I could empower them, give them space and as the adult in the room, impart knowledge. This time, I went to listen, to learn and share space. My first meeting with the five young women was akin to a mirror being held up against my own biases and assumptions. They unanimously disapproved when I shared my research topic:

mapping placemaking practices of young women from urban slum communities in India. “Didi (elder sister in Hindi), we do not like our home being called slums.” Early on, I learned that the reflexive journey into my perceptions was far from over. It was then that I revisited my research topic to look at the placemaking practices of young women from the homegrown neighbourhood of Yerwada, Pune, India, who live at the intersection of multiple marginalizations of gender, class, caste, religion, and age.

It was then that I relooked at my research questions to ask: “How do young women experience the homegrown neighbourhoods they live in?”, “Within the intersecting marginalization of gender, class, caste, religion and additional identities, what placemaking practices are enacted by young women from the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India?” and “How do these placemaking practices impact the intersectional spatiality of the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India?”

Gauri and Diksa (two of the young women in my study) point to the large banyan tree outside their school and tell me that this is the place where they hang out after school. “We stand here for so long after school is over, talking with our friends. Even when we come back here after 10 years, we will remember this place fondly.” I have always been enchanted by the idea of people telling stories about their lives through recollecting places they inhabited. Sébastien Caquard (2011) defines this as locating narratives whereby people ground their stories in tangible and credible places. As I embarked on the journey to study the placemaking practices of young women living within multiple intersectional marginalizations, I kept returning to the power of stories and their recollection that inherently happens through and in places. The way communities are experienced by those who live in it changes its meaning and makes it subjective. This is evident when Yi Tuan (1977) asserts that space is more abstract than places, whereby space becomes a place when “we get to know it better and endow it with meaning” (p. 6).

Our exploration into the emotional and socio-cultural topography of the Yerwada community was multi-faceted. During the one-on-one conversations with young women, I started exploring what the community meant to the young women and their experiences of living in it. Their stories were of belonging and unsafe feelings, of wanting to escape and eager to remain, of resistance and compliance. During our community walks, we started placing stories on the landmarks and the streets. As we (the young women and I) traversed the intricate terrain of a community entrenched in contradictions, I started learning about the paradox of spaces. Henri Lefebvre's (1991) foundational work brings awareness to the idea of spaces as socially produced and culturally informed. People associate meaning with spaces, which turns them into places (Setha Low, 2017), and this was evident as the young women recollected stories about family, friends, belonging and their layered experiences while they held my hand and introduced me to their world.

Research Context

This research is embedded in understanding and examining the placemaking practices of young women who live in homegrown community of Yerwada in Pune, India. Placemaking is defined as "an approach and a set of tools that puts community front and centre of deciding how their place looks and how it functions" (Cara Courage, Tom Borrup, Maria Rosario Jackson, Kylie Legge, Anita Mckeown, Louise Platt, Jason Schupbach, 2020, p. 5). Cara Courage, Tom Borrup, Maria Rosario Jackson, Kylie Legge, Anita Mckeown, Louise Platt and Jason Schupbach (2020) go on to say that the concept of placemaking is embedded in the idea that a community that lives in places is the expert. If we were to take the community out of the placemaking process, "the radical potential of this place-based process is completely lost" (p. 43). Within the placemaking framework, the focus shifts from buildings and infrastructure to people, community and their relationships with each other and the spaces around them, thus making people's participation essential to the process of

meaning-making and shared spaces. Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade (2011) explain this by stating that spaces are not neutral and hence are not equal for all but are experienced through bodies that are intersectionally marginalized or privileged due to their gender, class, caste, ability, sexuality, religion etc. This is to say that people live within intersectional identities and their bodies experience places differently, making their placemaking practices dependent on these intersections.

While walking on certain streets in India at specific times of the day, I have covered my chest with my backpack or been on a phone call with a friend or family member, as ways to avoid harassment in public. Unfortunately, this is a shared experience for many women who develop such strategies and tactics to exist in public spaces that have been deployed as patriarchal tools of control (Liz Bondi & Damaris Rose, 2003). However, a binary understanding of viewing spaces as either constraint or enabling for women must be re-evaluated. Access to perceived unsafe spaces in India, even using tactics, can give women a sense of freedom and empowerment. In my case, being able to experience safety in spaces and being able to move to Canada, a comparatively safer place than India, is a product of my privilege that gives me the ability to live in safer parts of the world. I state this to identify that spaces are complex entities and should be examined as such.

Spaces and places as socially constructed and embodied entities are abstractions that are made up of shared understandings and social structural differences of race, class, gender, and caste that are embedded in inequalities (Henri Lefebvre, 1991; Setha Low, 1996; Linda McDowell, 1993). This theoretical understanding of spaces and places implies not only that we cannot exist independently of the world around us but “the world around us cannot exist independent of the people who inhabit it” (Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman, 2014, p. 3). This highlights the importance of placemaking as a participatory process of collective meaning-making that people and their relationships give to a space (Iderlina Mateo-Babiano and Gini

Lee, 2020), which is at the core of my research. By drawing attention to the theories of embodied placemaking, places can either be reimagined as offering possibilities for radical change or can reproduce the social systems that are habitual, embedded and taken-for-granted. This research places emphasis on the former to counter the colonial hetero-patriarchal capitalist casteist narrative of urban spaces in India.

Within the context of India, caste becomes an important determinant of understanding the experiences of women/girls who belong to a certain caste category. The caste system is a social division of people based on castes that "are ascribed at birth and made hereditary" (Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal and Wandana Sonalkar, 2015, p. 45). The rights assigned to people based on caste are unequal, and those belonging to the lowest caste, referred to as Dalits, are penalized socially and economically. Dalits and other lower castes are denied the right to property, education, civic and cultural rights and restricted to manual labour and stigmatized for their occupation. At the crossroads of class, gender and caste, Dalit women and those who belong to lower castes face complex intersectionality of the inequities they face that come with economic deprivation, patriarchal norms and caste burdens. Often, sexual assault and violence against Dalit women is institutionalized (Clara Nubile, 2003). Some young women (Gauri, Diskha and Ayesha) in the urban slum communities belong to the Dalit caste, and their experiences of placemaking had to be studied through the lens of stigma, oppression and deprivation that comes with belonging to a lower caste.

In this research, I became aware of the complexity of spaces and the diverse experiences of young women through the lens of the different identities they belong to. There can be stark differences along the line of caste, religion and class for the young women and their experiences of placemaking. Homogenizing the experiences and placemaking practices of young women within urban slums in India is addressed in this research. As the researcher, I also had to the tread the line of not stereotyping the experiences of young women from

urban slum communities as victims, thus it became essential that I gather the stories of the young women appropriately and represent them and their experiences as authentically as is possible in a research process that is still deeply embedded in colonial legacies and hierarchies of the researcher and the researched. I do this by being cognizant of my own positionality within the research space. Being an upper-middle class woman from India, I believe there are differences in the ways I experience urban public spaces given my own privileges as compared to the young women in the research. Also, as my research engages with cultures that in some ways are different than my own and with marginalization that is experienced on a spectrum, it became important to uphold ideals of respect, reciprocity and responsiveness throughout the research process.

Michelle Anderson and Michele Lonsdale (2014) talk about respect in research as a two-way working together of people who are part of the research process – the participant and the researcher. They warn against researchers being "fly-in, fly-out" (p. 196) who show up to collect data for their own research without engaging with the participants in any valuable ways. Before going into the field, I was cognizant to not treat my research as a data grabbing exercise where I was the more knowledgeable outsider and the young women were people who would gain from my presence. I wanted to make sure that I valued the young women's experiences and their local knowledge. In order to ground my research in ideas of respect, I was in the field for 6 weeks, spending time with the young women almost every day. They would ask to meet more frequently, including the weekends, a request that I respected and followed through on. Spending more time with them also meant building trust and engaging with them in more authentic ways through showing up regularly and sharing my own life experiences with them. There were no traditional interviews that were conducted and almost all the stories that I collected and recorded were through unstructured conversations and going on walks that were led by them. I also made sure that their words

and stories were central to the research and I did the same through use of StoryMaps which made it a more accessible format. I shared the StoryMap with them after its creation to gather their feedback and incorporate it in the final product.

It was also my responsibility to respect the young women's choices in terms of things they wanted to be included in the research and things that they shared but wanted to keep out of the public eye. I also made sure that their anonymity was maintained, when requested. At the beginning of the data collection, I discussed consent and anonymity with them in detail and answered any questions that came up. They also requested some information to not be shared with the audience and that has been respected within this research. All the data that I collected was shared with them following the field work, including images which was in line with John W. Creswell's (2007) explanation of research as a process to give back to the community and reciprocity as a way to connect with those in the research. The initial plan in the research was to share the research data with the school to talk about the gendered experiences of the community with others in the school. However, the young women did not want their data to be shared with the community, as it could lead to potential safety issues within their homes and families. Since then, I have reconsidered the option of sharing their data with the school directly and instead plan on working with the school to create an educational module that talks about safe spaces and placemaking within community without directly referring to any of the young women's stories. Grounding my research in reciprocity meant that I shared my own experiences with the young women, answering any questions that they had about my own lived experiences. In my dissertation, I share my positionality with the readers, to make sure that they understand the lens that I have used for analyzing research data. I would like to refrain from using the term 'participants' for the young women in the research as a post-qualitative inquiry (discussed later in the research process chapter) calls for a blurring of the researcher-participant divide. Additionally, the

young women were leading research through conversations and community walks. One of the intentions of the research was for the young women to find a platform to share their stories and understand the value of their lived experiences.

Why young women?

The research was conducted with young women from the homegrown neighbourhood (explained in the Research Process Chapter) of Yerwada, Pune, India. These young women were within the age bracket of 15-17 years of age who were studying in Grades 9 and 10 from Matoshri English Medium School, housed within the Yerwada community. According to Olivia Theocharides-Feldman and Julia King (2024), young women have largely been left out of public spaces -- planning, design and implementation. This exclusion is seen through urban design that fails to light the streets after dark to make it safer for women, or lack of public washrooms for women, or the presence of older men that makes places feel unsafe for younger women. Furthermore, the young women belonged to varied religious, caste and familial backgrounds which complicates their relationship with spatiality. Younger women from lower-income households are unable to access spaces that might be safer but are unaffordable like shopping malls. Additionally, young women who are visibly Muslim (example wearing a hijab) can find themselves at the receiving end of violence or exclusion by virtue of their minority status in India. A rapid literature scan (Maria Loroño-Leturiondo & Sam Illingworth, 2023 and Jess Berry, 2025) revealed a gap in the consideration of gender within the placemaking discourse (e.g., Project for Public Places, 2015). As seen in the examples stated above, public spaces are overwhelmingly designed for males, specifically older males. As summed up powerfully by the question that Leslie Kern (2020) asks in her book *The Feminist City*, “Why do I have to walk an extra mile home because the shortcut is too dangerous?” (p. 8). Additionally, according to Kathryn Travers (2020), “much of the work around placemaking continues to be rather idyllic, failing to consider its potential

perpetuation of social and spatial exclusions related to gender, race and class, among others, both in its processes and results" (p. 140). Furthermore, within the context of urban India, much of the work around safe spaces has been done with middle-class working women, as outlined in work by Kalpana Vishwanath and Surabhi Tandon Mehrotra (2007), which is echoed by Anandita Datta (2020) and Syeda Jafar Zahan (2022) who argue that older women have more access to public spaces as compared to younger women. Such a gap becomes glaringly obvious as I started to examine research on Dalit women's spatial experiences within the rising masculinist nationalist upper caste supremacy on the rise in India. With the rising violence against Dalit women in India (see Citizens for Justice and Peace, 2024), there is a further erasure of their voices and stories through direct violence and exclusion. An intentional inclusion of young Dalit women's voices in this research serves to challenge their exclusion. Considering the different intersectionality of age, caste and class that the young women of this research can bring, I believe, offers a unique insight into the spatial lived realities and informal placemaking practices.

Even within feminist research within spatiality, geography and lived experiences, there is either an omission of young, lower-class women or they are either showcased as overdetermined or victims (e.g., Ann Varley, 2013). Such representation glosses over the complexities that their lives possess. There is also a homogenization of their experiences, which fails to account for the role of intersectionality in determining everyone's unique experiences. Within varied geographical regions, the differences in women's enactment of agency and autonomy are further differentiated based on class, caste, religion, age, to name a few. Anandita Datta (2021) argues for a need to study gendered lives of people within India against a "backdrop of their spatial contexts" (p. 7). The way gender is shaped, enacted or experienced in India varies depending on the geographical and cultural contexts. By studying the varied experiences of young women from homegrown neighbourhoods, spatiality and

placemaking practices of young women are placed within their socio-cultural and economic contexts. Co-creating research with young women from homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India where they tell their own stories of resistance, marginalization and agency provides value to otherwise absent voices.

Research Purpose

The act of gathering diverse stories and experiences of girls/women within formally colonized societies offers counter-narratives of women's agency and resistance to the hegemonic Western gender theory (Bagele Chilisa & Gabo Ntseane, 2010). Feminist scholars from North America and Europe have often excluded voices of Indigenous women and people and women of colour. This has devalued localized and contextual practices and experiences of women from the global south. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) writes about the "othering" of non-Western ideologies and stories of people from South Asia. This othering has led to a delineation of diverse voices within education, feminism and devaluing of local knowledge. Given that "women's experiences vary spatially and temporally" (Sara Ahmed, 2020, p. 1177), young women's stories of placemaking from homegrown neighbourhoods in urban India will bring diverse perspectives, thus attempting to make feminist theory and geography more inclusive.

This research, through an intersectional lens, examines the connection between spaces and the reproduction of power, to rethink places as not merely hierarchical but as relational. Through this rethinking, places can be thought as ever changing, exposing the possibility of young women reclaiming urban slum community spaces. As Anadita Datta (2021) argues, individual and collective agency can be negotiated given that gendered roles and relations are not fixed, but always shifting. Additionally, the narrative around the global south and gender is one of exclusion, violence and inequity. The purpose of this research was to demonstrate

how young women enacted placemaking by creating sites of agency, belonging and resistance through social interactions. The intent is not to romanticize young women's lives from the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India, which are determined by the patriarchy, unequal gender norms, violence and harassment. Instead, to highlight how young women make places amidst, and despite, these realities.

Chapter Two: A Conversation with Literature

Barbara Kamler and Pat Thomson (2011) ascertain that a literature review is not merely a summary of scholars' work, which can lead to a "he said, she said" (p. 2) scenario, but a conversation that a researcher has with the literature and scholars who have come before them. For that reason, I decided to title my chapter as such. I begin this conversation by grounding my research in a postcolonial intersectional feminist framework. Such a theoretical underpinning becomes crucial to the research and the rest of the conversation around understanding young women from urban India and their spatial experiences to challenge the Eurocentric perception of concepts like agency and resistance. I converse with the literature to examine the power relationships in homegrown neighbourhoods of India at the nexus of gender, class, caste and religion. In my conversation with scholars of intersectional feminism, specifically within the urban context of India, I underline ways in which intersectional identity and power dynamics shape spaces and places. I further dialogue with feminist theorists within geography to establish how young women are positioned within the spatial boundaries of homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India. This conversation underlies ways I understand spaces and places through a lens of identity and as socio-culturally produced. I then move on to a discussion around youth, placemaking and informal urban spaces.

Before beginning, I wish to frame my research through the essential act of restating the questions that my research sought to answer. In my research, I ask, "How do young women experience the homegrown neighbourhoods they live in?", "Within the intersecting marginalization of gender, class, caste, religion and additional identities, what placemaking practices are enacted by young women from the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India?" and "How do these placemaking practices impact the intersectional spatiality of the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India?"

Theoretical underpinnings

> For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.
>
> Audre Lorde (1984, p. 111)

Within postcolonial intersectional feminism, one must acknowledge that the patriarchy and racism are deeply embedded in the genealogy of post-colonization that embeds race and gender within nation building. This theoretical underpinning highlights that people are always marked by their differences given that "cultural differences are always racialized" (Sharlene Mollett & Caroline Faria, 2018, p. 120). Within the colonial hierarchies of the world, postcolonial intersectionality demands that attention must be paid to race and by extension to caste and ethnicity. I kept returning to Audre Lorde's (1984) assertions around the ideas that any discussion of feminist thought and theory would be incomplete if it does not examine the differences of people around the world and without an input from women who live at intersections of marginalized identities (poor, black, global south, lesbian, queer and/or trans). In my engagement with postcoloniality and intersectionality theories, it was becoming evident that to understand people's lived experiences, it was important to understand structural, political and systemic inequalities and to move away from examining intersectionality as a cluster of identities that explain individual lived experiences (Kimberley Crenshaw, 1989). Such a lens of postcolonial intersectional feminism was key to helping me understand how privilege and oppression shape the lives and experiences of young women from homegrown neighbourhoods in urban India that are biproducts of large-scale migration and rural land acquisitions.

The literature made clear to me that that we do not live in a post-colonial world as the structures of colonization and the impact it has on people's lives continues to oppress and marginalize people in different ways. The premise of postcolonial thought is based on the

idea that colonized people have an imagined supposition of inferiority that they have levied on themselves. Beyond the physical, economic, legal, classist, casteist, sexist and racist impacts of colonization, the psychological impact is seen in ways where the colonized have internalized and continued the colonial violence and hierarchies of power (Ricarda Hammer, 2020). Within my research, I see postcolonial thought emerging from the idea that people from slums in India have internalized that they have no value in a society that is neoliberal, capitalist and Eurocentric.

Structural impacts of colonization on homegrown neighbourhoods and on people who live in them is seen through "the development and implementation of a global super capitalist economic system that is primarily controlled by the West and ultimately mediates all global relations" (Ricarda Hammer, 2020, p. 578). The aspirations of moving to the cities, at times being forced out by land acquisition, global climate change driving people away from agriculture, and the prospect of better lives in big cities are all biproducts of a postcolonial capitalist system. I was able to observe these impacts as I listened to young women's recollection of their grandparents migrating to the city in search for work and "better" living conditions.

Postcolonial intersectional feminist theories served as an exploration of the intersecting relationship between colonialism and neoliberalism with gender, class, race, and sexuality within the different contexts of women's lives (Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan & You-Me Park, 2005). Several scholars' (Audre Lorde, 1997; Gayatri Spivak, 2005; Gurminder K. Bhambra, 2023; Homi K. Bhabha, 1994; Mohanty, 1984; Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, 1993; Reina Lewis, 2006) work that I was reading was pointing to the tensions that exist between the colonizer and the colonized, oppressor and the oppressed. Particularly, my readings and the discussions between scholars were highlighting the internalization of colonization that happens through acts of placing at the top of hierarchy the colonizers ways of knowing, their

languages and their ways of being in the world. Postcolonial feminist theories challenge these by re-centering the voices of the people from the global south, specifically the historically marginalized. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) critiqued the monolithic representation of the third-world women as devoid of agency and complexity. Within the context of the homegrown neighbourhoods, my readings of this critique led to the important realization around the need to reshape the historical representation of young women from homegrown neighbourhoods as deficit, vulnerable and marginalized. It became crucial to me that I was shifting the lens from a singular narrative of oppression to portraying the complexity of their narratives that are layered, nuanced and constantly evolving and being resisted by them.

Postcolonial feminist intersectionality within spatiality led me to works of feminist geographers like Doreen Massey (2013) and Elizabeth Grosz (1994). They were critical in grounding my understanding around power, inequity and identity as inscribed in and reproduced through space. I expand on this later as I talk about places as socially constructed, however, within postcoloniality, I was understanding that homegrown neighbourhoods are not merely places of deprivation but of community, political action and feminist action. As an extension, Richa Nagar's (2002) work in Northern India highlighted the need to understand women's spatial struggles and resistances as continuous, ongoing and always in flux. Reading and engaging with spatial justice work specifically from postcolonial feminist lens led to a realization that young women from homegrown neighbourhoods were simultaneously challenging and reproducing spatial norms through their practices of community building, engaging in leisure, occupying public spaces and redefining the boundaries of domesticity.

Within postcolonial intersectional feminism scholarship, I have returned time and again to Sara Ahmed's (2006) work to examine how different bodies experience places differently. Through the intersectionality of gender, class, caste, religion and age, young women experience spaces through the multiple intersecting lens of their identities. This

makes the act of spatial justice as a deeply embodied, relational and contested process. In this research, as I engage with the questions of spatial experiences and placemaking through postcolonial feminism, it became evident that I needed to centre the marginalized voices of young women. The theoretical underpinnings of my work required an epistemological and methodological shift to community-engaged research that privileges the voices and stories of the historically marginalized. The way I was able to achieve this in my research is explained in my Research Process chapter. Before expanding on theories of places and spatiality of identity and power, I examine the context of India and the homegrown neighbourhoods within them through the lens of intersectionality.

India at Intersections - Gender, Caste, Religion and Class

Shifting away from the singular lens of homegrown neighbourhoods within urban India as deprived, poor and underdeveloped was extremely important to my research. In fact, by shifting away from calling Yerwada an urban slum to a homegrown neighbourhood (because of the disdain for the word urban slum expressed by the young women in my research) was, in itself, the first step in redefining the context that I was conducting my research in. As I came upon the work of Matias Echanove and Rahul Srivastava (2016), I started to challenge the negative connotation attached to the words ‘urban slum’. As the scholars offered me an alternative term, I realized how important the shift was within my research. Homegrown neighbourhoods, as complex entities with multiple stories, hierarchies and structures, were necessary to shift away from a heterogenous understanding of slums and lived experiences of everyone living within them. Homegrown neighbourhoods are places where people live in mutually dependent ways, where businesses thrive and communities are built by familial relations (Matias Echanove and Rahul Srivastava, 2016). Such an understanding of Yerwada offered me a fresh and nuanced lens of understanding the stories of the young women in the research. It also offered me a lens to analyze their experiences

through the multitude of intersecting identities the young women occupied without oversimplifying their experiences. I was starting to understand that the lived spatial experiences of the young women were not only a product of the lower-income neighbourhood that they lived in, but that additional factors like caste, religion and age further shaped their experiences. This was evident in the way that the same homegrown neighbourhood was experienced differently by the young women because of their intersecting identities.

As alluded to above, homegrown neighbourhoods are extremely complex entities with multiple genders, religions, classes and castes residing within them. People with multiple intersecting identity categories exist within these communities, revealing them as ecosystems with complex social hierarchies. Unlike what might appear at first sight, these communities are not homogeneous. People living in them have a heterogeneous composition along class, caste and religion (Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade, 2011). I begin by acknowledging that reading about homegrown neighbourhoods revealed that they get sidelined by the urban planning authorities, and generally struggle with poor water, electricity and sanitation infrastructure (Digambar Abaji Chimankar, 2016). This lack of infrastructure specifically affects women and other vulnerable populations as most of the domestic life management falls within their realm of responsibilities (Wren Vogel, Christina D. Hwang, Sangchul Hwang, 2022). Women within these communities also experience growing gender-based violence, which leads to their further exclusion from public life (Sylvia H. Chant & Cathy McIlwaine, 2016).

An essential aspect to understand here is that living in homegrown neighbourhood blurs boundaries between public/private spaces. Many families live in one-bedroom houses with the possibility of having bathrooms in shared spaces of the community. This might give women some access to public spaces, but hardly any to private spaces. With no clear boundary between public and private, Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade's

writings (2011) were exposing me to the idea that women from homegrown neighbourhoods must carry the burden of "marking their private bodies" (p. 131) based on what they wear, how they walk, and who they talk to. Therefore, the moral responsibilities of women within homegrown neighbourhoods are higher given the proximity to where people live.

Within the complex mesh of identities within India, a major consideration that I had to be aware of was that of caste. "Caste is considered by social scientists as a unit of social stratification that places its units and subunits in an order of high and low rank by birth" (Kurmana Siham Chalam, 2020, p. 2). Within the four major castes identified in India, the lower caste, called the Dalits, has faced extreme violence, deprivation, and land ownership and access to jobs. This stratification is not a historical concept but continues till this day. In my conversation with scholars, I was coming across reports of lynching of Dalits who are forced into manual scavenging and free labour work and are not allowed into jobs and in places that are available to other people. I was coming across stories (Dalit man lynched in Rajasthan for drawing water from tubewell, 2022) of Dalit people lynched for entering places they "are not supposed to" such of those meant for the upper-caste people. Given the strong connection between caste and class whereby people belonging to the lower caste are systemically marginalized to the extend of having limited opportunities for upward class mobility, I will be making the assertion that lower caste and lower-class as interchangeable in my writing within the context of homegrown neighbourhoods.

My understanding was further expanded, as I started to read feminist scholars like Sharmila Rege (1998) and Uma Chakravarti (2003) talk about the inclusion of caste as an essential conversation within Indian feminist scholarship. Their call to include Dalit women's voices and Dalit feminism in Indian feminist studies shifted away from the universality of women's experiences in India. Within the intersection of caste and gender, Dalit women face multiple layers of marginalization. As three of the young women in the research belonged to

sub-categories under Dalit caste, I needed to understand their dispositions and resistances and challenge the dominant discourse that erases caste-based violence and inequity within India (Smita Narula, 1999).

Zoya Hasan (2009) and Hilal Ahmed (2019) both talk about the axis of marginalization for Muslim women in India, specifically from the lower-class. Muslim communities as minorities in India face spatial exclusion which is further exacerbated for Muslim women who struggle with patriarchal control within their own communities. In reading these authors I was making sense of the ghettoization that some Muslim communities face within homegrown neighbourhoods in urban India and its impact of their lived spatiality. Being forced into corners of cities further restricts access to places and opportunities for Muslim women. One of the young women in my study was a hijab-wearing, visibly Muslim woman and becoming aware of the intersectionality of class, gender, religion and the impact it had on her spatial experiences was crucial to my research and my deepening understanding.

Anandita Datta (2021) and Deniz Kandiyti's (1988) work makes a powerful assertion that young women are further marginalized by virtue of their age. They talk about ways classic patriarchy (prevalent in India), whereby women are rewarded for submission and conformity, places older women as gatekeepers of patriarchy, thus exercising control and power over younger women. In the context of India, sometimes women are seen as actively partaking in oppression of other women. Young women in India also become sites of control, family honour and sexual respectability (Ritty Lukose, 2009). Exploring Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kehily's (2008) work on young people and the strategies that they use for resistance further provided me with the tools to examine the complex nature of young women's identities from homegrown neighbourhoods, as they continually negotiate between modernity and tradition. Within the neoliberal urban city, young women experience

consumerism and access to digital media that creates space for desire to challenge the traditional familial controls. This is discussed further in chapter five of the dissertation.

Nexus of Intersectionality

A conversation with intersectionality theory within the context of urban India and the homegrown neighbourhoods offered me a powerful insight into understanding and examining the spatial lived experiences of young women. The complexity of lives of young women for whom gender does not exist in isolation but intersects with class, caste, religion and age, place was essential in unpacking how young women from homegrown neighbourhood's experience space, assert agency and engage in placemaking practices both constrained and resistant of the dominant hierarchical power structures. The next set of conversations with the literature was within the area of feminist geography as I started bringing together the context established in this section and extended it to understand places as experienced through the lens of intersectionality and as socio-culturally (re)produced.

Setha Low (2009) and Yi Fu Tuan (1977) both assert that spaces are more absolute, fixed locations which become places when "we get to know [it] better and endow it with meaning" (Yi Fu Tuan, 1977, p. 6). Grasping the connection between spaces and places was vital to a foundational concept that emerged through my engagement with literature -- places are created by people who reside in them, thus making them subjective, dynamic and socio-culturally constructed. My perception of places as dynamic and subjective brought me to scholars within the domain of intersectional feminist geography. I will expand on the work of some of the prominent scholars within this area, along with the ways they were shaping my grasp of this research. I do this by outlining the role of identity in shaping people's perceptions, experiences and construction of places.

Feminist Intersectional Spatiality

Linda McDowell (2003) describes places as spaces that have meaning, personality and connection to cultural and personal identity. Her work on cultural geography that describes how people experience places culturally was foundational to my examination of the experiences of young women as dependent on their socio-cultural positionality. As young women who belong to a certain class, caste, age and gender categories, I knew before going into the field that their experiences would be influenced by the intersecting identity categories that they belonged to.

Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman (2014) furthered this notion by adding a layer to my understanding of places as embedded in people's intersecting identities by asserting that places hold varied meanings for people based on their gender, class, race, age and ethnicity. Seeing places as changing, dynamic entities was critical to this research as I started to engage with lived spatiality as a bi-directional idea, i.e. places impacting people and vice versa. Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman (2014) added a layer to my understanding of places as embedded in people's intersectional identities by asserting that places hold varied meanings for people based on their gender, class, race, age and ethnicity.

I began to see the contribution of places to one's identity, a concept referred to as "place-identity" (Harold M. Proshansky, Abbe K. Fabian, Robert Kaminoff, 1983). These scholars of "place-identity" theory helped me conceive ways people identified with certain places like home or neighbourhood based on their intersectional identities. Building on their work, I could explain that places contained symbols of various social identities like caste, class or gender, something that I have seen myself in various neighbourhoods growing up in India.

Setha Low's (1996) theory of *Duality of Space* was critical to understanding spaces as created by people's actions, who are social agents. She referred to places as predominantly

social, produced by bodies that inhabit a space along with historical, cultural and political forces within them. All these conversations I had with the work of scholars of intersectional feminist geography made it possible for me to see places as alive, emerging and always in the process of becoming. It was this recognition of places as a social product that later led to various places within my research becoming my sixth research participant (elaborated in the research process chapter). Engagement with theories of place identity affirmed for me that spaces and places are made up of shared as well as varied understandings across social differences such as race, class, ethnicity and gender. My encounter with theories of cultural geography that see places as socio-culturally produced concretized the relationship between places and identity, and ways that people create a sense of place by continually (re)producing them.

Places as socio-culturally (re)produced

> "Space is not innocent of gender, and gender is not unaware of space"
>
> Anindita Datta (2020, p. 13)

Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade's (2011) work spoke to me immensely as they outlined the concept of spaces as not neutral grounds, i.e. equal for all. They appealed to those parts of me that intuitively knew that places were experienced through the lens of our intersectional identities. Setha Low (2017) calls it the social construction of space. According to all the scholars discussed above, places are abstractions made up of shared meaning and structural differences based on race, gender, class, etc. By engaging in their writings, I inferred the role of power relations in underlining the social construction of space, implying that places are embedded in inequalities. Sherene H. Razak (2009) further asserts that spaces are organized to sustain social relations, which in turn shape spaces. Such an awareness was pivotal to this research as I concluded that homegrown neighbourhoods become a unique reality for each person, dependent on their unique

intersectional identities. Thus, before my fieldwork, I had established a basic understanding of homegrown neighbourhoods as experienced heterogeneously by the young women.

In my encounter with feminist geography, I was reading feminist scholars' work that informed the idea that places as integrally structured around systems of oppression -- gendered, classist and casteist. My immersion into Anindita Datta's (2020) work introduced me to the concept of "regional genderscapes" (p. 4). According to her, the term refers to geographical locations and spaces as enacted and experienced through the lens of gendered roles and gender relations. To me, this confirmed my pre-understanding that women experienced places through the lens of their gendered identities. Essentially, women are restricted in their use and occupation of public spaces through the perceived and actual fear of violence that is inflicted on them. Gill Valentine's (1989) work was also crucial in unravelling the conception that women have restricted access to public spaces and most of them make mental maps of places that are safer during certain times of the day and where they are likely to fear assault due to their past experiences, other people's experiences or stories. Syeda Jenifa Zahan (2022), another feminist scholar, adds that women "undergo countless instances of routine violence" (p. 3) and such blatant acts of violence control the gendered use of spaces within urban geographies. The spatial gendering makes women adapt how they walk, talk, dress or make eye contact with people, which deeply embodies gendered spatiality. In addition to that, other structured inequalities like class, caste and religion affirm that places and their experiences are contingent on one's intersecting identity categories. What I was noticing within feminist geography was the emphasis on places as embodied, as experienced through the body that is socially positioned in systemic hierarchies.

Embodiment of Places

In their work on embodiment and places, Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman (2014) point to the importance of foregrounding the body's role in the (re)creation of places. By interacting with their work, I was uncovering the interconnectedness of people and their built/created environment. I believe that this was a critical dialogue with literature, as it exposes the need to grasp the dependence of the body on places and vice versa. Emphasizing embodiment allowed me to underscore the element of human agency in the "physical construction and social production of place" (p. 4). I was starting to comprehend that the physical environment was dependent on people and the larger socio-cultural, political and economic systems within which they existed. The female body is often inscribed with moral and ethical meanings that are regulated by family traditions and norms, religious codes and community expectations. Such regulations are seen in varied ways -- restricted mobility, policing of sexual and physical freedom and women's bodies as placeholders of family honour.

Places, as socio-culturally constructed, set the ground for establishing that they are fluid and flexible. Doreen Massey (2005), another scholar whose work is critical to this research, argues that places are always under construction and in the process of being made and remade. According to her, the meanings associated with places are impacted not just by the change in the physical environment and interpretations of these changes, but also through new experiences, evolved relationships, and social interactions. Adding another building block to this research, her work speaks to the notion of (re)production of space, as the title of this section suggests. I was learning that places impacted people, but people, their relationships and the meaning they associated with places also impacted the spaces. These scholars gave me a vital insight that people experience places, conditional on identity and power. Additionally, people could reimagine places to challenge existing spatial norms and

inequities. This reimagination of places happens through resistance and people exerting agency.

The role of intersectionality on spatiality offers a dynamic view of power and intersectional relations (Maria Rodó-de-Zárate & Mireia Baylina, 2018). The decision on what categories to consider, prioritize and study, which intersections are magnified and how, is defined by the researcher. Given my own experiences of having been a young woman in India and having worked with young women from homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India before, I chose to focus on the categories of gender, age, and class. Additionally, as the research is placed in India, caste, race and religion became important categories to study. As an intersectional feminist, my research challenges the notion that womanhood and oppression of women is experienced in singular, unified ways. Additionally, my research emphasizes that homegrown neighbourhoods are not experienced in a binary form of being oppressive or otherwise. I converse with Sarah Ahmed's ideas (2017) here who points out that women's agency within developing countries do not fit neatly within categories of 'existent' or 'absent' but rather should be studied through the socio-cultural and historical contexts. My conversation with her work, along with the work of other scholars from the global south, was helping me shift the conception of resistance and agency to include the voices of the marginalized. This shift was important as I needed to understand ways in which young women in my research were resisting power and norms that were put on them within the context of spatial agency.

Resistance and Agency in the Global South

Anindita Datta (2021) makes a powerful argument that highlights that individual and collective agency can be negotiated, given that gendered roles and relations are not fixed but always shifting. Such an assertion is crucial to knowing that a lack of agency that is

experienced by the young women in some contexts and at times is possible to (re)imagine. The need to talk specifically about women's agency in the global south stems from the idea that women's agency in the global south often faces additional challenges of poverty, limited access to education and resources and lack of political freedom that women from the global north may not. Gender-based violence also has a large impact on women exercising their agency within families and communities. Thus, agency within the context of the global south must be reimagined as a concept whereby people act in a socially acceptable manner to "produce legitimacy in public spaces" (Syeda Jenifa Zahan, 2022, p. 13). Syeda implies that the oppressed extend their claims to the spaces where they might find themselves excluded. As Anandita Das (2006) claims, women in such cases relocate their agency in the ordinary and the everyday rather than escaping from it. Through acts of creating a place for themselves, women often portray resilience as forms of everyday resistance that become a middle ground to show agency, endurance and adaptation. This is done to exercise agency in ways that are reflective of their socioeconomic positions within communities (Sarah Ahmed, 2020). People are not passive occupants of spaces in the world and through multiple actions -- intentional, embodied, or unintentional are challenging oppressive practices (Tara Page, 2020). This makes the young women in this research agentic entities -- a crucial reminder to move away from victimizing the young women from homegrown neighbourhoods and value the complexity of their lives (Ann Varley, 2015).

There is an argument in the literature against individual resilient practices that act as "proxies for the neoliberal governance and cooption of feminist values" (Syeda Jenifa Zahan, 2022, p. 15), and I wish to address this here, as young women can be seen to practice acts of resistance and challenge patriarchy in their individual siloed ways, a post-feminist outcome. Individual acts of everyday resistance practised by young women in the specific context of the global south require some form of conformity to the gender norms and violence and fear

that are so prevalent in the young women's lives. Individual agency work, even though it can seem to be defeating the purpose of feminism, which calls for a collective and systemic overthrow of unequal power, can be politically oriented (Syeda Jenifa Zahan, 2022). Their effect can be seen in the way women produce greater autonomy that is a "necessary precursor to resistance and transformation" (Geoff DeVerteuil and Oleg Golubchikov, 2016, p. 67). Oversimplifying individual agency and resilience to independent actions should not be assumed as uninfluenced in bringing about systemic change. Even the accommodation of certain gendered norms due to fear of violence or losing a sense of belonging takes away from the changes that these actions can bring to marginalized lives. Such a stance, which is often seen reflected in the liberal feminist stance of freedom and agency, is a non-inclusive narrative within feminist discourse which fails to consider the lives of women from the global south and/or those who cannot exist within the binaries of (un) empowerment. Agency and freedom within the global south, that demonstrates as inclination to be more intersectional (Ekatherina Zhukova, 2025) which is unlike liberal feminism, calls for a need to understand women's empowerment as a complex intermingling of class, caste, religion and other intersectionalities.

Spatiality of Belonging

Lastly, within feminist intersectional spatiality, I encountered scholars who spoke to the idea of belonging and affect. The politics of belonging/exclusion, visibility/invisibility and experiencing places through emotions is critical to feminist theories of space. Drawing on Sarah Ahmed's (2006) work describing how queer bodies are placed in spaces, it was becoming evident to me that certain bodies 'belong' while others are rendered out of place or invisible by systems of oppression. Extending her ideas to those of the young women from homegrown neighbourhoods supported my awareness that public spaces that are often created for and by men, discouraged the presence of the female body. This denial of access leads to a

lack of belonging in public spaces -- a concept that can be seen reflected in the young women's experiences of public spaces within homegrown neighbourhoods. Reading Avtar Brah (1996) deepened my understanding of this conception that it is possible to be located in a specific place and yet feel no sense of belonging to it. Within homegrown neighbourhoods, specifically within the public spaces, young women are routinely excluded by being confined to private spaces or being discouraged due to fear of violence. Such acts of systemic exclusion can lead to belonging being a contested emotion.

As Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) explains, belonging can either be personal, whereby one 'feels at home' in a place that is usually termed as place-belongingness or belonging as a political construct of resisting social-spatial inclusion/exclusion, which can be called the politics of belonging. The five young women from the urban slums live, go to school, play and work in these communities. Their sense of belonging could stem from their everyday interaction with streets that they regularly access, or the paths that they take to school every day or the shops they visit regularly. Their feelings of belonging could also stem from the collective and shared experiences of oppression and marginalization that they face. Many women rely on social networks to keep each other safe and to extend their access to spaces that would otherwise be absent. Such collective practices of creating community, resisting, and looking out for one another could be characterized as building a sense of belonging to a group and a place or a community at different times in one's life. Connecting to concepts of agency, I further understood that challenging this exclusion through acts of everyday resistances like walking in groups, forming communities, participating in religious activities, dressing in acceptable ways, are all acts that help young women navigate their communities.

As described by Christian Ehret and Ty Hollett (2016), experiences of making a place can generate feelings of belonging which are embodied and experienced through the ways our bodies feel and experience places. A shared sense of resistance and/or agency, practices of

resilience, experiences of oppression and violence and fear of unsafe access “produces a sense of solidarity” (Syeda Jafar Zahan, 2022, p. 8) among women who come from varied familial or social backgrounds. Anandita Datta (2021) and Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade (2011) highlight the same through their work on loitering as acts of resistance to reclaim city spaces. Collectively, when women ‘loiter’ in public spaces, parks and spaces for leisure, it becomes a means of reclaiming these spaces and resisting the trope of such spaces as “fraught with risk for women” (Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade, 2011, p. 56). Conversations with all these scholars’ work gave me the necessary perspective of shifting a binary understanding of belonging as either existent or absent, but rather experienced on a spectrum. At this junction of my conversation, I was being introduced to theories of placemaking, specifically within the context of youth in informal urban spaces like the homegrown neighbourhoods in urban India.

Placemaking - Youth and Informal Urban Spaces

Within urban studies, placemaking is understood through civic participation, equal access and community-led development. Reading Tara Page’s work (2020) made it clear that people’s agency and embodied ways of creating places for themselves became their placemaking practices. The common phrase “making a place for yourself in the world” came to my mind as I was engaging with the literature on placemaking. Given that people are not passive occupants of spaces, it is through their actions—intentional, embodied, or unintentional — that the process of placemaking occurs (Tara Page, 2020).

However, within postcolonial feminist discourse, placemaking was being studied as an informal process of the everyday, embodied and often invisible practice of creating place for oneself. Given that structural constraints limit the participation of certain demographics (young women, in this case) in active decision making about community spaces, it is in the

ordinary, mundane and everyday that placemaking practices need to be observed and studied. Specifically, within homegrown neighbourhoods that are classified as informal urban spaces (Gautam Bhan, 2009, 2016), excessive surveillance, control of young women's actions and use of public spaces and gendered division of labour all lead to challenging the normative understanding of placemaking. It was through the practice of everyday life, as described by Michel de Certeau (1984), that theories of placemaking as equal and inclusive had to be contested. I discuss this concept in detail within my discussion chapter, where I started analyzing the everyday practices of young women from the homegrown neighbourhoods as acts of placemaking. Even though my encounter with literature was leading me to question the Western understanding of placemaking, I have to confess that it was only through my encounter with the everyday lives of the young women while in the field and their often-invisible placemaking practices that I truly understood placemaking as an informal, relational and embedded practice.

Within the context of homegrown neighbourhoods, the construct of 'youth' is significantly under-theorized. A conversation with Ritty A. Lukose's (2009) work around youth in the urban Indian context revealed to me the often-competing expectations that are put on young women - that of obedience and aspiration. Young women within the homegrown neighbourhoods find themselves navigating access to education and employment opportunities that were not afforded to women who came before them while also managing that within the bounds of familial expectations and gendered roles. The shifting boundaries offers them opportunities to practise placemaking, even though it is done within the constraints of the community expectations and norms. They can access the digital world, opportunities at schools and possibilities of employment, all while managing the material and gendered constraints that limit their mobility and freedom.

As mentioned before, I ended up engaging with the literature around informal placemaking a lot more after my data collection and field visit. However, I was encountering various aspects of placemaking like embodiment, affect, relationality and adaptation through the reading of feminist placemaking scholarship. Asef Bayat's (2010) concept of marginalized communities' gradual claim through non-confrontational means is one of them. I was understanding that young women from homegrown neighbourhoods were perhaps creating places for themselves in non-obvious ways -- through dressing, adjusting routes to avoid harassment or through building community. Feminist scholars like Manissa M. Maharawal (2017) and Richa Nagar (2013) unmasked for me the role of relationality and emotions in the creation of safe spaces. For young women, building kinship, ties, and shared memories of spaces was an act of placemaking. A location within a community could become relevant and meaningful due to affective association of feelings like happiness and play. These themes will be discussed further in my (re)storying chapter.

To summarize this discussion of and with literature, it is evident that placemaking practices of young women from the urban slum are complex, layered processes of negotiating power and agency through the everyday, often invisible, embodied practices. Through conversing with literature, it became essential for me to recognize that placemaking practices of young women from Yerwada would require digging deeper into their everyday practices that might, at first sight, not appear to be agentic. As established before, this is due to the complexity of agency and freedom within the socio-political context of the global south and the intersectionality theory that raises a need to examine lived experiences of people within multiple, yet constantly changing, identities. This calls for placemaking to be understood through the layered nuance of socio-cultural context of the homegrown neighbourhoods along with an appreciation of the mundane everyday ways that the young women employ to make spaces livable and meaningful in the margins of the urban city.

Chapter Three: Research Process

The following chapter outlines my research process involving one and a half months in the field and the analysis and writing process afterwards. With my use of post-qualitative research inquiry, as discussed shortly, I find the traditional division of the chapter into sub-sections of data collection, analysis, and methodology rather misaligned with the process that I undertook in this research study. I start by describing the research site and the young women offering context to the research process. I then explain my use of post-qualitative inquiry in my research through using short narratives of my engagement while in the field. I also reflect on my own positionality while I was in the field, woven throughout the chapter. Lastly, I will use the thinking with theory approach of post-qualitative research to reflect on how I engaged with the young women in the field and my (re)storying of their narratives -- traditionally known as data collection and analysis.

In the first year of my doctoral studies, I was mesmerized by the power of narratives and stories through the reading of literature and engaging in narrative research in my courses. My research proposal outlined the use of narrative inquiry as my methodology. It was then that I was certain that I wanted to work with stories – listen to stories, tell and (re)tell them through my research. My methods of data collection -- unstructured interviews/conversations, focus groups and community walks were all designed with my initial plan to tell stories of the young women from the homegrown neighbourhood of Yerwada in Pune, India in mind. When planning for the research, I automatically leaped to methodology and planned my qualitative research process. In other words, I started my research with methodology and not theory. According to Jacques Derrida (2016), a person who thinks with a method has already decided how to proceed and is simply driven by method and is not a thinker. I say this to acknowledge that my research did not start from a post-qualitative inquiry space. In fact, the concept did not exist in my research vocabulary. Before I explain my use of post-qualitative inquiry in

this research, I will offer some context to the research by talking about Yerwada and the five young women who became a part of this research.

The Research Site

Urban India has less-developed communities located right next to high-rise buildings, and thus, people within these less-developed communities find work in the area. Most of the parents of the students attending the school are daily wage workers, service staff in nearby IT offices, hotels or hospitals. A google map image of Yerwada showcases this disparity and acts as a snapshot of this urban divide (see Figure 1), common to many/most big cities in India. As seen in the google map image below, Yerwada, a densely populated low-income area of the urban city, is located right next to big hotels and offices. Koregaon Park (as seen in the map) is one of the most affluent neighbourhoods of Pune city which is located right next to Yerwada. The disparity is talked about before is evident in the way the people living within neighbourhoods like Yerwada serve those living in the upper-class parts of the surrounding areas. Government refers to communities like Yerwada as urban slums in their census data. Yerwada is also one of the most densely populated areas within Pune city which houses a large urban population. Most of the people living within these communities are second or third generation immigrants from other parts of the country or rural areas of Maharashtra, the state in which Pune is located.

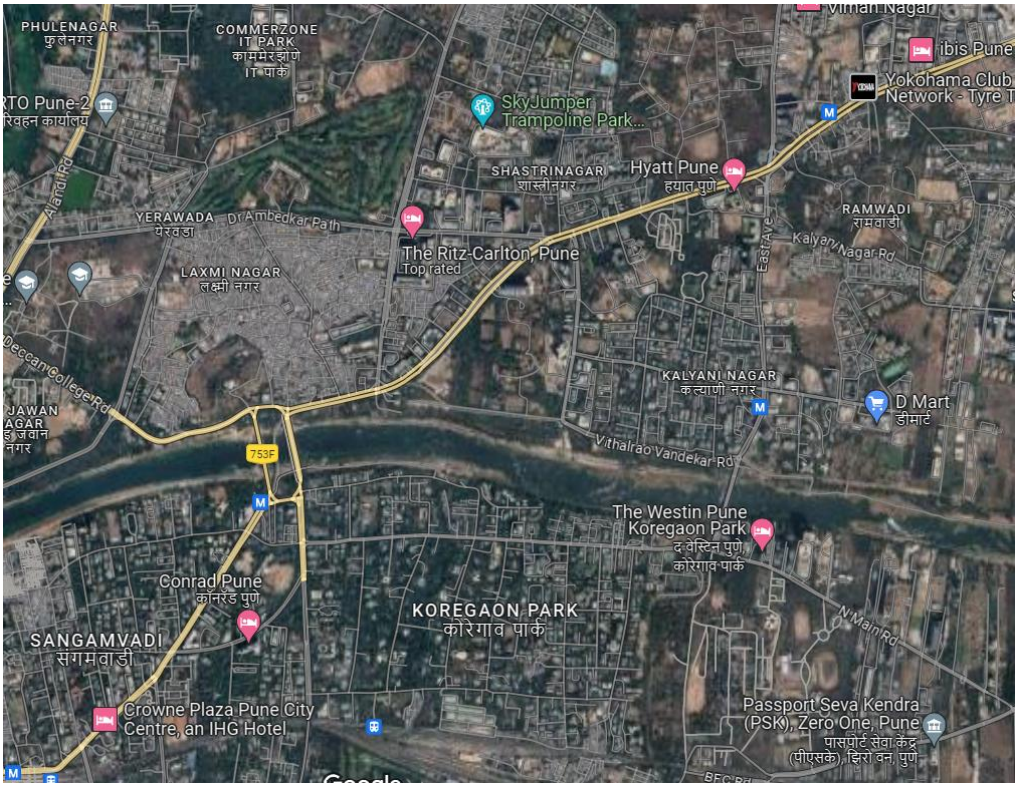

Figure 1: Google Map View of Yerwada, Pune, India

In July 2022, I went to Matoshri English Medium School (see Figure 2) for my research data collection. Matoshri is a public-private collaboration school that is housed within the Yerwada community. The collaboration basically means that the school administration and teaching is run by a non-profit organization while the government provides funding for students' education, the school building and other logistics. Within the Yerwada community of Pune in India, Matoshri English Medium School has most of their students from the local community. Since most of the students who attend public schools in India come from the same locations where the schools are situated (Ambast, n.d.), it is not uncommon to have a high population of migrant children within public schools in urban communities. Yerwada community, like many others around the world, is referred to as a homegrown neighbourhood. These communities usually lack infrastructure, like running water and proper electricity, but provide livelihoods and affordable housing for families who have limited access to large cities (Matias Echanove and Rahul Srivastava, 2016).

Figure 2: Matoshri English Medium School

I had worked in the community previously through my engagement with an NGO, prior to my doctoral studies. I knew about the context and was aware of the student population and parent demographics, which is why I was interested in conducting this research in that location. Most of the students in Matoshri are from the neighbouring small communities. Given that I had existing connections with the school and the non-profit associated with it, I was able to connect with the school, and they agreed to my working with the student population within these schools for my research work. They also offered me the school premises for holding my research meetings with the young women. I was paired with a teacher from the school who would help connect me to young women from Grade 9 and 10. I met up with Manisha Didi, a teacher from the school, before my first research meeting with young women. She gave me a lay of the land -- how the school functioned, the logistics of when I could meet with my participants and who I could potentially connect with for my work.

I was looking to work with young women from grades 9 and 10, from different socio-cultural, religious and caste backgrounds to add variability to the experiences. I also limited young women within the age bracket of 14-16 years old, i.e. young women, the reasons for which are discussed in the introduction chapter. However, I decided to talk to several young women from Grade 9 and 10 to present them with my research and ask if they were interested in joining. I explained to them through my research I was interested in knowing their spatial lived experiences and understand ways they create safe spaces for themselves and others in their community. I also talked to them extensively about consent and anonymity. This was followed by opening up space for questions and any concerns they might have about participating in the research. The young women who initially signed up for the research brought their friends into the group. I did not turn away any of the young women who showed interest in being part of the research, though decided to focus on the stories of five of them who showed up consistently. My first meeting was with around eleven young women to whom I presented my research idea and plan. By the end of the research, I had seven young women, five of whom engaged with the research regularly and whose stories I tell through the (re)story section of my dissertation.

My initial research plan outlined the use of unstructured one-on-one interviews with the young women, focus group discussions with them and a community walk as a means to see places from their lenses. It is needless to say that things in my research did not go completely as planned. On my first day on the field, as I shared my research idea with the young women, they unanimously shared their disdain of the use of the word urban slum to address their community. Gauri, one of the young women, was upset that people called their home “slums” and attached a certain meaning to the word and the place. According to her, urban slums meant that people looked at their homes as deprived, unclean, underdeveloped and something to feel ashamed of. I left the day questioning my own biases and

understanding of the community. Tone Pernille Østern, Sofia Jusslin, Kristian Nødtvedt Knudsen, Pauliina Maapalo and Ingrid Bjørkøy (2021) talk about the researcher always in-becoming throughout the process of research. I saw myself fully entangled with the research -- cognitively, emotionally and in embodied ways. This was evident to me when on my third day, I was immersed in their community, resolving fights between two of the young women, visiting their homes to have chai and talking to their families. In my research inquiry below, I talk about my shift into a post-qualitative inquiry that calls for research to evolve as it moves forward without a carefully laid out plan. Such entanglements of being immersed in research were not a part of the carefully laid research plan at the beginning!

The Young Women

I give an introduction to the five young women in the (re)storying chapter of my dissertation though I share information about the young women here also as I reference them in this part of the dissertation. I am also sharing images (see Figure 3, 4 and 5) of the five young women to give faces to their names. My references of their caste and religion in the introductions further establishes the segregation of people within caste/class/religion brackets. However, part of the introduction is based on the things that the young women shared with me as they introduced themselves at the beginning of the research. I believe this establishes the importance that caste and religion play in their everyday lived experiences.

Gauri is a 15-year-old confident, outspoken young woman in Grade 10. She lives with her mother and two younger siblings. Her family belongs to the lower caste referred to as Scheduled Caste (SC)in India. She is considered to be a ‘problem child’ at school and by her mother at home because she receives complaints about smoking or talking to boys in the school. Her parents separated when she was young, and she lives with her mother though occasionally visits her father’s family who live in a different neighborhood.

Diksha, a wise 15-year-old young woman in Grade 10, lives with her grandmother, father and an elder sister. Her family also belongs to the Mahar Caste that was historically considered the lowest amongst the Schedule Caste (SC). Her parents are separated, and she lives with her father while her brother lives with her mother. She visits her mother sometimes, who lives in a different part of the city.

Ayesha, known to be the mature one by her teachers and peers, is a 15-year-old in Grade 10 student. She lives with her parents and uncles/aunts in a joint family. Her family belongs to the Mahar Caste, which is a sub-sect within the Schedule Caste (SC) in India. Her family runs a scrap shop in the neighborhood.

Sanika, a 14-year-old in Grade 9, belongs to an upper-caste Hindu family. She lives with her parents and a younger sibling. She is considered to be extremely disciplined and focused by her teachers and peers in school. Sanika wishes to travel to the US for her higher education.

Yashfin, a 14-year-old young woman in Grade 9, comes from a Muslim family. She lives with her parents, grandparents and two younger siblings. She is considered great at academics and aspires to become a doctor. She is a confident and determined young woman who was very vocal about her thoughts during our conversations.

Figure 3: Gauri (left on top bench), Ayesha (right) and Diksha (right, on Ayesha's lap) with Other Friends

Figure 4: Sanika Playing Archery After School

Figure 5: Yashfin (Sitting Down with the Hijab) with her Friends

Stories that people tell are in and through places. As Elizabeth Mavroudi (2017) asserts, the narratives of belonging, otherness and nostalgia always fluctuate between "the timespace of 'here' and 'there'" (p.9). According to her timespace is the way people make sense of the interplay between time and spaces they inhabit. A journey into these narratives is bound to bring up memories of places -- the way they looked, smelled or sounded. Bodies move through time and space, recounting and gathering multiple narratives. Thus, as humans, we live through and in stories that are placed in locations. As Thomas van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose (2012) point out, we humans are innately capable of being storytellers and mapmakers by living "storied lives in storied landscapes" (p. 20). My research inquiry is housed within these multiple, yet interconnected, ideas around places, stories, embodiment, affect and mapping. I delve into bringing these ideas together through a discussion of my research inquiry process below.

The Research Inquiry

Post-qualitative inquiry, according to Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2018) and Karen Charman and Mary Dixon (2021), is not a methodology. It does not start with pre-existing methodologies, research designs, data collection methods or processes. Post-qualitative inquiry does not codify data and analyze it to draw a coherent and meticulous series of logical conclusions. Specifically, within narratives, such an inquiry does not emphasize a chronological representation of stories afterward. Post-qualitative inquiry challenges the goal of representation by asking people to experiment and create something new. There is a lack of a coherent definition of post-qualitative approaches, given that answering that question itself challenges the notion of such an inquiry that is rooted in not knowing and using writing as a means of thinking and inquiry (Laurel Richardson, 1990). As Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2018) describes, "this is truly an experimental inquiry, refusing impoverished answers, we've given to the questions of the world" (pp. 604-605).

Post-qualitative inquiry is based on post structural and post humanist theories, each of which challenges the pre-existence of methods and a single structured way of thinking. Poststructuralism challenges our secure sense of meaning or the notion of the existence of universal truths. Post structural theorists like Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault explain that reality, knowledge and language are socially constructed and constantly shifting. Embedded within post-qualitative inquiry is post humanist theory that is challenging the superiority of humans over non-humans, thus blurring the boundaries between human and non-human. Post humanist theory becomes important to my research as I expand on places within my research becoming an essential part of my research.

Post structural and posthuman theorists denied the use of pre-existing methods and methodologies and bolstered the idea of truth and identity as always evolving. My engagement with theory also demanded that I think about research differently. As I was reading feminist theory that was provocative, I was being led to poststructuralism. Reading feminist theorists like Judith Butler (1993), who explains performativity of gender and poststructuralist ideas of gender as not a stable category but shaped by cultural norms is at the heart of my work around places, narratives and identity (evident in the (re)storying chapter of my dissertation, in the section entitled Spatiality of Identity). In this research I draw upon the ideas that spatiality is gendered and performed, constantly shifting and open to evolving.

Post-structural inquiry blurs the boundaries of ontology and epistemology; as Karen Barad (2007) states, research and knowing do not occur at a distance but with a direct engagement with the world, which posits that boundaries between ontology and epistemology are blurred. Throughout my research, I was constantly engaging with truth instead of simply wanting to represent it. My intention with the research was not focused primarily on getting the stories of the young women and presenting them, but on engaging with their stories while I was in the field and as they were emerging in the process of my interaction with the young

women. As I look back on my research proposal, my onto-epistemological underpinnings were always rooted in ideas of poststructuralism and posthumanism. My research from the very beginning was based on the belief that knowledge is subjective, co-created and socio-culturally varied. I talked about the multiplicity of realities and power as the determinant of knowledge and truth. I also referred to my onto-epistemological belief as an inquiry based on the relationship between people and the environment. The reason I mention this is to highlight that I was always working/thinking in post qualitative inquiry, though rather unknowingly.

Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2021) argues that a research study that "starts as a qualitative study cannot be made post-qualitative after the fact" (p. 5). Like most qualitative researchers, even though methodology was key to the research I wanted to do, I was struggling with the likes of narrative analysis that was asking me to analyze people's narratives and order them chronologically. Such a task became even more tedious as I went on the field to 'collect data' and realized that I could not separate the human from the data. I was not methodically conducting interviews and focus groups based on pre-designed questions and neither was my analysis neatly resulting in themes and categories. Unlike the initial plan of collecting and (re)telling stories of young women, I was starting to engage with places as an additional entity and an essential part of my research. In my (re)storying chapter, I tell stories of the young women in and through the places that they experience and occupy. That way, I also relate stories of the places that the young women talk about which ended up becoming essential to this research. I was engaging in stories of places as much as that of the young women. The non-human, in this case, was very much shaping the research and influencing the stories of the young women. It was only when I started writing my dissertation and making sense of all the stories that I had collected that I came upon the term post-qualitative inquiry.

Post-qualitative inquiry warrants that researchers are not static beings but change with the process. I found myself growing not just in the ways that I was seeing my research but in ways that I was seeing the world. During the research, I was not just an outsider but also shared my own stories of once being a young woman in India. My own role was consistently shifting. At times, I was an outsider, a researcher from Canada, detached from the lives of these young women. In the beginning of my time on the field, the young women would constantly ask me about my life in Canada. They mentioned how different my life was, the choices that I was allowed to make and the freedoms that I enjoyed. Eventually, as I started to share my own life experiences of living in India, I slowly became a part of the group. With Yashfin, I noticed my identity as a Muslim woman emerged. As she shared stories of oppression at the intersections of her religion and gender, I shared my stories that resonated with hers. As Tone Pernille Østern, Sofia Jusslin, Kristian Nødtvedt Knudsen, Pauliina Maapalo and Ingrid Bjørkøy (2021) contend, I was very much involved in the research as an affected body and was not an objective outsider or observer. I was changing with my research, evolving and growing in the process -- both as a researcher and a human.

Even though these changes were happening, I was unsure of how to work through them. I was unsure if this was the 'right way to do research'. I was struggling with questions of how to capture the changes in my ways of thinking through language and my writing of the research. The paradigmatic shift, even though it always existed, was manageable until I reached the data analysis part of my research. As I came back with a lot of conversations, stories, images, audio and counter-maps (to be discussed later in this chapter), literature of methodology and analysis was telling me to transcribe my data, (re)read it and find themes by codifying the data. As prescribed, I started with attempting to transcribe the stories. Needless to say, I gave up the endeavour fairly early in the process. The young women's stories were told to me in Hindi, their second language and a common language that we used to converse.

That meant that I had to translate their stories and then transcribe them. I was again haunted by questions of abandoning the process as the wrong way of doing research. However, in conversations with my supervisor and some fellow doctoral students, I gained the confidence to challenge the notion of having to transcribe the stories. Instead, I decided to listen to them.

I spent the next few months of coming back from the field, listening and re-listening to our conversations. I started writing down pieces of the young women's stories on post it notes. These were stories that spoke to my research question, gave me an insight into their lived experiences, expanded on their experiences with places and the ways they engaged in placemaking and/or that came up multiple times emphasising its importance to them. I then placed these snippets of their stories on the feminist counter-maps, discussed in the research method chapter below, that they had drawn (see Figure 6). To me, this was an act of adding stories on top of places, blurring the boundaries between human and non-human. Such an act of layering maps and stories and images of the young women spoke to the idea of research produced, analysed and presented in and through multiple forms and modes. As Elizabeth St. Pierre (2011) asserts, using only verbal forms of expression reduces the meaning-making and affect-producing capabilities of research. The act of placing narratives on maps also gave me the idea to use StoryMaps as a way to (re)story the narratives of young women (discussed more in the (re)storying chapter of the dissertation). By placing young women's stories on maps and telling the stories through places, I was able to add to the richness and depth to the (re)storying of their lived experiences of their community.

Figure 6: My Research Data Analysis Process

The academic expectation is for the researcher to identify particular methodology or paradigm for their research at the beginning of the research process. I challenge this idea in two ways. Firstly, giving research the space to evolve on its own without having to fit it into a research paradigm might have higher knowledge-producing potential. As post-qualitative inquiry posits, there are different forms of knowledges and in such a research inquiry as outlined by Karen Barad (2007), knowledge is always being produced and (re)produced. By not stating the paradigm outrightly in the beginning, I recognize that knowledge is fluid and complex and my understanding of the paradigm did not lead the research, instead my engagement with the research in emotional, embodied ways led me to the post-qualitative research paradigm. Secondly, to challenge the notion of rationale, I want to highlight that I do not see myself doing this research in any other way. Given that I let the research guide me in my process of doing this work, it was evolving, and I was following where it led me. I have at times been confronted with the doubt that this is an overly romanticized idea of research or a highly improbable one. Having found the language of post-qualitive inquiry has provided me

with the validation that I have at times needed in my research. I am finding solace in the words of Alecia Youngblood Jackson (2017), Karen Barad (2007), and Elizabeth St. Pierre (2018), who have stated that research is fluid, data is alive, methods are method-less and methodology is experimental.

Thinking with theory

Central to post-qualitative inquiry is thinking-with-theory, as highlighted by Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei (2012). Unlike using an established methodology, post-qualitative inquiry posits that we break away from leading into research with methodologies and methods and instead keep coming back to theories that guide the research and our understanding of the 'data'. Such an approach to research takes away prescriptive ways of doing research and gives space for the research to evolve while still rooting the research in onto-epistemological worldviews. As asserted by Gilles Deleuze (1990), truth is never value-free, and thinking-with-theory allowed me to dialogue with the research -- not to represent a well-laid out truth but to engage with it, producing new insight. This research was guided by post-colonial intersectional feminist theories, and I strongly believe that I was thinking through the lens of this theoretical framework before, during and after my fieldwork. Instead of simply sharing my theoretical framework, I will shape this section by highlighting ways I was thinking with theory throughout my research by storying my research process.

(Re)storying places through the silenced narratives of the young women in my study who lived at multiple intersecting identities meant that this research found itself deeply entrenched in theories of intersectionality. These intersections create complex forms of oppression and opportunity for these young women, as discussed in the (re)storying section of the dissertation. Intersectionality, according to Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) is not merely a reflection of the lived experiences of people that represents a singular narrative of oppression.

Intersectionality explains the complex interplay of systemic barriers and social hierarchies that amplify challenges faced by the marginalized. According to Heshan Zhao (2024), intersectionality reveals that discrimination is not just layered but interconnected, creating a unique pattern of inequality for people of multiple marginalized identities.

I found intersectionality at the core of my worldview and throughout my research; I found myself reaching out for it. Before going in the field, I knew that even though I was a young woman from India, my intersectional marginalization of being a Muslim woman from upper-middle class in India made my experiences vastly different and unique from those of the young women that I would encounter in my research. Theory of intersectionality within this research helped me recognize that heterogeneity of experiences would offer a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of young women from the community. While in the field, I wanted to make sure that I was able to talk to a diverse population of young women -- different caste, class, religion and familial backgrounds. In my conversation with Manisha Didi (school support counterpart), I asked her to suggest names of young women who, in addition to having varied social identities, also had a diverse academic standing in school. Such an intentional approach to recruitment helped offer an inclusive and nuanced understanding of places and the lived experiences of the young women. The young women in this research came from varied caste, class and religion. This helped create a heterogenous understanding of the lives of young women in Yerwada. Engagement through an intersectional lens also unwrapped the stories of young women that reveal that even though Yerwada might look like a homogenous composition, it is anything but. People living in these communities have a heterogeneous composition along class, caste and religion, according to Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade (2011).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), in her TED talk about the danger of a single story, highlights the need to seek out diverse narratives. According to her, the danger of a

single story lies in the possibility of stereotyping people and their lived realities. She asserts that this is complicated because stereotypes can be true but are never the complete story and lead to prejudice. In talking about the lives of young women from homegrown neighborhoods of India, one can have a singular understanding. This understanding might be true, and in fact is to a certain extent, but it takes away from the complexity of the lives of these young women and their stories, that are not just of oppression but also of belonging and resistance (as seen in the (re)storying section). Thinking through the theory of intersectionality offered richness to my research process and to the stories that I was able to (re)tell.

Postcolonial feminism, as understood through my reading of the works of scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010) and Sarah Ahmed (2017), offered me a critical insight into the experiences of women from the global south. Being informed by these scholars was crucial at different stages of my research process as I started to understand the ongoing effects of colonization on power relations, gender inequity and economic deprivation of certain marginalized groups in South Asia, specifically. In fact, I saw myself reflected deeply in Chandra Talpade Mohanty's work "Under Western Eyes" given my own positionality of being a feminist researcher from Canada, yet somebody who grew up in the global south. As I dabbled in both the Western and the global south world, I returned to my own positionality of being a minority, while at the same time, with all my privileges. Sara Ahmed (2017) asks a crucial question of what it means to live a feminist life. According to her, such a life is not based on a set of ideals or norms but rather rooted in the ethical question of how to live better in an unjust world. To me, throughout this research, looking through a postcolonial feminist lens meant acknowledging my own intersectionality and standing in solidarity with the communities that have and continue to struggle at the hands of colonization and patriarchy.

Postcolonial feminist theories challenge the Western-centric narratives of the global south. The central aim of this research from the beginning, for me, was to tell narratives of communities that are often sidelined. By extension, the aim was rooted in my critical examination of Western or upper-caste and classed feminism that excludes voices of young women who have multiple marginalization by social hierarchies that are at times unique to India. I set out with the agenda of (re)telling these stories of young women from postcolonial societies. By amplifying the voices of these young women and acknowledging their unique struggles through their own narratives meant returning to postcolonial feminist theories time and again.

Here I wish to bring forward this fine line of the academic privilege that I live within. Gayatri Spivak (2010) in her work, *Can the subaltern speak*, challenges the speaking on behalf of the subaltern -- Indigenous people dispossessed in colonial societies. She and Ahmed (2020) both talk about the agency of these communities and their ability to speak for themselves. Western, upper-caste and classed feminism have reproduced a hegemonic structure that speaks on behalf of people such as these young women. In this research, I have specifically been challenging my own position of speaking on behalf of these young women. In (re)telling their stories, I am aware that my research did not end up becoming completely participatory. I attempt to offer an insight into the lives of these young women through respecting their own words and entangling with the research in embodied and affective ways. However, such an endeavour is always incomplete. My interest in studying this particular research topic, deciding how to study, the use of specific tools and the academic end product that I write in the colonizer's language, all speak to my academic privilege and power relations that exist within research. My hope is that by acknowledging my own positionality, I offer an insight into my biases and subjectivities. Through sharing my own stories with the young women and attempting to break some of those researcher-researched barriers, by

asking them to lead me to places and stories that they wanted to show and tell, I was constantly bringing my awareness to forms of intellectual oppression and marginalization that traditional extractive research can have on already marginalized communities.

My engagement with postcolonial feminist intersectionality was at the heart of my motivation behind (re)storying the young women's experiences of places. During the analysis and writing, not linear, but deeply entangled, processes, I was seeing the research stories through the lens of theory. Postcolonial feminist intersectionality acknowledges that patriarchy and racism are deeply embedded in the genealogy of post-colonization that embeds race and gender within nation building. This theory highlights that people are always marked by their differences, given that "cultural differences are always racialized" (p. 120), as explained by Sharlene Mollett and Caroline Faria (2018). Within the colonial hierarchies of the world, postcolonial intersectionality demands that attention must be paid to race and by extension, to caste and ethnicity. While in the field and after, I was confronted by the deep hold of caste on the lives of these young women. As I started (re)storying the young women's lives, caste became one of the core factors that influenced the lived realities of these young women. Given that I intentionally recruited young women with varying caste-based categories, the role of caste and the long-lasting impacts it had on their lives were even more evident. In the (re)storying section of the dissertation, it is evident that caste, as a deeply rooted reason of social stratification, has a prominent role to play in the spatial experiences of the young women. I have attempted to offer an insight into it and have remained cognizant of the impacts of caste-based hierarchies and oppressions in analyzing the young women's experiences.

Apart from returning to theory in analysis and (re)storying, I was also aware of the impact of postcolonial theories in the relational aspect of this research. As mentioned before, the young women, specifically Sanika, was deeply impressed by my connections to the West.

They saw me not just as an outsider at the beginning of the field work, but also as somebody holding a higher form of knowledge. This was evident to me in their interactions with me that were always embedded in feelings of me knowing better but also in their surprise at other people being interested in their stories. They asked me time and again, “do people there (Canada) care about what we have to say? Why do they want to know our stories?” The premise of postcolonial thought is based on the idea that colonized people have an imagined supposition of inferiority that they have levied on themselves. Beyond the physical, economic, legal, classist, casteist, sexist and racist impact of colonization, the psychological impact is seen in ways where the colonized have internalized and continued the colonial violence and hierarchies of power (Ricarda Hammer, 2023). In understanding the words of Sanika, I returned to such understandings of postcoloniality.

Within this research, I see postcolonial thought emerging from the idea that people from homegrown neighborhoods in India have internalized, and also been systemically made to believe, that they have no value in a society that is neoliberal, capitalist and Eurocentric. These ideas are further deeply embedded in young women who find no value in their lives unless they can fit into the popular image of a useful citizen who speaks English, are successful in school (a deeply colonial system), are productive through earning money and are “good” women who accept the normalized ideas of behaving like one. I bring this to light as the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal structures were central to the way I (re)storied the young women’s lives but also the way I tried to challenge this thought by reminding them of the power and importance of their stories and knowledges.

Using the postcolonial intersectional feminist theory also helped me understand how privilege and oppression shape the lives and experiences of young women from homegrown neighborhoods in India that are a biproduct of large-scale migration and rural land acquisitions. One can see the impact of colonization on these communities and people who

live in them, through “the development and implementation of a global super capitalist economic system that is primarily controlled by the West and ultimately mediates all global relations” (Ricarda Hammer, 2023, p. 578). The aspirations of moving to the cities, at times being forced out by land acquisitions, global climate change driving people away from agriculture, and the prospect of better lives in big cities are all biproducts of a postcolonial capitalist system. In this research, I have relied on the work of postcolonial feminist scholars to make sense of all that I saw, heard and experienced while in the field while also standing on the shoulders of their powerful praxis to engage in the research, understand the stories and experiences and write the research through multimodal narratives told by the young women.

Even though I challenge the idea of starting research from methodology, I wish to expand on my use of narrative inquiry and methods of walking and counter-mapping within this research. I do this since in (re)storying the lives of young women, I relied heavily on the relationality of narrative inquiry. I was using theories to understand the research, but also engaging in the telling and (re)telling power of narrative inquiry. Specifically, I was inspired by Jean Clandinin’s (2013) ideas of narrative inquiry and not just talking *about* people’s experiences but living alongside those experiences. While in the field, as we went on community walks and I heard their stories about places they were excited to show me; I was engaging in an ongoing inquiry into the lives of these young women. As they were related stories of their community and places, together we were also creating new and varied stories of the places. As Jean Clandinin (2013) mentions, in my existence alongside and in the midst of the lives of the young women, I was unfolding the complexity of their lives and the places that we were co-creating. By shifting away from the dominant narratives of the young women as subdued subjects -- a fragmented and fixed identity of women from homegrown neighborhoods, we were “composing identities within multiple and often competing narratives” (Bodil H. Blix, Pamela Steeves, Vera Caine, and Jean Clandinin, 2025, p. 3). This

was specifically evident to me in our creation of the research space during the fieldwork. The young women were seen engaging with their community in newer ways through the act of participating in the research. They were using the research opportunity to hang out in public spaces that were otherwise off limits. The permission that was afforded to them by their families in lieu of participating in a school-led project, gave them the opportunity to resist and engage in their community spaces in ways they had not done before.

Research Methods

Community Walking

Maggie O'Neill and Brian Roberts (2019), in their work Walking Methods: Research on the Move, explore the power and importance of using walking as a research method that facilitates connection with lived experiences and communities. Dee Heddon and Sue Porter (2017) reflect upon walking as a communal endeavour and not a solitary pursuit by highlighting the importance of walking and sharing with others. In this research, I shift away from the idea of walking interviews to that of community walking as an act of engaging in memory and narrative work. The idea within this research was not to conduct interviews while walking but to let the walking and engagement with spaces lead the conversation and story work. By using community walking as a method in this research, the aim was to enable embodied recollection and creation of experiences.

Dee Heddon and Cathy Turner (2012) also ask the crucial questions around gendering of space and what that means for walking women. Thus, community walking is not a simple practice of roaming but a study in the socio-cultural examination of what it means to be a gendered body within certain specific spaces. Such theoretical underpinning is where this research finds its roots. Our gendered bodies and beings exist within the larger socio-cultural structures which determines our experiences of places. I emphasize this complex

understanding of spatial experiences extensively through the (re)storying. In fact, by engaging in the act of (re)storying places through the narratives of the young women, the research exposes these interplaying systems of oppressions as experienced in and through places by different people. On one of our first community walks the young women were confused and they kept asking me what I wanted to see. I reiterated to them that I wanted to see the community as they see and experience it. I wanted to be led into the spatial lives of the young women instead of directing it in any form. I told them to show me places that are important to them, that mean something to them, that are inclusive/exclusive for them or just what their daily routes look like. Community walking gave us the opportunity to talk about places, their stories of places and people. However, it also gave me the opportunity to see them in their organic form -- as merely existing within their communities. I talk about the places that they show me in the (re)storying section of the dissertation but in addition to that, community walking enabled building a relational bond as they took charge and our roles as researcher and the researched blurred. They took me to their homes which helped us create a relational bond that was crucial to this research.

Additionally, walking has a pedagogical potential whereby it creates creative insight, mindful awareness, a conscious interest in beings beyond the human and opening minds to knowledge and understanding (Arlene L. Grierson & Vera E. Woloshyn, 2013). Within this research, the young women, as they shared their own stories within their communities, were starting to understand their experiences through the critical lens of gender, class and caste. Through the counter-mapping activity that followed the community walking, it is evident that they were able to critically examine the gendering of their spatial experiences. They understand that within their community the caste-based division has led to violence against women, spaces with ongoing construction sees an increase in gender-based violence and the importance of access to education. As an embodied practice, walking offered insight into

their embodied spatial experiences while at the same time provided them with an opportunity to understand their own spatial experiences by sharing and storying them to me.

Feminist counter-mapping

In this research, the young women engaged in feminist counter-mapping as a way to (re)represent their communities through their gendered lens. The questions that counter-mapping in the case of this research asks are, “What does the community look like to the young women who exist at its periphery?”, “How do the young women experience their community?”, “What places do they have access to and what does that access look like?” and “What feelings are evoked by the different places they exist within?”. I used these guiding questions as we came together during our two-day counter-mapping workshop activity. On the first day, I explained to them what counter-mapping was and what they could do to represent their experiences in the community. I also shared examples from literature of the multiple ways in which one could engage with counter-mapping. Even though I did not want to limit their creativity by sharing examples, I knew that having never immersed themselves in such an activity, they were initially confused and needed some guidance or possibilities.

Historically, the powerful have used maps as tools to tell stories of places. As noted by Alice E. Finden (2024), colonial and patriarchal archival documents including maps tend to whitewash the violent past and present, an example of which is the imagined geography of central Africa as an empty space, which provided justification for occupation. Drawing from such an understanding, one can see the classist impacts of the representation of Yerwada as a dangerous, underdeveloped community within the urban city. On examining Yerwada’s view on Google Maps (Figure 7), one notices that certain routes and streets are missing. It is evident that maps as created by the powerful can represent a “selective perception of reality” (Jon Corbett & Maeve Lydon, 2014, p. 115). The casteist undercurrents in Yerwada are seen

through the geographical separation of the community with one road leading up to the less-developed, dirtier and crowded part of the community which is mostly occupied by the lower-caste communities while the upper-caste community lives closer to the urban city area with better amenities like proper roads (see Samgamwadi Rd on the map) while the Yerwada community shows an absence of roads (as seen on the large empty space on the map near Matoshri English Medium School).

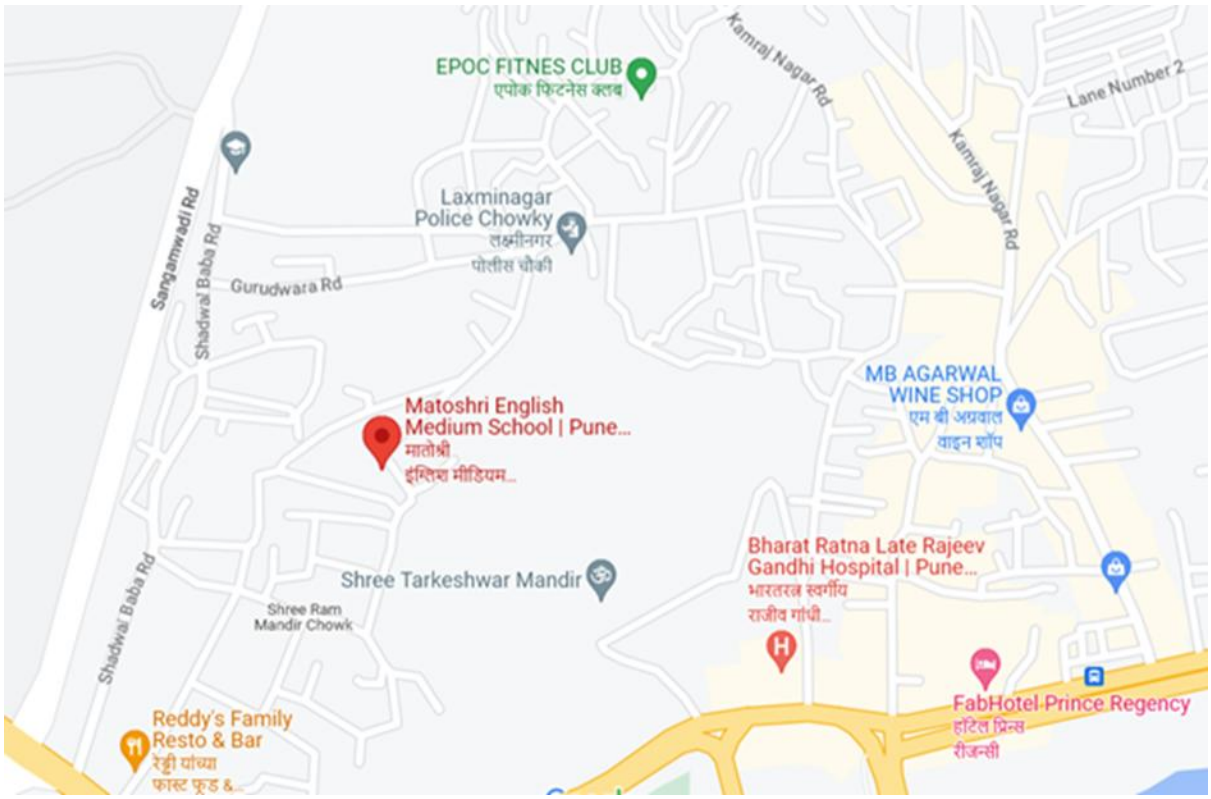

Figure 7: Google Maps Snapshot of Yerwada

However, maps can also be used to tell stories of emancipation and resistance by the historically marginalized (Jon Corbett & Maeve Lydon, 2014). Counter-maps and counter-mapping as a process centers the voices of the marginalized by creating a "generative space for new knowledge" (Alice E. Finden, 2024, p. 462) that emerges by illustrating the feminist underpinning of such a method. Feminist counter-mapping is a way of representing alternative realities as opposed to what is represented by colonial, casteist, classist and gendered normative ways of knowing. The counter-maps created by the young women, as

shown in the (re)storying section of this research, showcases the intersectional approach that the feminist counter-mapping takes. The counter-maps also center the affective and everyday by exposing the hegemonic patriarchy, capitalism and casteism that is prominent in the spatiality of communities like Yerwada. By offering young women a tool and an opportunity to counter-represent their communities by placing their stories, emotions, and identities on the maps, counter-mapping allows for a reconceptualizing of space through their own lenses. In doing so, the young women were able to reclaim the spaces as their own and through their own narratives.

Counter-mapping as a research method also created space for active listening and dialogue between me and the young women. Following the counter-mapping exercise, the young women and I engaged in one-on-one conversations where I asked them to talk to me about their maps, share what they had created and why they had represented the spaces that they chose to showcase on their counter-maps. This exercise was vitally important because it offered them the opportunity to speak to the erasure of their own voices in their communities. It also gave them the opportunity to rupture the normative by engaging in what I believe to be an act of resistance -- centering themselves within their everyday spaces by representing their truths and knowledges, those that are often silenced and sidelined.

Finally, I bring this chapter to a close by tying together the discussion around theory and method. Examining the role of postcolonial feminist intersectional thought within spatiality through use of feminist counter-mapping is where this research locates itself. It is only by seeing through the lens of the interlocking systems of oppression that this research understands the spatial experiences of young women from the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban cities. Sharlene Mollett and Caroline Faria (2018) build their work on radical feminist thinkers and assert that power is spatial. The way systemic oppressions within gendered, casteist, and classist structures are maintained and reproduced, according to them, through

particular places. This research establishes this by continually looking at gender, caste (and by extension class) and religion as factors that explain the experiences of young women within their communities, but also in online spaces. The research exposes ways in which power is seen in places, but also the resistance to power that people exert within places. These acts (re)shape places and reimagine them as places of emancipation that are not linear but always in the process of being (re)made. Situated within the realm of intersectional feminist geography, this research, I believe, opens up a conversation about what it means to (re)tell stories of people in and through places.

Chapter Four: (Re)storying Places

Restorying means rewriting the dominant narratives that define us. Until we do, every future we imagine is going to be built on a crumbling foundation.

- Ronee Penoi (2023)

I title this chapter about my research findings as *(re)storying places* because it has become evident that the Yerwada neighbourhood, as visibly occupied by men, has silent stories of young women that are most often sidelined and untold. (Re)storying places through the narratives of the five young women in my research affirms that places are dynamic, subjective and hold varied meanings and values for people.

My Process

I use ESRI StoryMaps, an ArcGIS-based geospatial technology that allows narrative cartography, to present my research findings. StoryMaps offers the opportunity to represent, visualize, and analyze the narratives of people in and through physical locations on a map (Dong-Min Lee, 2019). StoryMaps is a powerful tool that has afforded me the opportunity to share stories of the young women through places by using maps. The application is flexible and offers me numerous creative ways to share narratives through use of multimedia (images, videos and audios). Overall, StoryMaps, as a narrative-based map tool, adds value to research such as this -- situated at the intersection of narratives and geography.

In my use of the StoryMaps, I present the young women's stories as thematized based on my interaction with these five young women (conversations, group discussions, community walks and counter mapping). The StoryMap is mainly used to present my research findings while the reader will be able to toggle between the findings and a deeper analysis through links and images of the StoryMap, used as a recall mechanism. The reason that I have separated the two is because I intend for the StoryMap to be able to serve as a

stand-alone and accessible medium of engaging with my research. I plan to share my research findings with the young women that I worked with and their peers; representing their stories through non-academic, multi-modal means will hold great power. By separating the analysis from the findings, I also wish to make sure that the StoryMap mainly focuses on the voices and narratives of the young women while keeping my voice to a minimum. Additionally, there are certain limitations to the StoryMap tool as it is a linear format of representing stories, which is not how narratives work. Stories are complex and "always evolving, always in the making, always being shaped and reshaped over time" (Bodil H. Blix, Pamela Steeves, Vera Caine, and Jean Clandinin, 2025, p. 1). By building a recall mechanism (through links and images), I plan to work around this linearity.

I would recommend that the reader start by engaging with the StoryMap and then toggle back (through a link in the Story Map below) to a deeper analysis of concepts that emerge throughout the findings. I will use images of the StoryMap, along with page numbers, and encourage the reader to use the StoryMap Link to move back and forth as needed.

(Re)Storying Places - StoryMap

I mention in the concluding section of the Story Map that it is impossible to neatly segregate places through walls or boundaries. In fact, it takes away from the complexity of places and their experiences by people. Places, as experienced by people with intersecting identities, are interconnected and interdisciplinary. Thus, to do justice to this complexity and interconnectedness, I will refrain from neatly analyzing the phenomenon under the categories of neighbourhoods, homes, school, bodies and online. Instead, I will recognize and acknowledge their complex and blurred boundaries by organizing the analysis under sub-headings that tackle different concepts and phenomena. The varied concepts will blur the

spatial boundaries by drawing on different locations and the interconnected narratives of the young women.

Spatiality of Identity

As examined in the literature, places have different meanings for different people, some of which are determined by their identities. Places and identities are seen to impact one another and are shaped by their constant intermingling. According to Jianchao Peng, Dirk Strijker and Qun Wu (2020), as discussed in the literature section, it can be difficult to pin down a cohesive understanding of place identity. However, within this research, I understand place identity as the meaning that people attach to places and ways that such an action influences and (re)shapes places. It has also been discussed in the literature that places are fluid and constantly in the making. Keeping this in mind, place identity is being shaped by how people interact with places and the changing meanings of places, leading people to continually reshape their identities.

The reason I establish the connection between place and identity here is because the research reveals a non-coherent narrative of the community as experienced by the young women which influences the sometimes contradictory meanings attached to the places within their communities. Also, given that the young women play multiple roles and relationships between different groups, the places tend to hold multiple meanings, which can impact their collective sense of belonging and meaning making to places. Edward Relph (1976), a cultural geographer, explores how attachment to a place contributes to people's sense of identity and belonging. Both Dorren Massey (2013) and Henri Lefebvre (1991) emphasize that places are not static but dynamic and continuously shaped by social relations and power dynamics. This is evident in the way the young women describe experiencing their homes, neighborhood, bodies, schools and online spaces. Gillian Rose (1993) points out that spaces are socio-

culturally determined and identity is spatially constructed. I will expand on these interconnections between place and identity through the different identities the young women talked about.

Class, Caste, Gender and Spatiality

Through traditions, practices and norms that are learned, practised and re-enacted at home and the communities, identities are shaped. A prominent piece of these young women's identities is reflected through their religion and caste, both of which are learned and enacted through these traditions, practices and norms. When I asked the young women to introduce themselves, four of them (Yashfin, Gauri, Diksha and Ayesha) talked about their caste and religion. According to Gauri, at home her family prays both to the Hindu deities and follows Buddhism, just like her ancestors. Diksha also talks about the environment in her home that is reflective of her family's disillusionment with Hindu gods and religious customs. Yashfin referred to her religion as caste. The young women's geographical location within the community is determined by the caste/class-based communities that they belong to. Considering the deeply ingrained and learned identities that the young women carry, as women and people belonging to certain caste/class categories, their meaning-making pertaining to places i.e. their place identity is embedded within the socio-cultural context of Yerwada. I wish to reiterate here, my interchangeable use of class and caste given the deep interconnections of people's lower-caste leading to their class margnization.

Spatiality of Home

Within homes, the young women learn what belonging to a certain gender category entails. Iris Marion Young (2020) examines the gendered nature of home, discussing how traditional notions of home can reinforce gender roles and inequity. The internalization of role-related expectations, as outlined by Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke (2000), influences the conceptualization of people's identities. Young women learn their gender

identities by observing their parents' interactions, the gendered power dynamics that exist within their families, the implicit and explicit messaging that they receive from adults around gender norms and the inherent inequities they are confronted with on a daily basis. The examination of homes and their impact on shaping the young women's identity is captured in the StoryMap (see Figure 8) through the concept map that captures how identity is shaped by experiences of home.

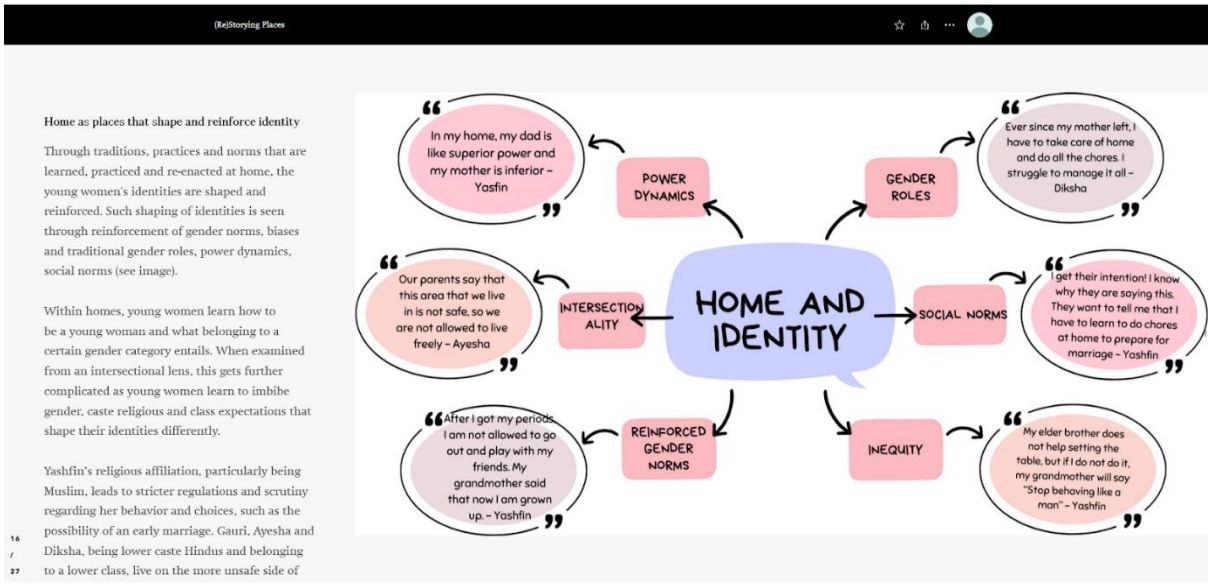

Figure 8: Home and Its Impact on Identity for The Young Women

Within the social construct of power, public and private spaces are majorly designed for men while women are mostly confined to private spaces. This is evident in the research as young women have very limited access to public spaces. Additionally, homes become places that reinforce the social norms of the community, thus blurring the boundaries of home and neighborhood. This is evident in Sarah Ahmed's (2020) work, which calls attention to the idea that families in certain contexts within South Asia are beyond immediate family and extend to what she refers to as *biraadri* (community). Unlike notions of home as private spaces which offer freedom from surveillance and external role expectations, in the case of these young women, homes are an extension of their neighborhood and thus not completely private. However, the messaging around their identities of gender, religion, class and caste is

influenced by all other places they live in. This is evident throughout the Story Map where multiple instances and stories that the young women shared reflect the control that people exert on them in terms of how to properly behave as young women, based on the specific caste/class they belong to.

Spatiality of School

Another prominent place in the lives of the young women is school. School plays a major role in the formation of the young women's identities by both challenging normative ideas of gender and reinforcing gendered colonial identities. The dichotomies of school will be explored in the section on addressing complexity below. In this section, I focus on the way schools (re)shape the identities of these young women.

Within the confines of the school, the young women in the research described experiencing a sense of liberation, enjoying the company of friends, supportive teachers, and the chance to participate in activities that bring them joy. School becomes a place of resistance for the young women as they challenge dominant narratives and assert their identities. Education and educational spaces (i.e. school in the case of this research) appear to be avenues for agency and resistance to the gendered norms placed upon the young women outside the confines of the school. The young women were engaging with people from different genders, ages, religions, castes and class categories within the schools, something they do not have access to outside the school. Such interactions shape parts of the young women's identities as they are challenging the norms at home and their community. They are resisting, fighting and talking back to their families. Interestingly, this is evident in the way the community and their families perceive the English-medium school. As mentioned by Yashfin, her father in a fit of anger says that "studying in English-medium school is spoiling them". Their school is infamous in their community for leading girls astray and turning them into rebellious, spoiled women. The young women speak to this by stating that at times their

parents complain about the ideals that the school is teaching them that is making them “act out” -- that is, challenging the norms. The young women proudly share stories of some of their seniors who finished school and decided to run away from homes or choose partners of their own. This act is seen as a disgrace in their community, as Yashfin says, “here falling in love is a crime only.” The young women are asserting their agency in the only ways that are possible, one such way is being in romantic relationships, which is one of their parents’ biggest fears. The young women’s normative gendered identities are constantly being (re)made through their interactions with school as a place, thus shaping their place identity, that (re)shapes their sense of self.

In contradiction to opportunities for shaping unique identities, schools tend to become places that (re)enforce the colonial hierarchies of power. Within the Indian education system, higher value is given to the English language and the colonial discourse of education that teaches people about contexts vastly different from than their own. Young people within India learn about worlds that are immensely different from their own local contexts which has built a certain aspiration of a life outside of India. I saw this reflected in the way the young women interacted with me. For a large part of my time in the field, they would talk to me about my life in Canada, which “surely must be great” (Sanika). The heavy focus on English education was evident in the way Sanika talked about her other friends from private schools who spoke better English, and which was aspirational for her. She also speaks about watching English TV and hating the local Marathi media, a fact she took great pride in. Another aspect of the deeply neo-colonial education system in India is showcased in its emphasis on Western science that serves the needs of the elite by creating a workforce that becomes part of the capitalist machinery. This is visible in the over-emphasis on engineering education or the push the young women face to go into sciences as that would offer them better job

opportunities in the future. Gauri talks about how even though she is interested in pursuing a career in interior designing, her family is forcing her to take science.

On the other hand, schools are also contributing to (re)shaping their class identities. In the context of the young women in my research, their parents are very keen on young women pursuing their education and getting jobs, which they view as leading to upward social mobility. This aspiration of the young women's parents to break through the classed boundaries contrasts with their patriarchal views/practices of limiting women's access to education and careers. In the case of these young women, their parents constantly remind them to focus on their education to aspire to achieving higher grades and to study well. The aspiration of breaking out of one's economic situation affords these young women certain opportunities and empowerment that would otherwise be unavailable to them by virtue of their gendered identities. In the aspiration to build a better life and acquire cultural capital, as discussed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986), schools transform ways in which the young women see themselves. This is specifically apparent in the way the young women live their lives in comparison to their mothers or other older women in their community. They are keen to gain financial freedom and to have opportunities their mothers did not have. They joyously talk about what they want to be when they grow up and how they wish to eventually move out of their community and build freer lives for themselves. As Yashfin mentions, "I cannot wait to finish school, find a job, and get out of here".

Yerwada and its Spatiality

Place identity is not the only site of interaction between identity and geography. Consider, for example, the ways that identities are encoded in spaces. This is apparent in the way the community is divided based on caste and class, which will be discussed under intersectional spatiality. Here I would like to consider the larger conversation of Yerwada as a

community and the way its identity is created within the urban city. The urban city sidelines the homegrown community by relegating it to peripheries and considering it as uninhabitable. Yerwada is known as unsafe and dirty by people living in other parts of the city. Yerwada becomes a very interesting case study in how cities are designed for the rich and powerful. The snapshot of Yerwada (see Figure 9) and its neighbouring places showcases the way the community is perceived given the google map snapshot depicting a lack of streets and lanes that are present. Many men and women from this community serve as house help -- cleaners, cooks, nannies, security guards and/or custodians for those living in the high rise next to them. Urban cities like Mumbai and Pune show evidence of ways slums are located right next to hotels, high rise buildings and IT offices. This occurs mostly because the people from these communities serve to do the invisible labour through providing much-needed services, like cleaning and maintaining communities, neighbourhoods and home of those belonging to the middle/upper-class, an assertion made by Matias Echanove and Rahul Srivastava (2016). Most of the people residing in Yerwada are migrants from rural areas, who were disillusioned into being “given the opportunity” for better jobs while also being reminded of “their place” in the hierarchy of the urban city through acts like -- being asked to carry ID cards that allows them access to homes of the upper-class, while always being viewed with suspicion by the residents of the apartment buildings. As Edward Soja (1996) writes, “geographically uneven development and the formation of lasting structures of privilege” (p. 57) favours inhabitants of one place while disfavoring others. Such a classist/casteist urban design, that was intended to keep people from lower class/caste at the urban city’s peripheries, explains the way young

women find the rest of the urban city out of their reach and “not for them” (Ayesha).

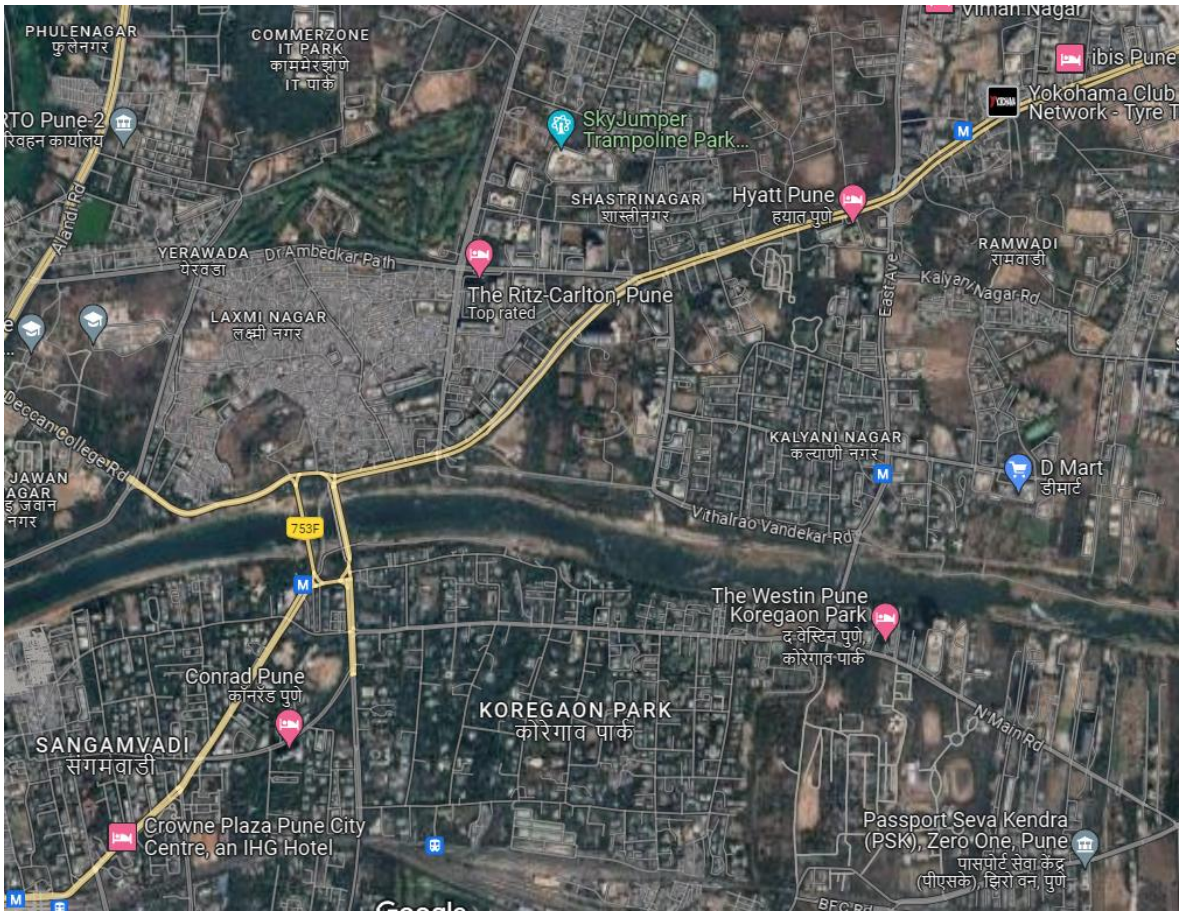

Figure 9: Snapshot of Yerwada Housed Around Big Hotels and IT Parks (Source: Google Maps)

Such a classist/casteist divide of the city goes on to explain Sanika’s experience as different from her peers. On her counter-map (as shown in Figure 10 below), she draws the Phoenix Mall, a place that is generally reserved for those who have consumption capability and concentrated in locations that house people from higher income households (Patrick Mullins, Kristian Nataliar, Philip Smith and Belinda Smeaton, 1999). Sanika comes from a family that has access to class and caste capital that other young women in the research do not. This means she can find herself in places like malls that others do not. Also, consumerist spaces like the malls are safer for women who have class privilege. So, within her confines of being a young woman, she is able to exert her agency by existing in safer spaces. Her capital also gives her access to technology or online spaces, unlike other young women in the

research. As reflected in the StoryMap, the digital divide, as showcased by work of scholars like Danah Boyd (2008), Nancy Baym (2015) and Eszter Hargittai (2001), disparities in access to technology and the internet disproportionately affect young women, particularly those from marginalized communities or low-income backgrounds. So, while Sanika, by virtue of her class and caste privilege, engages in digital place-making, a concept explained by Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2018) where people can create and maintain spaces online -- like social media communities, other young women who were part of the study find themselves severely limited. Scholars such as Howard Rheingold (2000) have also discussed the concept of virtual communities, where online spaces act as places where people gather, interact, and form relationships. These virtual places can foster a sense of belonging and community, similar to physical neighborhoods or social clubs. Sanika's counter-map points out to this glaring disparity as her map is the only one that features places beyond the confines of the Yerwada community. Her counter-map talks about the friendship she has built with people from other parts of the world (see Figure 10) like the United States of America.

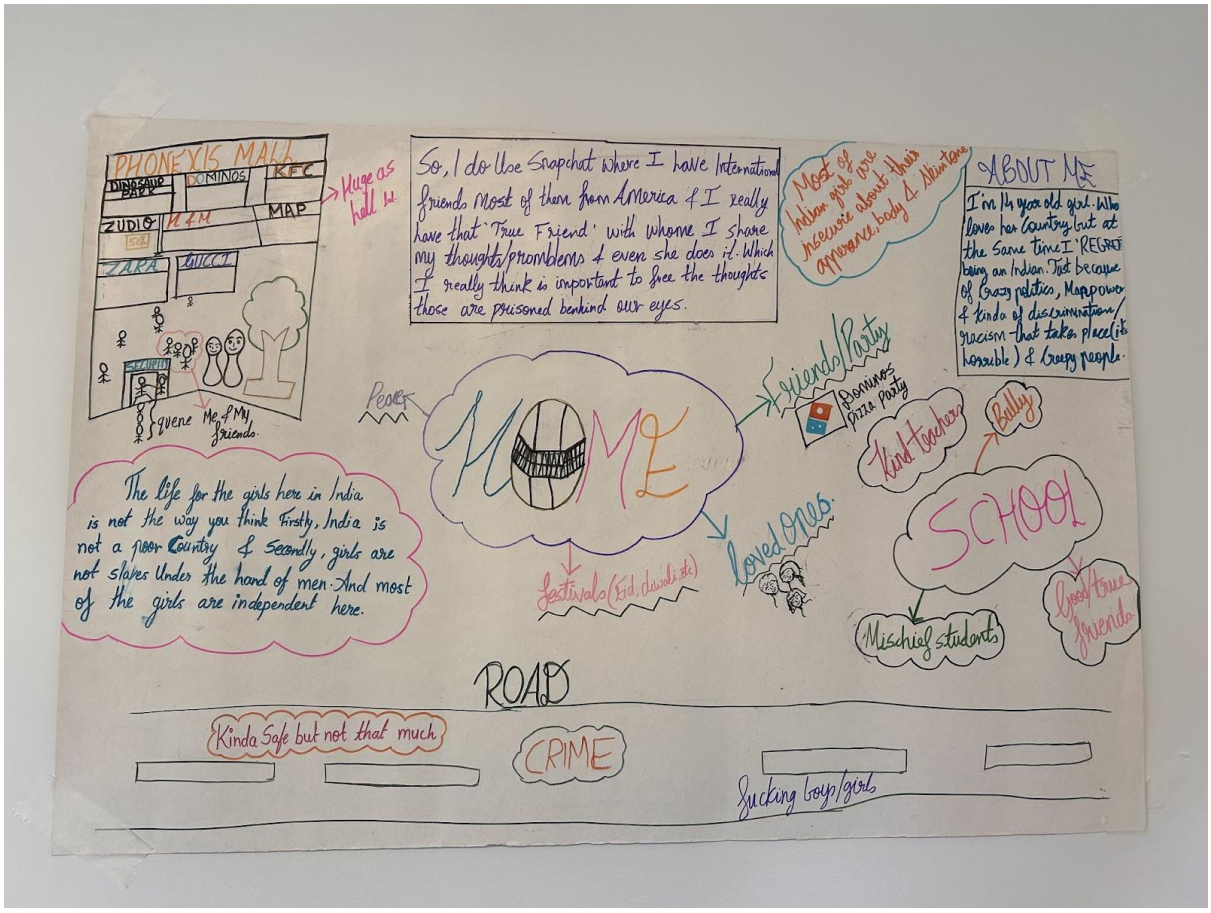

Figure 10: Sanika's Counter-Map Depicting Her Access to Spaces Beyond Yerwada

Intersectional Spatiality

As evident through the Story Map, Yerwada is spatially segregated based on caste, class, religion and gender and the young women's experiences of places are largely impacted by this intersectional spatial segregation. According to Prem Chowdhary (2014), spatial divisions along caste, religion and gender explain the limited or exclusion of women and lower-caste men. To explain, spatiality refers to the social construction of space rather than assuming that space is an absolute entity. Segregation based on spatiality examines the physical separation of groups of people based on their identities. Further, intersectional spatial segregation, as a framework, analyzes the impact of intersectional identities on spatiality i.e. how spaces are constructed through the lens of social inequalities as experienced by people with different intersecting identities. According to feminist scholars

Maria Rodó-de-Zárate & Mireia Baylina (2018), intersectional spatial segregation explains how people experience places differently from each other and is impacted by who has access to certain places and resources. This is evident in the research where the young women are not allowed to spend time after school hanging out on the premises and are expected to get back home immediately after school, unlike young men, who are seen to be leisurely hanging out in the community.

Spatiality of Caste

Yerwada is geographically divided along the lines of caste and class. Additionally, the young women interchangeably use caste and religion, thus highlighting deeply embedded systemic caste-based division within their context. Given the correlation between caste and class, those belonging to the lower caste (used interchangeably with Dalits for the purpose of this research) also face systemic economic deprivation. According to Anil Kumar Patel (2022), even though caste-based segregation is less evident in cities and in contemporary India, socio-spatial fragmentation continues to find its presence in the subaltern existence of lower-caste Hindus through their lived experiences and social lives. Dalits, who were referred to as untouchables, were confined to locations within villages and cities where they had limited access to resources. Within Yerwada, caste-based spatiality is reflected in the way upper-caste communities are closer to the highway, main roads and malls whereas the lower-caste people are placed deep inside the confines of the neighborhood. I observed this caste-based spatiality when I visited both sides of the neighborhood and noticed the differences whereby the upper-caste parts of the neighbourhood are closer to the main roads and highways, unlike the lower-caste parts which are less-maintained. I also base this on the stories that were shared with me by the young women in the research. Additionally, according to Yvette Taylor and Michelle Addison (2009), geographies based on spatial segregation are "embodied in individuals' sense of place, in feelings of belonging and in everyday

identifications; they are materially enacted in the resources and opportunities that are available or denied" (p. 565). The class and caste spatial divide are highlighted in Figure 11 from the Story Map seen below, where Diksha talks about the amenities available to people living on the richer (other) side of the neighborhood.

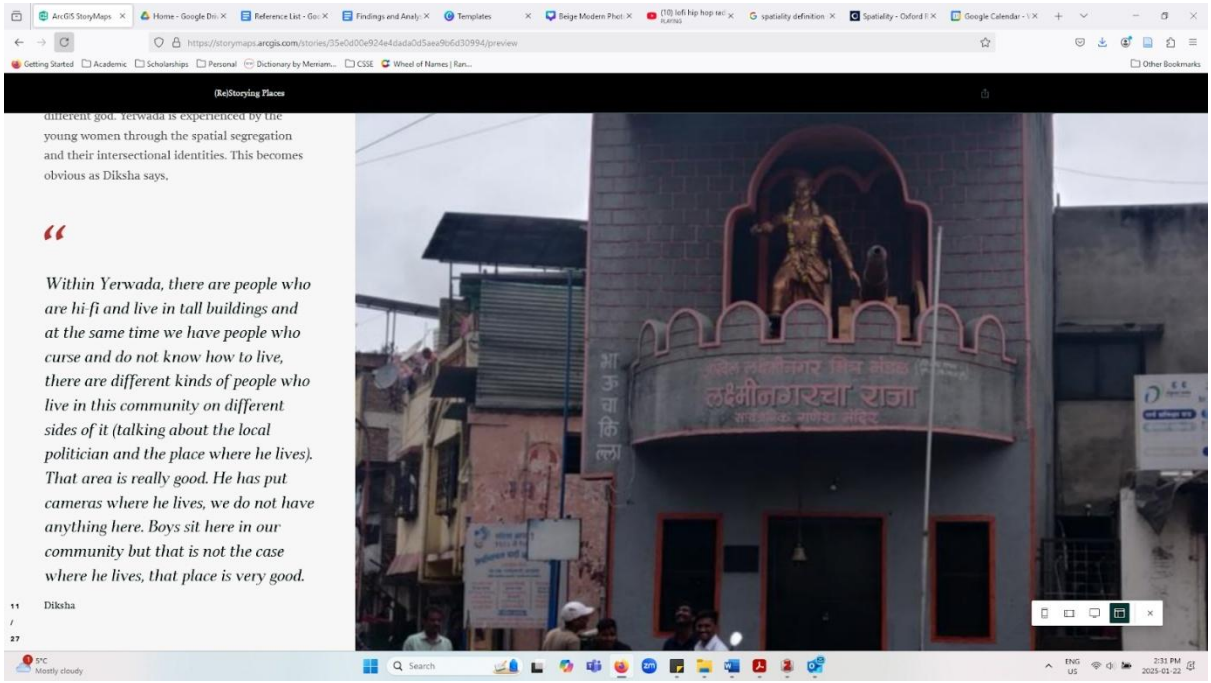

Figure 11: Class and Caste Spatial Divide in Yerwada

As people display caste symbols on their houses and communal spaces, the messaging is both inclusive and exclusive. Some homes and most of the prominent buildings in Yerwada have some form of symbols to indicate caste affiliation to highlight that the people living in the adjoining areas belong to a certain caste, which builds a sense of safety and belonging for those who belong to the same caste while excluding those who do not. The spatial segregation along the class-caste divide is not merely a story of othering but also of conflict. The young women talk about the caste-based conflict that is a constant source of struggle within their neighborhood. Diksha and Gauri talk about witnessing inter-caste fights and conflicts arising in their neighbourhood multiple times. On the other hand, those who belong to the lower caste assert their identity and belonging by placing photographs of B.R.

Ambedkar, a leader of the Dalit movement in India, on their walls. They challenge historical marginalization by symbolically presenting their identities through spatial representation. They challenge the caste-based discrimination that is still prevalent today by owning and taking pride in their identities. The young women reflect how even various sub-castes of Dalits come together to celebrate festivals. Such practices are evidence of the sense of belonging that people with similar historical marginalizations have managed to create. Caste as a cause of conflict and also a source of unification from the perspective of spatiality points to the complexity of places and meaning making (further examined in the Discussion chapter).

Spatiality of Gender

In this research, the spatial segregation based on class and caste divide gets further complicated as issues gender are introduced. As pointed out by Leslie Kern (2020), women experience cities through social, economic and physical barriers that "shape their daily lives in ways that are deeply gendered" (p. 5). As the young women experience their community through the lens of limitation, lack of access and agency and fear of violence, it becomes evident that urban cities, and housed with them, the homegrown neighborhoods are designed from a patriarchal lens of control of women's autonomy and movement. As the young women share, their neighbourhoods are mostly designed for men, who sit on the street corners, making it unsafe for them. Establishing an awareness of the class, gender and caste-based spatial segregation is also essential to understanding the heterogeneity of experiences that the young women have of their neighborhood (see StoryMap -- Neighbourhood as spatially segregated). This heterogeneity is portrayed in the StoryMap through a place-based comparative difference in experience of the one young woman who belonged to the upper-caste and that of the three young women who belonged to a lower-caste community (see Figure 12). Sanika, one of the young women from an upper-caste community, mentions that

her tuition teacher tells her that because of reservation, good students like her from the upper-caste communities have difficulty navigating admission process to colleges since a large number of college seats are reserved for the students belonging to the lower-caste. She is also keen to remove herself from the rest of the four young women by constantly referring to them as "people like them" or not wanting to be clubbed into the same category of "young women from the other side of the neighbourhood" (translation -- those belonging to the lower-caste). This socio-cultural segregation is seen to transcend into a spatial one when Sanika refuses to accompany the rest of the young women on our community walks that take us through the deeper confines of the neighborhood. She refuses to go to "the other side" which is unclean and unsafe, according to her and her family.

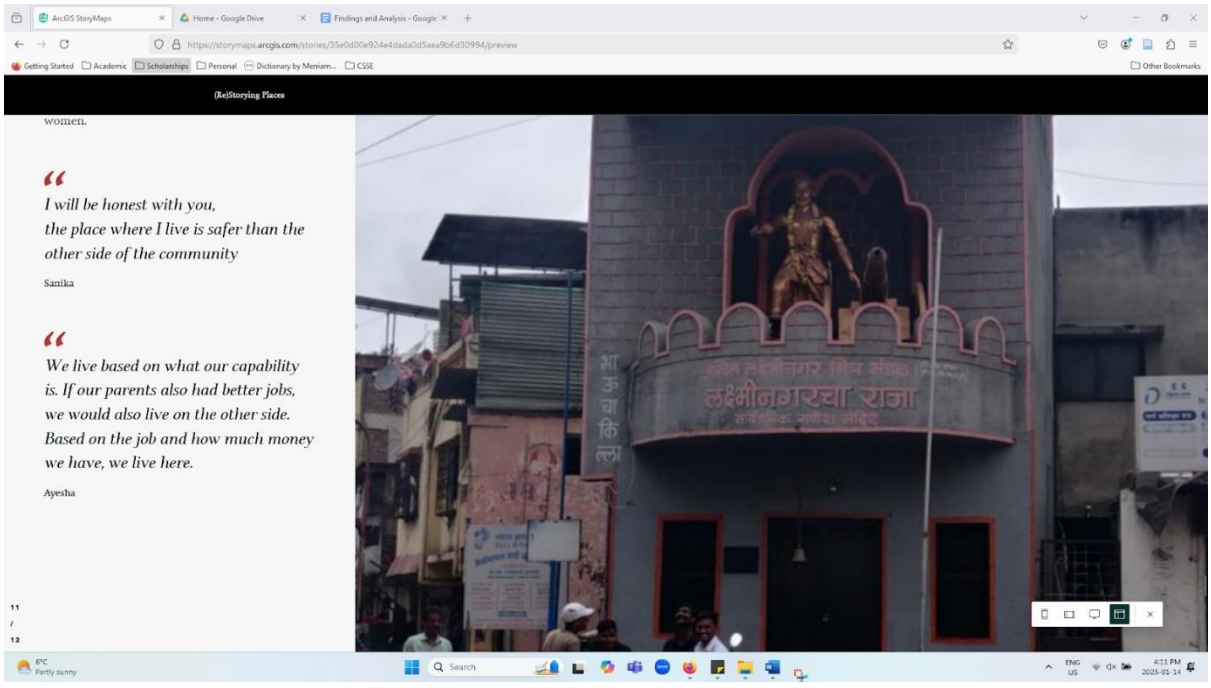

Figure 12: Heterogeneity of Experiencing the Neighbourhood (Storymap)

"Our cities are patriarchy written in stone, brick, glass and concrete"

Leslie Kern, 2020, p. 53

A tool of patriarchal control, prominent in this research, is the justification of policing and control of the young women's agency in the name of safety and protection from violence. According to Rituparna Bhattacharya (2015) and Syeda Jenifa Zahan (2022), fear and

violence in public spaces has become a tool of patriarchal control. This further regulates women's mobility and social lives. As evident through the Story Map (Figure 13), the young women explain their parents and communities' control over their mobility and social lives through the prevalent violence within the neighborhood.

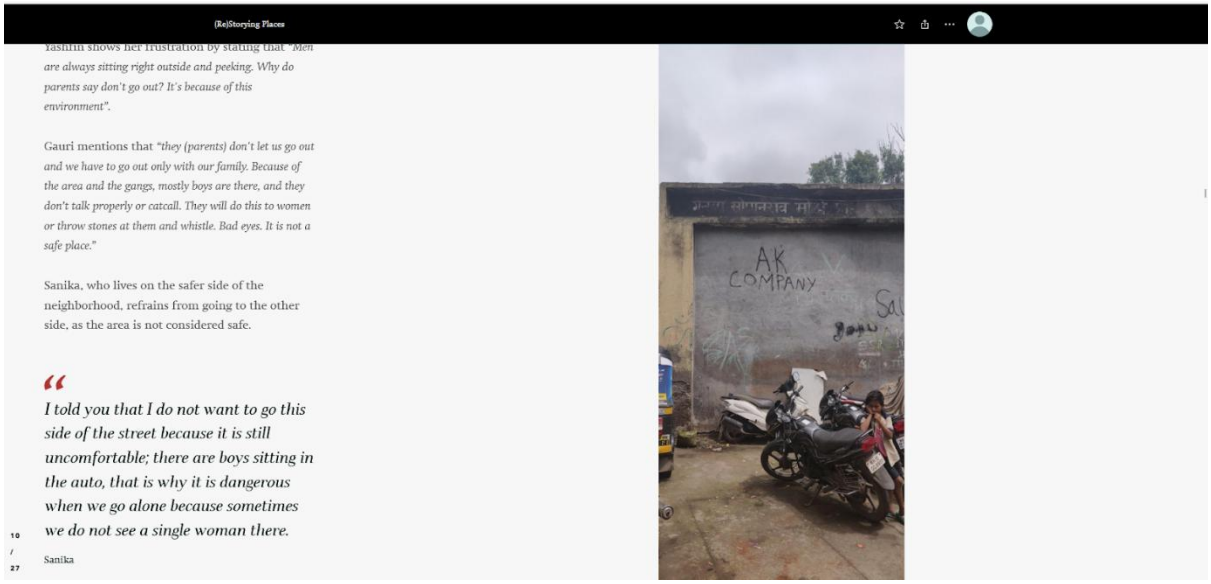

Figure 13: Control of the Young Women's Movement Due To Fear of Violence

Spatiality of Fear

An important aspect that emerges through the control of movement of young women is the spatiality of fear, as explained by Gill Valentine (2022). She points out that women feel more at risk in certain places, at certain times of the day, which leads to them creating mental maps of places where they fear assault based on their past experiences or secondary information. Fear-based spatiality is evident in Sanika's hesitation of going to the parts of the neighborhood that are considered more unsafe. The hesitation of women themselves to confine themselves to parts of the neighborhood that feel safer can be explained by Kim Lane Scheppele and Pauline B. Bart's (1983) examination into how women themselves alter their behaviors or patterns of movement as a consequence of fear of violence by men. The young

women talk about dressing in appropriate ways, hanging out in groups or with male friends and avoiding going out alone at night as alternative ways of reclaiming spaces within their community (see StoryMap - Neighborhood as places of violence and fear). These are ways the young women resist the normative spatiality of not being allowed to go out or access public spaces due to fear of violence from men. Such tactics are important to understanding the role of everyday resistances in the young women's stories and the impacts on reshaping normative spatiality.

Everyday Resistances and Spatiality

When Yashfin stays back after school to hang out with her friends, to engage in archery which requires removing the scarf covering her hand, she is challenging the patriarchal control that her grandmother asserts over her actions through constant nagging (kit-kit, as she calls it) -- and over her body (Figure 14). Everyday resistance has a prominent place within the feminist scholarship as seen in the writing of by U. Kalpagam (2000), who asserts that most of the narratives of women are a mix of strategies of negotiation, resilience, manipulation, subservience and pretension, never a singular narrative of heroism or victimization. Everyday resistances are especially important to the young women in the context of their homegrown neighborhood of Yerwada as traditional forms of resistances or organization can result in physical exclusion, emotional violence and losing a sense of safety and belonging.

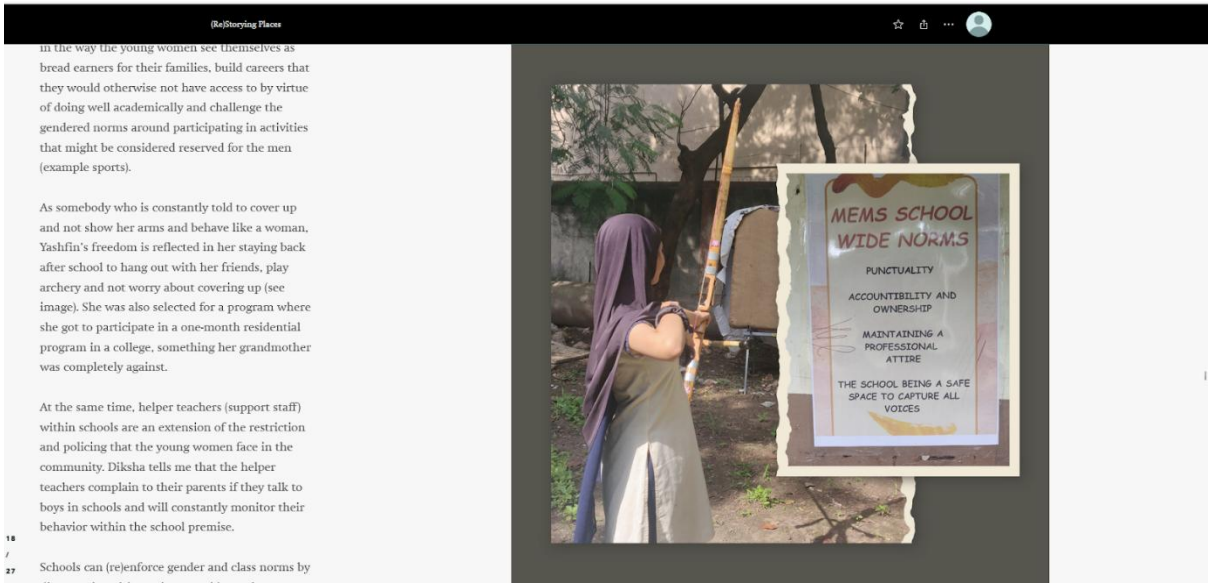

Figure 14: Yashfin's Resistance to the Gendered Norms Placed on Her

Several forms of everyday resistances, especially within homes, are discussed in the StoryMap (Figure 15). However, the power of challenging norms around spatiality through everyday acts of resistance is not limited to the home. As Syeda Jenifa Zahan (2020) points out, women's struggles in public spaces are not independent of their struggles in private spaces -- negotiation in one reflects and supports negotiation in other spaces. The young women are constantly negotiating their place in the community through talking back, manipulation or resilience. The young women talk back to men or older women in their families and negotiate autonomy by challenging patriarchal control through acts of everyday resistances. As Yashfin points out, she talks back to her father and pushes him to help her mother with household chores.

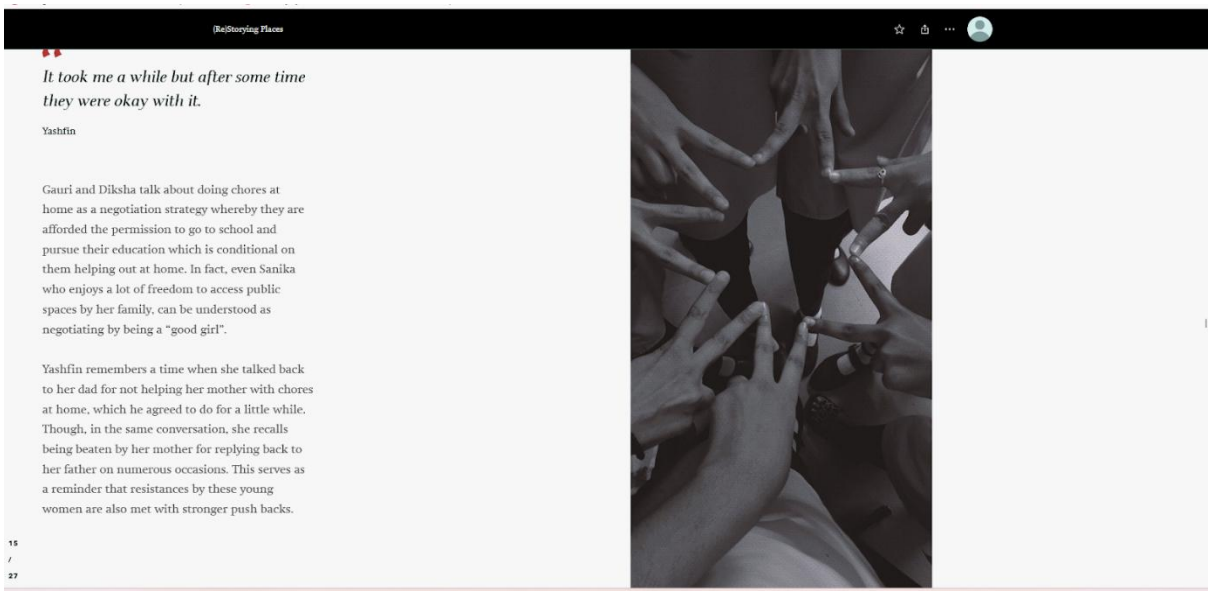

Figure 15: Everyday Resistances of the Young Women in Yerwada

Counterspaces

According to Peter Hapland, Annemarie van Paassen, Conny J. M. Almekinders and Cees Leeuwis (2023), it is through acts of constant, collaborative and generational acts of resistances that radical social transformation takes place (see StoryMap - Homes as places of everyday resistances). Another reason that the everyday acts of resistance by the young women result in important yet small changes is because they offset agency in some situations to gain freedom in others. These acts of balancing and negotiating autonomy is especially useful in subverting oppression for the young women who live at multiple marginalizations. Saba Mahmood (2001), in her work within the context of global south, believes that such a balance between exercising and offsetting agency is crucial. For similar reasons, everyday acts of young women's resistances support the (re)shaping and challenging of normative spatiality within their communities. The young women are seen to create what Anindita Datta (2020), calls feminist counterspaces -- creating alternative spaces of resistance against patriarchal discourse of control of women and power over marginalized peoples (see Figure 16). Given that such a phenomenon always happens within the context of the classic

patriarchy, the need to create feminist counterspaces arises in “hegemonic spaces of patriarchal control” (p. 4). Such is the case for Yerwada where intersecting marginalizations of class, caste, religion, age and gender influence the experiences of the young women. Creating counterspaces, an act of everyday resistance, becomes crucial to these young women, as freedoms that are available or even considered basic to women from privilege spaces of caste, class, age, religion are usually denied to them. Feminist counterspaces such as the banyan tree (as seen in Figure 16), reclaiming their body spaces by resisting patriarchal and religious control over them, and testing the boundaries of their agency within the safer premise of the schools are all examples of small but profound acts of everyday resistances that afford young women a sense of autonomy and freedom.

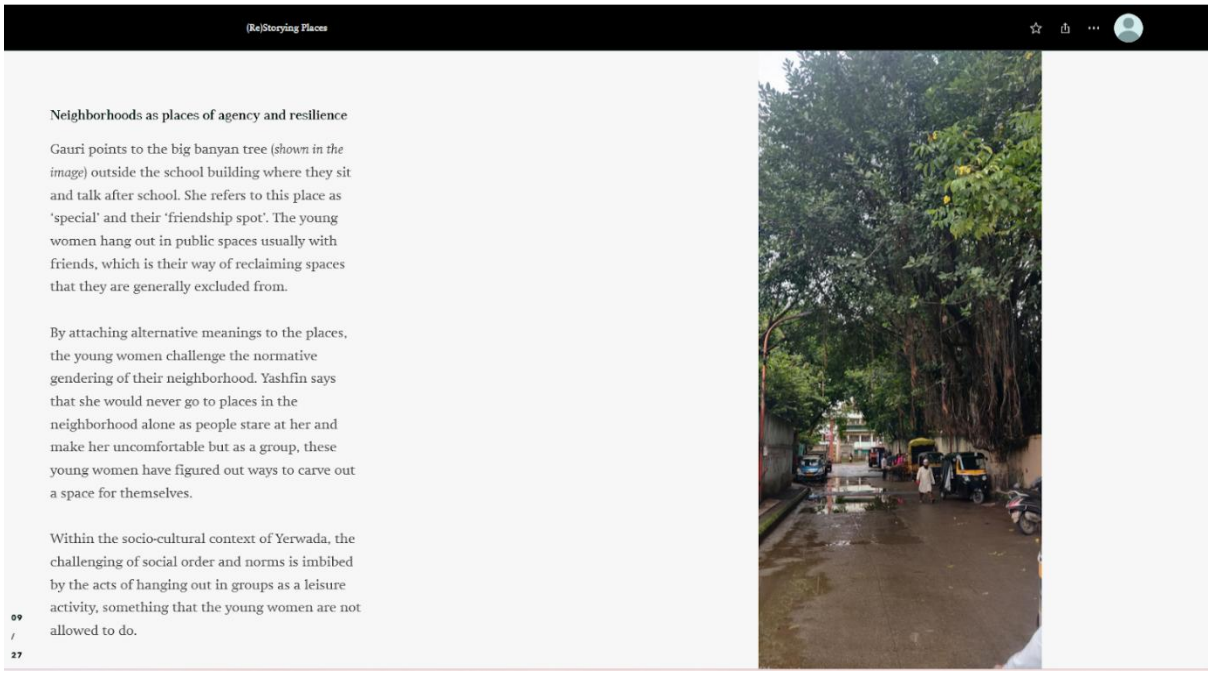

Figure 16: Banyan Tree as a Feminist Counterspace

Leisure as Resistance

Furthermore, being in public spaces for leisure activities is reserved for men in Yerwada. During my community walks with the young women, we saw young and older men hanging out in groups, smoking, chatting, watching their phones and engaging in other

leisurely activities. Such acts that are usually considered frivolous by the young women, are denied to young women by men and older women within their families or communities. Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade (2011) talk about the conditional access that women have to certain spaces. Compounding this denial with other identity-based restrictions such as age, religion, class and/or caste, the conditions to be in public spaces get further limited. As pointed out by Gauri, “one hardly sees a lot of women in public spaces of Yerwada”. Even on our community walks, I hardly noticed a lot of women around us and the men were startled by our mere presence and our casual walking and chatting. The young women talked about being outside either to go from Point A to B or for chores approved by an adult family member. The young women are not seen in the public spaces engaging in simple acts of pleasure or freedom. It is evident in the way they predominantly move between private spaces and access public spaces only with other members of their family. However, as rightly asserted by Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade (2011), “the quest for pleasure and the struggle against violence are deeply interconnected” (p. 185). Acts of leisure that might appear frivolous and unimportant to the feminist resistance are indeed rooted in women’s struggles against violence. When women hang out in public spaces for pleasure, safety becomes an important consideration. Thus, these young women’s acts of leisure, by means of creating counterspaces, are ways of asserting spatial autonomy and reclaiming their right to the community. Though I wish to highlight here that such acts of reclaiming spaces through acts of everyday resistance are almost always met with oppression by adults -- men and women within families and community.

Several scholars like Chandra Mohanty (1988), Saba Mahmood (2001) and Sarah Ahmed (2020) claim that resilience and agency need to be understood through the lens of the context, socio-political and historical position of women in society. Resilience, as is the case for these young women, is at times their only option and needs to be de-romanticized. For the

young women participating in this research, resilience is not a choice but a necessity of their lives. The lives of these young women are riddled with patriarchal control, violence, devaluing of their gendered, classed and casteist lived experiences by their families, teachers and community members, the glaringly visible unequal gender norms they have to make their peace with. Here I insist on the need to de-romanticize the resistance of these young women, as it produces the naivety that despite these struggles the young women create safe spaces for themselves and exert spatial autonomy. The limited access the young women are able to gain can be taken away at any moment. Such a naivety takes away the complexity of their lives and their struggles. The young women do not claim spatiality through everyday resistances despite the oppression but amidst and in spite of their difficult realities.

Complexity of Spatiality

The complexity of the young women's lives, their resistances, the community and their feelings towards it, challenges the binary understanding of spatiality as either a relationship of constraint or that of enabling. Liz Bondi and Damaris Rose (2003) warn against seeing places as binary as this view takes away from understanding the layered nuances of what it means to belong to places. A profound understanding of breaking this binary narrative and embracing the complexity is seen when the young women speak of their experiences of home. In their counter maps (Figure 17), they represent home as a place of love and also one of dislike/discomfort, always existing within these two extremes and not always fixed as either/or. Complexity of spatiality is a constant theme that runs through the narratives of all the places that the young women exist within (refer to the various sub-sections of the StoryMap). The young women are constantly existing within these layers and never quite settled at either ends of the binary or at any single place along the continuum. During my time with the young women, I was constantly baffled by this complexity as I would hear opposing stories about different locations, at different times and in multiple

conversations, until I realized that stories are not coherent or linear and people are always constructing and deconstructing identities and meanings. Eileen Green and Carrie Singleton (2006) draw upon the importance of people's identities as relational and constantly under construction based on the interaction between their personal agency and the social context. This contributes to an understanding of how young women can both actively construct their identities or stories -- for example, by taking risks, and yet continue to be constrained by dominant discourses which represent them as submissive or oppressed. This complex phenomenon challenges a binary understanding of young women's experiences of places and the complexity of their spatial experiences within different places.

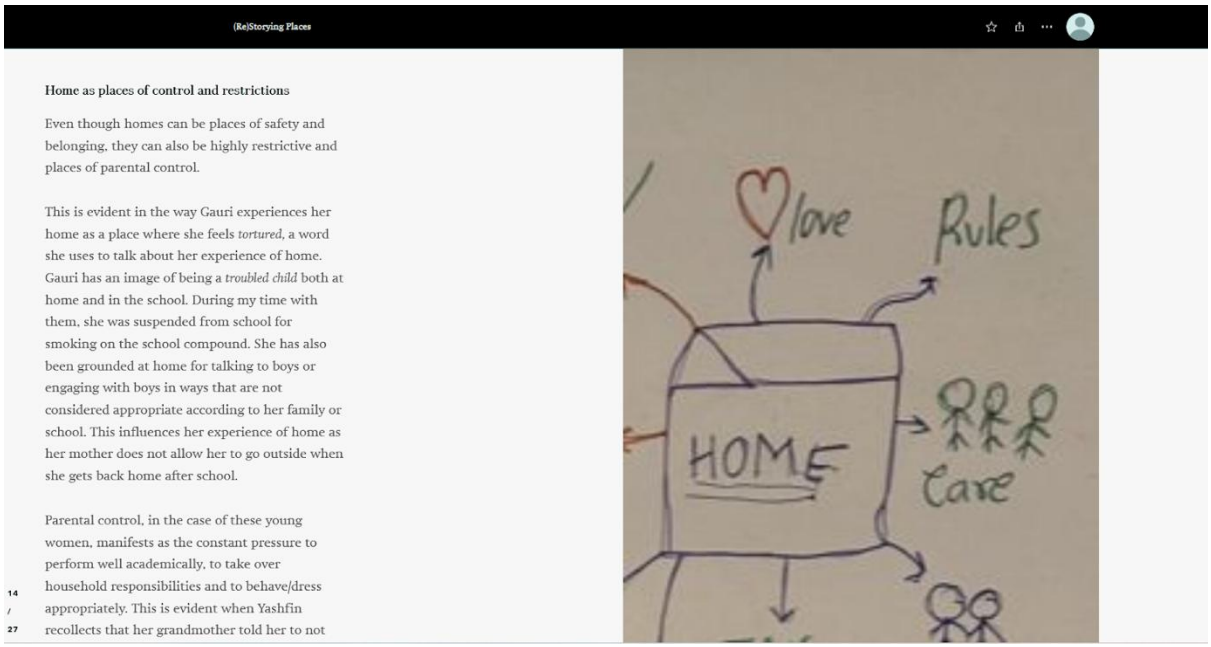

Figure 17: Depiction of Home in Yashfin's Counter-map

Religion and Spatiality

The young women negotiate their presence in the world by existing in places within their community that would normally not be acceptable for 'young respectable women'. However, at the same time, they either must exist in these places, often done by staying in groups or by dressing 'appropriately'. These tactics that these young women employ, a

concept examined by Liz Bondi and Damaris Rose (2003), points to the need to understand these young women's stories as always under construction and changing with times and places. The complexity of their lives is specifically evident in the way young women engage in cultural/religious practices in their neighborhoods. Religious places can be spaces where cultural traditions are maintained and celebrated, contributing to the cultural richness of a community while also maintaining social and gendered control. During the community walk, the young women took me to multiple religious places when I asked them to show me their community and the places they went to. This surprised me and made me wonder about the role of religion and religious places within their neighborhood and in their experiences of it. Gauri showed me places where people come together during festivals to celebrate irrespective of their religion or caste and where food is distributed by various members of the community based on their financial capabilities *(*"Log apni haisiyat se jitna ho paata hai, who karte hain (People give based on their financial capabilities)"). They also talked about visiting temples during different events with their families and sharing experiences of being allowed to go out of homes during festivals.

I find this anomalous, as a lot of their oppression is also attributed to the religion they belong to (as evident in Yashfin's account of control of her life in lieu of religious expectations). This is especially true in the case of Yashfin, as she recollects being pressured into following the religious expectations and rules put on her by her family and community. However, the young women share the extreme joy they get by dressing up and going to temples with their families to take part in large-scale celebrations. I infer from their stories that religious places during certain times of the year become a legitimate pretext for the young women to access public spaces. Given that religious places are deeply gendered, women are allowed to exist more freely within them and can take up more physical space. This is evident in the way women often play a key role in sacred ceremonies and more

informal religious practices, as asserted by Saba Mahmood (2001) and Elizabeth A. Castelli (1998). Through engaging in religious practices, women are ‘allowed’ to exist in public spaces that have a religious underpinning. Thus, even though religious practices have historically kept women within homes or private spaces, dictated their behaviours and dressing, they have also offered them a sense of community and belonging with other women. I strongly believe that religious places, within this research, bolsters the complexity of spatiality as they challenge the binary understanding of space and their associated meanings. Young women are able to access public spaces and engage in rich community life by way of engaging in religious practices and rituals that allow them to meet other people and visit places outside the confines of their homes.

School and Spatiality

Within the complexity of spatiality, schools emerge as another extremely dichotomous place (Figure 18). On the one hand, schools are places of safety, freedom and opportunities (see Story Map - Schools as places of opportunities/limitations) for the young women while still being places of fear and gender-based inequity and violence in the form of bullying by male peers. Unfortunately, there is limited research in the complex spatiality of schools in India most of which caters to the larger debate of girls' access to schooling. However, I draw upon the blurred boundaries of the community and the schools that are within them. There is a certain normalization of the gender-based norms that exists within the community. Much of the behaviour (teasing, bullying and violence) displayed by young men within schools is normalized in statements such as “they are just boys”. This is an actual comment by a teacher that I observed in an interaction and is severely pervasive in the way young men are allowed to be within school and the community. There is a disparity in the academic expectation whereby teachers talk about how girls do so much better in schools while the boys perform poorly, as mentioned in passing by a schoolteacher. Some of the young women in the

research also talk about the normalization of drugs and alcohol abuse by young men in their community and schools. On the other hand, Gauri talks about being severely reprimanded for being caught smoking in school. The young women are held to a higher standard of discipline and rule-following and young men get away with engaging in similar behaviours. This is clear in the way the helper teachers (support and cleaning staff) in school always hold young women accountable for their actions or for talking to boys, however, I heard of no instance of any such complaints reaching the boys' families. Here I would like to acknowledge that since I did not interact much with the young men in the research, some of my analysis draws on observations and experience from my previous work experience in the community and some comments that were made by the young women who pointed out that "there is definitely gender bias in their schools" (Sanika).

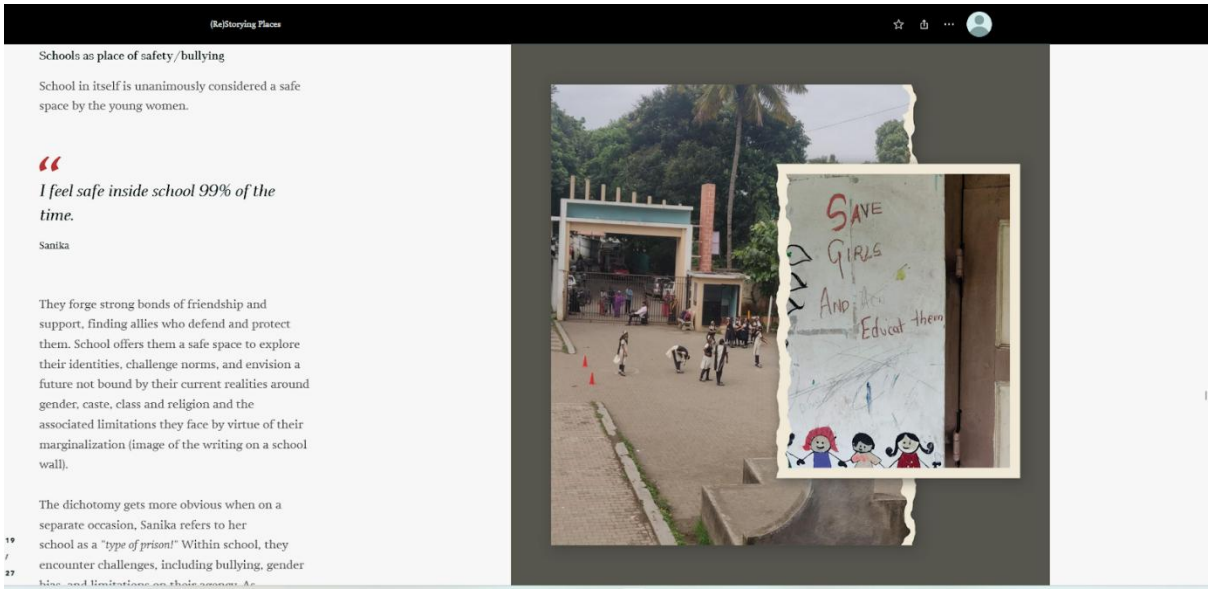

Figure 18: School as Dichotomous Places

Another obvious complexity of school spatiality is the way school is viewed by the community as a place that spoils the young women yet also become places of opportunities for them. Extending this to my fieldwork, I noticed that even though the young women were not allowed to stay back in schools after hours, the parents agreed to my proposal of letting

young women stay back after school. The young women used this opportunity by asking me to meet them up over the weekends. Given that the parents' permission is easier to get if the school or a teacher is involved, they used that to their advantage and meet their friends, get out of home during weekends and meet their boyfriends. Parents of these young women perceived teachers as more knowledgeable and as those belonging from the upper-class strata of society, causing a power imbalance in the relationship. However, in lieu of this power dynamic that exists between teachers from middle/upper-class and the parents, the research space became a place of resistance for the young women. Fieldwork, in and of itself, became a way for them to resist the gendered norms of being confined to homes on the weekend, as there was no good enough reason for them to leave home. As Noelle Brigden and Miranda Hallett (2021) point out, fieldwork should not just be merely a means of doing research but as an opportunity for radical action itself. In this case, the research offered the young women the freedom to exercise some agency and resist the norms that were placed on them.

A silent presence throughout the themes discussed above -- spatiality of identity, intersectional spatiality, everyday resistances and complexity of spatiality -- is that these young women exist within gendered, classed and casteist bodies and thus their stories are experienced through and within their bodies. Embodiment of spatiality even though woven throughout the discussion above, is discussed more specifically below. The mutual relationship between body and places are foundational to the idea that bodies cannot exist independently of the world around us, but neither can places exist without people who inhabit them. I aim to centre the body through the discussion around embodied spatiality, a notion where human stories take a physical form. Embodiment of spatiality also challenges us to break the Cartesian divide between the intellect and the body.

Embodiment of Spatiality

Setha Low (2003) refers to the idea of embodied space as a location where human experience takes on material and spatial form. The young women's intersectionally marginalized bodies either remain at the periphery of the spaces they occupy or are constantly monitored, controlled and disciplined. They experience their world through their sidelined bodies and their stories reflect such a devaluation (see Story Maps - Bodies as places of monitoring and control) though their bodies are also constantly pushing against the boundaries that outline them. Thus, a discussion around embodiment related to spatiality calls for a look into the way their bodies are shaped by socio-cultural factors while the young women are also continually negotiating these forces.

Within the socio-political context of the global south, women's bodies become sites of maintaining and upholding family honour. According to Aparna Rajeev (2002), patriarchal norms link women's bodies to the honour of their families. Even today, women in India are killed to uphold family reputation in view of potential events of violence, a concept called honour killing. Such gruesome acts are existing even today, as shared by Namrata in an Arizona State University blog written in 2024. Yashfin recollects experiences of other women in her extended family who are pushed out of homes or forced to marry if they fall in love with men from other communities, caste or religion. Also, the scrutiny and control on their bodies increases with age. Yashfin shares how her life changed drastically after menstruation -- 'before I had my periods, I could go out and play. But then I got my periods, and my grandmother said that I was a grown woman and should not be allowed to go outside'. Grown women's bodies suddenly transform into locations of maryada (family dignity) and hence they are expected to engage in places within the realms of these boundaries. Their families allow them reluctantly to engage in the world outside and beyond what is socially palatable but reassert control in the name of traditions and customs. Young women like them are expected to study in English-medium schools but not take on the values and worldviews that

are considered as Western. They get access to colleges in different parts of the city but are not allowed to roam or explore their cities. Even though they are allowed to build careers, young women are expected to help their mothers at home. Such narratives of control get further complicated when examined through the lens of intersectionality.

Dalit Women's Bodies

Dalit women's bodies have been a part of many conversations around concepts of intersectionality, gender-based violence and deprivation within the South Asian context. Lower-caste women's bodies exist at the intersection of gender, class and caste nexus, forcing them into horrendous disadvantages. In fact, the whole concept of caste in itself is embodied, since Manusmriti, the ancient literature that talked about caste, describes in its foremost chapter that the Shudras, or the lower castes, were created out of the feet of Vishnu (the Hindu God of creation). In doing so, the social position of the Dalits at the "below" -- the feet of the society, as described by Suddhadeep Mukherjee (2021). Dalit women are continually objectified by the upper-caste people and are harassed, raped, and violated in their day-to-day lives, which is contrary to the idea of untouchability, that is rendered on their bodies. When it comes to sexuality, according to Uma Chakravarti (2003), lower-caste women's bodies, otherwise regarded as "untouchable", suddenly become accessible and acceptable/available to upper-caste men. Additionally, Uma Chakravarti (2003) talks about how violence is inflicted on Dalit women's bodies as a means of controlling caste dominance and maintaining caste purity by keeping Dalit people's bodies physically away from those of other caste. Yashica Dutt (2024), in her work, *Coming out as Dalit*, talks extensively about Dalit women's bodies still viewed as sexual property of men. Violence inflicted on Dalit women's bodies becomes a message to the entire community about their place in society and as a tool of suppression. Drawing from the previous discussion around women's bodies as places of family honour, lower-caste women's bodies carry the burden of needing to be kept in their place. This is

further bolstered as Dalit women's bodies are rendered even more powerless at the hands of men within their own families who adhere to the deeply patriarchal dominance prevalent in the larger society.

I believe nothing captures the idea of exclusion of Dalit women's bodies more coherently than Diksha telling me "If there was no progress in casteism, I would not be sitting here in front of you, talking to you". Diksha's comment reflects Dalit people's inaccessibility to public spaces and opportunities like education. The three young women in the research who exist in Dalit bodies have stories that vary from the upper-caste body, noting that none of these stories are homogenous. The Muslim woman's body is also a place of social, cultural and patriarchal control. As discussed by Syeda Jenifa Zahan (2022), adapting the way one talks, walks, dresses, makes eye contact (or not), and overall behavior are some of the widely used embodied practices in public space. When Diksha mentions wearing a jacket to cover her arms or shows me the length of sleeve that is allowed (see Figure 19), it further bolsters the idea that the young women have limited control or agency over their own bodies.

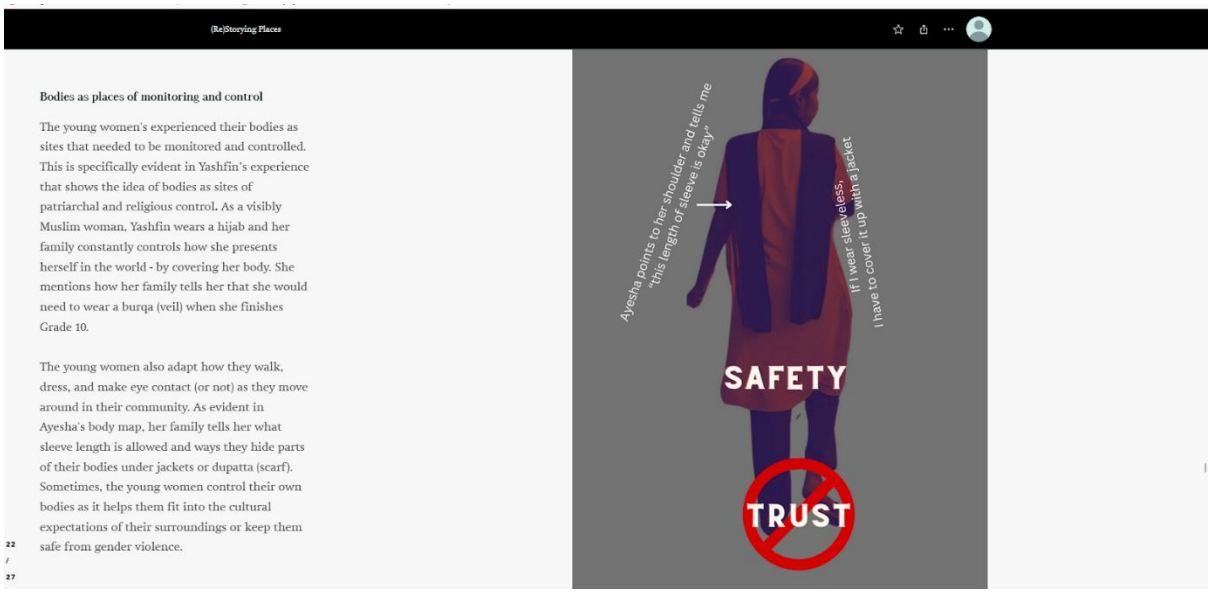

Figure 19: Control of Young Women's Bodies

Bored Bodies

A term that kept coming up in my conversation with the young women was “bored”, and I believe that the connection between that word and inequality is worth examining. Every time I asked them about their weekend, they would show indifference and say they did nothing and got bored. The young women were also keen on meeting on the weekends as it gave them an excuse to get out of their homes for a reason seen as legitimate by their parents. In its simplest form, boredom is one’s inability to find interest and meaning in the tasks or life’s events. However, the use of the word boredom as the young women share about their free time, represents their experience with inequity. While their brothers, fathers or adults in the family get to go out either for work or leisure without feeling the need to justify or explain themselves, these young women mostly stay indoors and have limited social engagements. According to Allison Pease (2012), women’s boredom reflects their lack of agency and their irritating awareness of what they lack in terms of access. The young women’s bodies on a surface level seem like bored bodies but on a deeper examination, these are unequal bodies that aren’t allowed movement or pleasure of any sort, unlike their male counterparts.

Bodies as Sites of Resistance

Despite these controls, young women’s bodies also become sites of resistance and disruption. According to Setha Low (2003), social change occurs and is possible through everyday bodily practices. On our community walks, as women who were walking, roaming and leisurely existing in different parts of the community, in itself was a transformative act. One day we stopped at a local stall that sells tobacco, cigarette and betel leaf, common to the South Asian subcontinent. We all bought and enjoyed beetle leaf, a rather scandalous act for young women and their schoolteacher to engage in. I was made aware of the disruption that

our collective, loud, leisurely bodies were causing to the social norms of the community, thus being transformative acts of social change. This brings me back to the idea of fieldwork, which in and of itself, can have transformative potential and should not be de-politicized, a concept discussed before in the complexity discussion. Their engagement in the research did lead to repercussions for the young women, where they were constantly discouraged from leaving home or staying back in school. However, the issue was resolved by me calling and reassuring their parents that they were with a teacher in school, a responsible adult who would supervise them.

Hypervigilant Bodies

According to Gill Valentine (2022), mere visibility does not translate into unfettered or violence-free access to city spaces. Yerwada is known to be a community that is afflicted by violence and women's bodies become recipients of this violence. The young women in the research embody this potential violence by not being outside after dark, not being in places that have commonly recurring gang violence cases, by putting their head down and walking or mostly being in public places with an adult male or a family member. The fear of physical violence keeps them hypervigilant in their neighborhoods and continually internalizing the need to control their movements. The resisting of social order, though, does not go unnoticed or unpunished for these young women. The counter-resistance to their exercise of agency is seen in the ways that the young women's bodies experience more policing. As they become more visible in their communities, they are faced with more violence and control by others in the community along with their families. Elizabeth Grosz (2018) talks about how women's presence in public spaces often invites surveillance, objectification, or regulation, reinforcing patriarchal control of space. Their presence, according to Leslie Kern (2020) challenges the male-dominated spatial order, and the community in response doubles down on women's bodies by exerting further control.

I see that the communities in which these young women live are not designed for keeping their needs in mind. In fact, these communities are designed in a way to exclude them from public spaces. According to Sara Ahmed (2017), spaces are often structured in ways that privilege certain kinds of bodies while marginalizing others. The Yerwada community is tolerant of women's bodies -- older women move about to go for work or even run small businesses. However, these older women then become responsible for the patriarchal task of policing younger women's bodies. As noted by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), women in these contexts become the gatekeepers of patriarchy. Mohanty asserts that older women in families earn this right of control of younger women's bodies by complying to the patriarchal norms placed on them and the expectations on their bodies. Most of the young women shared that their grandmothers and mothers were always controlling their bodies -- what they wear, who they talk to and how they interact with the world around them.

Edward Soja's (1996) words about spatial justice ring in my head as I conclude this section of my dissertation. Through my research, I aim to put space as central because spatial justice is not an alternative to other forms of justice and neither should it be an afterthought. Social and political forces at play in our world decide the "place" of groups and individuals within hierarchies of power. With the evolution of spatial thinking, space is rendered not just as a physical location but as a product of our experience, affect and embodiment through the socio-cultural lens. Spatiality matters because we are not just temporal beings but exist within structures of power and privilege. Telling spatial stories challenges the colonial, capitalist notion that our experiences can be explained through a purely cognitive endeavour, as outlined by Edward Said (2015).

Telling stories through maps, as I experienced in this process, had the power to blur the boundaries between stories, human and non-human. It showed me and the participants that we live in a continuum with all the elements around us – the physical, emotional,

material and socio-cultural. The five young women exist in places and their stories are shaped by these spaces. While at the same time, their stories and experiences shape the places that they live within. I mention this as I intend to return to my research question that was asking about the placemaking practices of young women who live at multiple intersectional marginalizations. Placemaking, i.e. the way people create and influence places and their meanings through agency, voice, resistance and community, gets reflected in these findings and analysis discussed here. Now, I take a step back and reflect further on the meaning of the work that I engaged in and its implications to the scholarship and research.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine the spatial lived experiences of young women from the homegrown neighborhood of Yerwada, Pune, India and understand their placemaking practices despite the gender, class, religion, age and caste marginalization. Through the act of placemaking, these young women are able to create safe and inclusive spaces for themselves and others. Through (re)storying their lives four significant themes emerged: (1) the spatial lived experiences of young women are determined by their intersectional identities that are constantly evolving and in-process of being made; (2) a (re)examination of placemaking through the socio-cultural context of the young women is essential to understanding their practices; (3) lived spatiality and placemaking practices of the young women are constantly being (re)negotiated through acts of everyday resistances; and (4) lived spatiality and placemaking are embodied and need to be examined as such. In this section, I connect the (re)storying of young women's spatial lived experiences to the research questions. Additionally, I want to reiterate my practice of using full author names throughout the research to make the gender of the authors a little more visible, ensuring my work remains accessible and feminist.

Intersectional identities and spatial lived experiences

Intersectional identity was significant throughout this research as the young women were constantly engaging in spaces and creating places through the prism of their multiple intersecting identities. For the young women, it is not merely their gender that is determinant of their spatial lived experiences. Within the category of gender, the heterogeneity of their experiences can be explained by their other prominent identities of class, caste and religion. Geographers like Tim Cresswell (2014), Michel de Certeau (1984) and Doreen Massey (2013) argue that places are not static locations but are a dynamic process of creation through

social, economic, political and cultural interplay. Such an interplay and its influence on the lived spatiality is evident in the (re)storying section that focuses on the varied experiences of the five young women who belong to different identity groups. The vastly different experience of Yashfin by virtue of her Muslim identity, the caste-based differentiation of spatiality for Gauri, Ayesha and Diksha in comparison to that of Sanika all point towards the differing experiences of places for people with different identity categories.

Within the field of cultural geography, places also have different meanings for different people, as determined by the interplay of their identities, which are also in constant process of (re)construction. The complexity of interconnectedness is reflected in Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke's (2000) work around identity, which highlights the dynamic nature of identities dependent on the context of people. The five young women experience places within their community – in their neighborhood, homes, school, bodies and online -- sometimes vastly differently. However, complexity arises as their individual experiences of places can also differ based on certain factors like time or people who influence them. Their access to community changes at different times of the day (not at all accessible at night) and they get to engage in leisure within community if surrounded by family members, young men or as a group of women.

This complexity reveals the paradoxical nature of places that is clearly evident in the research. In J. Nicholas Entrikin's (1991) work *The Betweenness of Places*, it is argued that there is no universal understanding of places waiting to be discovered by researchers, but rather that places are best understood within the situatedness of humans and nonhumans. The homegrown neighborhoods are both places of belonging and those of exclusion for the young women. As evident in the (re)storying, the paradox is glaringly obvious in the young women's account of their community and their experiences of it. Gauri shares her frustration with how people from the community complain to her parents if the young women are seen

talking to boys or behaving in ways that are not considered appropriate. At the same time Gauri shows appreciation for the safety this familiarity offers them as people intervene if they are ever in danger as they know them personally or shopkeepers offering them discount on items on account of a personal connection with them or their families.

Gillian Rose (1993), in her revolutionary work on feminism within geography, talks about the paradoxical nature of spaces which are multidimensional, shifting and contingent. According to her, places are dynamic and always understood in relation to power and identity. The segregation of the community based on caste, the two separate roads that show a differentiation based on caste and the difference in infrastructure in the two sections of the community, all speak to lived spatiality as contingent on identity and power over the historically marginalized, i.e. in this case, those belonging to the lower caste and lower class living in the less developed part of the neighbourhood. My engagement with the spatial lived experiences of the young women highlights that their heterogeneity of experiences can be explained to a large extent by the interaction of their gendered identity with that of the varying class, caste and religious identities. This interconnection enables me to make an important assertion that the spatial experiences of people should be studied through and within the socio-cultural contexts.

(Re)Examining Placemaking

Placemaking, as conceptualized within the Western context, is usually characterized by collaborative dialogue amongst stakeholders, including community members. As examined by Tim Edensor, Ares Kalandides and Uma Kothari (2020), placemaking is often understood as people coming together to reimage, reinvent and reshape their communities in order for human community to be at the center of the urban design. Early scholars on placemaking like Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), Edward Relph (1976) and William H. Whyte (1980)

emphasize the experiential connection of humans to places they inhabit, making the process of placemaking dependent on factors such as autonomy, freedom, agency and voice – characteristic that people within a neighborhood are assumed to have. However, such is not the case for people from different contexts and parts of the world whereby citizens do not have an equal right/freedom to participate or have a say in their neighborhoods. When social, economic and cultural factors are taken into consideration, people do not experience inclusive or equitable production of public spaces.

The Project for Public Spaces (n.d.) explores the notion that even though placemaking is based on the principle of inclusion, literature fails to fill the gap around considerations of intersectionality in placemaking discourse. Placemaking as a concept is rather idyllic, focusing on fostering community through collective art or community events, failing to consider its' perpetuation of exclusion related to gender, class, race, in its process and outcome. Placemaking, based on a literature scan, fails to consider who is part of community building and who is not, or which communities participate in placemaking projects, and which ones do not/ cannot. The reason I emphasize this distinction is to point out the need for placemaking scholars including myself to (re)examine our understanding of the conceptualization of placemaking, specifically within the socio-cultural, economic, political and geographical context of communities in which we engage. This research study had caused me to rethink the Western notions of placemaking and take into account that placemaking, even if embedded in the everyday and the ordinary, has transformative potential for young women in my research.

I build here on the work of Asma Mehan (2024), who introduced the term informal placemaking to speak back to the Western notions of placemaking that exclude women from different race, sexual orientation, class and ethnicity who are unable to assert themselves, organize or mobilize due to direct authoritative power or by surveillance or censorship. In

this research, the young women are at risk of physical or emotional harm if they assert placemaking through voicing their concerns around exclusion. As evident in the (re)storying section, Yashfin speaks of the physical violence at home that she receives for spending time outside the home, the fear of gang violence if the young women hang around in public spaces or the emotional violence that they face at home as they begin to assert their basic rights to online spaces or choice of clothing. I reiterate this to assert the need to shift away from a simplified or binary understanding of placemaking whereby people either engage in the act of placemaking or are devoid of any assertion or capacity to resist. The young women's placemaking practices exist on a spectrum. They enact informal placemaking through acts of everyday resistances that include building community, resilience, and maneuvers like negotiation or subservience.

Lived spatiality and placemaking through everyday resistances

According to U. Kalpagam (2000), most of the narratives of women are a mix of strategies of negotiation, resilience, manipulation, subservience and pretension, never a singular narrative of heroism or victimization. I draw on this as I examine the informal placemaking practices of the young women. Yashfin recounts multiple narratives where she is a victim of patriarchal control within her family and community, while at the same time she uses strategies like talking back to her father, challenging the status-quo of not being allowed to choose a career by manipulation and crying and questioning the typical norms of behaving like a woman. Another significant strategy of everyday resistance that I see reflected in Sanika's story is that of subservience. Sanika's story shows her negotiating agency by complying with certain dominant gendered expectations to gain control over other aspects of her life. According to Soran Reader (2007), this is referred to as *patiency* whereby people give up agency in some situations and spaces in order to negotiate agency in other spaces. Saba Mahmood (2001) speaks to this in her research specifically within the rural contexts of

the global south, where women experience an immense patriarchal control over their everyday lives and actions. Given the similarity in the case of this research, it is important to note that Western notions of resistance and agency that focus on acts of outward defiance might not apply directly in the lives of the young women as they can prove to be dangerous or lead to loss of safety and belonging for the young women.

In the (re)storying section there are multiple accounts of everyday resistances, agency and resilience that the young women exercise within their neighborhoods, home, school, online and through their bodies. I notice these constant negotiations of finding and creating safe spaces and production/reproduction of places and their meanings through social interactions. I include this idea here as I see that everyday resistances are one of the ways these young women are constantly reproducing places and enacting placemaking.

Another factor that I observed is the sense of community that these young women at times experience in their neighborhood, schools and homes. The intentional creation of a community that is sometimes at odds with the expectations put on them by their families is another way these young women experience spatiality and exercise informal placemaking. On numerous occasions, I observed the young women finding immense value in their friendships and relationships with each other. Extending Nel Nodding's' (2003) feminist ethic of care, I suggest that we are interconnected beings and that we do not exist as isolated individuals, but as communities. In addition, feminism, according to Basia Sliwinska (2021), is enacted through acts of profound care for each other. From a postcolonial feminist lens, the informal acts of community making and belonging through strong bonds of friendship speak to the feminist ethic of care that is based on the affect and the rationality of survival that makes the places liveable for the marginalized, as highlighted in Alexandra Kokoli's (2016) work. According to her, *feminist survivalism* is not a submissive act but a transformative one whereby vulnerable people survive through practices of care. Such feminist ethic of care is

evident in the way the young women showed up every day during my time with them. They shared stories of looking out for one another, of supporting each other and creating a sense of belonging and safety through making communal ties.

According to Setha Low (2003), social change occurs and is possible through everyday resistances. On our community walks, dissonance was expressed by the young women's leisurely presence in the neighbourhood, a sight that others were not used to. This resulted in men stopping on the street corners staring at us and trying to understand why we were there. On one occasion, a few men known to these young women stopped them on the street to ask us what we were doing. This is reflective of the non-normative nature of these acts of presence and leisure in public spaces, predominantly performed by men. One day we stopped at a local stall that sells tobacco, cigarette and betel leaf, common to the South Asian subcontinent. We all enjoyed beetle leaf, a rather scandalous act for young women and their schoolteacher to engage in. I was made aware of the disruption that our collective, loud, leisurely bodies were causing to the social norms of the community, thus being transformative acts of social change. As explained by Michel de Certeau (1985), people form engagement that empower them to resist, counter and transform the world around them. Thus, it was through banal acts of everyday resistances that young women were (re)negotiating their lived spatiality and engaging in informal placemaking. Circling back to Setha Low (2003), this spatiality and everyday resistances are almost always embodied, making it crucial to center the body in the research on lived spatiality and placemaking.

Embodied lived spatiality and placemaking

The mutual relationship between body and places are foundational to the idea that bodies cannot exist independently of the world around us, but neither can places exist without people who inhabit them. The mutuality of the relationship shows that places are experienced

by people in embodied ways. Setha Low (2003) refers to the idea of embodied space as a location where human experience takes on material and spatial form. The theme of embodied spatiality becomes crucial to my research as I start examining how the young women's bodies exist within the homegrown neighborhood, i.e. their lived spatiality, while also understanding that their bodies create, (re)create and alter the places and their meanings thereby engaging in acts of placemaking. Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan and Shilpa Ranade (2011) talk about the unequal nature of spaces and assert that spaces are constructed and experienced through the physical body, making spaces integrally gendered. This is further supported by Anandita Datta (2021) who claims that gender and spaces cocreate each other. According to her, spaces are experienced through the gendered bodies of those who inhabit it. Such gendering of embodied spatiality is evident in the research where the young women's gendered bodies either remain at the periphery of the spaces they occupy or are constantly monitored, controlled and disciplined. This constant monitoring of the young women's bodies is not just focused on where these bodies are allowed to exist but also how they are expected to behave. As discussed by Syeda Jenifa Zahan (2022), adapting the way one talks, walks, dresses, makes eye contact (or not), and overall behavior are some of the widely used embodied practices of placemaking in public spaces by women in India.

Furthermore, acts of control and monitoring as justified by others in the community are considered essential and a moral task bestowed on the families. Within the socio-political context of the global south, women's bodies become sites of maintaining and upholding family honour. According to Aparna Rajeev (2022), patriarchal norms link women's bodies to the honour of their families. Even today, women in India are killed to uphold family reputation in view of potential events of violence, a concept called honour killing. However, these young women's bodies are not just gendered but also exist at the intersections of class and caste. This complicates the analysis into their embodied spatial lived experiences.

Lower-caste women's bodies exist at the intersection of gender, class and caste nexus, forcing them into horrendous disadvantages. As discussed in the literature, Uma Chakravarti (2003) talks about how violence is inflicted on Dalit women's bodies as a means of controlling caste dominance and maintaining caste purity. Drawing from the literature around women's bodies as places of family honour, lower-caste women's bodies carry the burden of needing to be put into place. This is further bolstered as Dalit women's bodies are rendered even more powerless at the hands of men within their own families who adhere to the deeply patriarchal dominance prevalent in the larger society. The young women's embodied spatial experience, as showcased in the (re)storying chapter, can be largely explained by this intersection of caste and gender. Additionally, the embodied spatiality is also reflected through the embodiment section of the (re)storying section and their bodies being experienced through their boredom and family/community hypervigilance.

Given that these young women's bodies are fixed in their caste categories but can aim for class mobility, they are expected to find jobs and pursue education that would support an upward class mobility for their families. These young women aspire to build careers as doctors, engineers or police officers, goals which are supported by their parents and communities. This need sometimes appears to be in direct conflict with gender norms. However, on further examination, one understands that such a freedom is not free. Grown women's bodies suddenly transform into locations of maryada (family's dignity) and hence they are expected to engage in places within the realms of these boundaries. Their families allow them reluctantly to engage in the world outside beyond what is socially palatable but reassert control in the name of traditions and customs, as explained by Aparna Rajeev (2022). Young women like in this research are expected to study in English-medium schools but not take on the values and worldviews that are considered as Western or modern. They get access to colleges in different parts of the city but are not allowed to roam or explore their cities. I

believe these intersections of class, caste, religion and gender intersect to explain the complexity of the embodiment of spatial lived experiences of the young women.

Despite excessive control, young women's bodies also become sites of resistance and disruption. Such a phenomenon is suggested to be embodied placemaking by Henri Lefebvre (1991). This is examined in detail in the previous topic of everyday resistances. To explain this further from an embodied lens, I focus on the embodiment within spaces that raises the pertinent connection of human agency impacting the physical construction and social production of space. By exerting their presence in some form, these young women start to challenge the patriarchy of the places, which in turn impacts the community. As discussed in the literature, existing for leisure, in community and as loud bodies, the young women continue to (re)form the spatiality of their experiences. However, according to Gill Valentine (2022), mere visibility does not translate into unfettered or violence free access to city spaces. The resisting of social order, though, does not go unnoticed or unpunished for these young women. The counter-resistance to their exercise of agency is seen in ways that the young women's bodies experience more policing. As they become more visible in their communities, they are faced with more violence and control by others in the community along with their families -- especially older women who become gatekeepers of patriarchy (Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 1988). Elizabeth Grosz (2018) talks about how women's presence in public spaces often invites surveillance, objectification, or regulation, reinforcing patriarchal control of space. Their presence, according to Leslie Kern (2020), even though, challenges the male-dominated spatial order, the community in response, doubles down on women's bodies by exerting further patriarchal control -- both external and internal (as discussed in the literature). I believe that this constant push and pull is crucial to understanding how spatiality is always in transition and being (re)made through everyday acts of control and resistance.

In this section I answer the question of "So What?" about my research through the four themes that have emerged through the (re)storying of the young women's lived spatiality. I have drawn on and extended the literature to answer my research questions -- "How do young women experience the homegrown neighborhood of Yerwada, Pune?", "Within the intersecting marginalization of gender, class, caste, religion and additional identities, what placemaking practices are enacted by young women from the homegrown neighborhood of Yerwada, Pune?" and "How do these placemaking practices impact the intersectional spatiality of the homegrown neighborhood of Yerwada, Pune?" A key takeaway from this research has been that this is not a singular story and nor a binary simplification of the young women's lived spatiality or placemaking as present or absent. These young women exist within the complex and layered in-betweenness that is constantly shifting and evolving. Feminist scholarship needs to take into account this non-linearity of women's resistances and control. The stories of these young women also speak to the idea that places are experienced by those who live in them that is unequal and systemically determined by those in power. The young women's experiences of places and their acts of placemaking, thus, are intertwined in their intersectional identities, which are constantly changing within the socio-economic, political and cultural context of their neighborhoods.

Chapter Six: Implications and Reflections

This research sought to answer the following research questions: : “How do young women experience the homegrown neighbourhoods they live in?”, “Within the intersecting marginalization of gender, class, caste, religion and additional identities, what placemaking practices are enacted by young women from the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India?” and “How do these placemaking practices impact the intersectional spatiality of the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India?” In doing so, the research has several important implications for research and education concerning the spatial experiences of young women within the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban cities. These implications are grouped under those relevant to a) feminist scholarship, b) education and educational spaces and c) urban planning/placemaking. The research highlights the need to comprehend the complex and layered nature of gendered spatiality within urban cities as examined from an intersectional lens and challenge the Western feminist scholars to consider the diverse contexts and pressures that women in other parts of the world face

Implications for feminist scholarship and research

Within the expansive domain of feminist scholarship, this research has implications specifically for feminist and intersectional geography through the lens of place and placemaking. Firstly, the study shows that young women from the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban cities experience the places within their community through the intersectional lens of their identities -- gender, class, caste, religion and age. These experiences are heterogeneous, given that the young women belong to different identity groups. Even within each group, the way young women experience places is dependent on other factors like their family's socio-cultural positionality and the young women’s compliance with gendered norms or their family’s traditions and expectations. This

heterogeneity of experiences establishes the work of scholars like Shilpa Phadke (2007), Anandita Dutta (2020), and Yvette Taylor and Michelle Addison (2009), who assert that spatiality is gendered, i.e., places as experienced by people are a product of the gender category one belongs to. However, this study also extends the feminist geography scholarship to say that gendered spatiality should also consider the unique intersectionality of those who identify as female. This builds on the work of scholars like Doreen Massey (2013), who reflect that places are experienced through the lens of intersectionality. Factors like age, class, caste and religion influence how young women experience their communities. However, as noted in the (re)storying section, even the young women who belonged to the same age, class, caste and religious identity categories (Ayesha, Gauri and Diksha) experienced their communities differently. Thus, places become a unique reality for everyone, and it is only through acknowledging and studying the differences that feminist and cultural geography can be inclusive of varied lived experiences of spaces and places.

Secondly, the research points to the interlocking power structures like colonialism, capitalism, neoliberalism and casteism that are always at play within various spatiality in this research. The young women's limitation of access is a systemic process of exclusion and silencing. This is explored in the work of feminist scholars like Gillian Rose (1993) and Mollett and Faria (2018), who state that "power is spatially contingent" (p. 566). The research extends this understanding by showcasing that even though spaces must be understood in relation to power and identity, they are also constantly shifting (Doreen Massey, 2005). The shift indicates that places can be counter-produced through resistance -- an act of placemaking. In Western feminist scholarship, sometimes these resistances have been seen as small and are often overlooked (Chandra Mohanty, 1984 and Sara Ahmed, 2017). However, this study calls for feminist scholarship to be cognizant of these everyday resistances as impactful and transformative. Specifically, within feminist geography,

everyday resistance supports the (re)evaluation of spatiality as a dynamic and evolving concept. This post-colonial consideration of agency and resistance within feminist geography opens avenues to studying placemaking as inclusive of varied contexts.

Even within urban Indian cities, women from the upper and/or middle class and upper caste have at times been able to create spaces that challenge patriarchal norms. These spaces, as the research highlights, can include places like malls. However, such spaces that attempt to disrupt power dynamics by offering safe and equal space to some women can, in turn, exclude certain other women or reproduce exclusions and power dynamics. In this research, access to consumerist spaces offers liberation and empowerment to one of the young women while simultaneously reinforcing the power relations between her and other lower-class/caste young women. As a final implication of this study within feminist geography, the often-paradoxical nature of spatiality as it intersects with identity should be recognized and examined.

In addition to the implications for feminist scholarship within geography, the research also calls for feminist research to create conditions and space for what Gayatri Spivak (2010) calls the subaltern to speak for herself. She calls for a need to evaluate research as a colonial tool that not only speaks on behalf of the subaltern (defined by her as somebody in the position of oppression) but that also shares a singular story of pain and oppression. Intersectional feminist research has and continues to challenge notions of third-world women and/or women of colour as oppressed beings and portrays them as resilient people with voices (bell hooks, 2009). However, within feminist research, low-income women often end up as "over-determined" -- either as victims or agentic heroines (Ann Varley, 1995). Such a representation of women, who live within multiple marginalizations, glosses over the complexities of their lives. This research magnifies the complexity of the young women's lived experiences and challenges that their placemaking practices are not binary narratives of

inclusion or exclusion. An essential implication of this research for feminist researchers is the importance of capturing the nuanced complexities of women's lives while moving away from speaking on their behalf and letting their narratives take the lead.

Implications for education and educational spaces

The first implication of this research within the realm of education and learning is for educators, formal and/or informal. This research highlights the complications of intersectional experiences of places and spaces as layered, complex and heterogeneous. The young women's experiences of their school spaces and the influence of family and community on these experiences speak to the idea that students within our educational spaces are complete human beings, and assuming that they leave their lived experiences outside the confines of the educational space would be an unfair and impossible assumption. As young people bring their complete selves to educational/learning spaces, so do they get their experiences, biases, familial restrictions, and learned and internalized patriarchy, to name a few. The way they create places for themselves within educational spaces is an extension and reflection of the power and agency that they can exercise within the confines of the norms that are placed on them. One of the major implications of this research is for educators to engage with learners who live at multiple intersectionality through their lived realities. Education needs to be inclusive of the young people's identities and experiences, and not ignorant of the same. Educators need to acknowledge that differences exist even within educational spaces that are aiming to create equitable and inclusive access. Such a critical understanding would offer educators an opportunity to build relationality within their learning spaces by connecting learning with people's realities. Learning needs to take into account the spatial oppression of educational spaces that can be exclusive to people like those in this research. Young women experience their schools mostly as safe spaces but also find them (re)enforcing the gendered, classed and casteist norms of the world beyond school

spaces. Educational spaces are not devoid of the biases and oppressive norms that exist outside of them. Studying the intersectionality of young women's experiences of places will offer educators critical insight into making educational spaces inclusive by providing them with an understanding of the gaps that exist. It is only through examining the normative oppression of young women's voices within the places they inhabit that educators can aim to create more inclusive and critical educational spaces.

Additionally, the young women shared their spatial experiences through narratives and counter maps. These serve as exceptional pedagogical tools to learn about issues of gender within educational spaces and beyond. In and of itself, the tools used in this research for data collection -- walking, narratives and counter maps -- can be used by educators in classroom spaces and beyond to understand the gendered, classed, colonial or casteist experiences of their students. By engaging in the act of telling their stories and being heard and valued, historically marginalized people find avenues for exercising agency. Diksha's amazement at people being interested in their stories, to young women using the research space as a place of resisting norms around being outside of homes during the weekends, serves as a reminder of the power of being heard. Educators hold the key for young people within their classrooms to feel valued. It is through acts of engagement that educators can practice a more equitable and inclusive pedagogy within their classrooms and beyond.

Implications for urban planning/placemaking

Edward Said (1997, 2014), a Palestinian cultural critic, developed a concept of imaginative geographies that refers to the "political organization of space through its material manifestations that produce oppressive and unjust geographies" (Edward Soja, 2010, p. 37). Such imagined geographies of power and oppression are seen within this research in a nested way. Within urban cities, homegrown neighbourhoods become symbols of violence, poverty

and underdevelopment. Through an imaginative process of subordination - a concept that Edward Soja (2010) defines by extending Said's work- the homegrown neighbourhoods receive very little to no attention from the urban city planners, which influences the perception that people in other parts of the city have about these neighbourhoods. This subordination is evident in how I was informed that cab drivers refuse to drive to Yerwada at night. At the intersections of class and caste, Yerwada finds itself at the imagined and real geography of exclusion, a lower hierarchy of organized spaces within the urban city, which leads to spatial injustice as socially and politically produced. Additionally, Leslie Kern (2019) raises the pertinent point in *Feminist City* about how the inclusion of women in geographies that are created for/by men would not qualify as inclusive and equitable. Inclusive urban planning would need to reimagine cities and neighbourhoods from an intersectional lens of includes women's voices from diverse groups. Also, the task of inclusive and feminist urban planning is riddled with a history that is based on imperialism and the discovery of lands by colonizers. Bringing it all together, this research adds an implication for urban planning: to examine how urban cities are perceived by the youth from lower-class and caste and minority religious groups. I believe this is possible only if urban planning is cognizant of these voices that have been completely ignored in the past. The research offers valuable insight into the stories of these young women -- how they interact with their community, but also how the community housed within the urban city is ignored and excluded from inclusive urban planning and/or placemaking initiatives.

Reflections

Situated within feminist adult and informal learning in/through places, this research focuses on adult and informal education, community-based learning, feminist placemaking scholarship and urban planning. Given that, unlike educational research that could pertain to a specific physical location/context like a classroom, this research finds itself distributed. I

reflect on my research through the five categories of insight into: 1) adult community-engaged learning, 2) urban cities and planning, 3) feminist placemaking research and 4) schools and educational institutions, 5) feminist post-qualitative research.

Adult community-engaged learning offers avenues for critically examining the power dynamics that exist in spaces while also highlighting the potential of place-based norms and identities to be challenged through the resistance of people who live within them. By including marginalized voices and listening to/engaging/with often-silenced stories, adult education and community-engaged learning can open opportunities to learn beyond the classroom and from the lived experiences of those who are often at the periphery.

Urban cities and planning need to give saliency to input from the communities that they are planning for, which includes local ground-level input. Cities and their planning should prioritize safety and accessibility for their most marginalized and those prone to violence and exclusion.

Feminist placemaking research can ignore the experiences of those who are often unseen and confined to private spaces. Such invisibility can be due to the lack of participation of some communities (like the young women in this research) in placemaking activities, but also because placemaking for people can look vastly different. Expanding feminist placemaking research and allowing its reimagination and redefinition are key to inclusive research practices - an important recommendation for the feminist geography scholarship.

Schools and educational institutions need to create a better relationality with the community in which they are housed. The research reveals schools as safe spaces and offering agency to young women who do not have much control over their lives beyond the confines of the school. This makes prominent the role of schools in offering placemaking opportunities to those who are deprived of community and collective action within their

homes or communities. With pedagogy that is contextual and curriculum that focuses on existing knowledges of communities and the students in classrooms, schools need to become potential avenues for inclusive learning and offer safe spaces to their learners. Housed within communities, schools can also offer possibilities of alternative ways of community building and engagement rather than replicate the colonial, sexist, patriarchal, classist and casteist norms beyond the school gates.

Feminist post-qualitative research like these calls for a need to move away from a Western, white, masculine, hegemonic way of thinking in order to decolonize research processes and products. In my research, as I shifted into a post-qualitative inquiry, I started dialoguing with perspectives and stories that are most often relegated to the margins. Young women from lower-income communities and their spatial lived experiences are hardly studied in feminist geography research. Post-qualitative research provides the space to honour and acknowledge the young women's knowledge and their lived complexities in non-predetermined methodological ways, which gives way to new ways of thinking and doing research. An essential reflection from this research for me, is to rethink the focus on methodology and shift our research focus in post structural and post humanist ways of thinking. Such shifts make way for new forms of research that invites us to rethink and re-situate our practices in relation to feminist research. It also allows us to re-position ourselves as situated and evolving with/through our research instead of conducting research with pre-determined and fixed ideas.

Significance of Research

Most of the research within the Indian context of feminist geography has studied middle or upper-class women's experiences of communities or urban cities in India (Anindita Datta, 2021). This has resulted in the further exclusion of the voices of younger women who

belong to specific class and caste categories. With the rise of masculinist nationalist upper-caste supremacy in India (Debradita Chakraborty, 2024) and the further silencing of women, Dalits, Muslims, LGBTQIA+ and lower-class people, this research raises timely questions of: a) how are urban cities changing in terms of access, inclusion and safety; b) what implications does this new order of systemic exclusion have on urban city planning, along with steps that need to be taken to challenge this oppression; and c) what role does adult and informal/non-formal education spaces have in enabling people to critically examine their role and responsibility. I return to Paulo Freire's (2000) words, “It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free the oppressors” (p. 44). This research is an attempt to provide the much-needed platform for young women who live at multiple intersectional marginalizations to (re)tell their stories in the hopes of both offering a nuanced understanding of their lived experiences and challenging the Eurocentric idea of the lives of women from the global south.

Future Research

This research provides insight into the place-based experiences of young women from homegrown neighbourhoods of Yerwada and their placemaking practices. This research is unique in the ways it specifically understands the role of caste and class-based spatiality and its impacts on the gendered experiences of young women; there is scope for further research in this area. There is a need for more narrative-based work that centers marginalized voices to deepen the understanding of socio-economic, cultural and familial factors on spatial experiences. There is also a need to examine how cities and urban design, and planning impact the experiences of the demographic of young women from homegrown neighbourhoods.

Most of the spatial experiences of these young women are of control, lack of access, fear of violence and lack of agency. However, the research also highlights the complexity of their lived spatiality by showcasing the sense of belonging, everyday resistance and safety that they can experience in their neighbourhoods at other times. Further research can expand on these contradictions, examining the paradoxes of spaces and challenging the binary understanding of spaces. The nuances that this research highlights in terms of belonging, agency and resistance can be further bolstered with varied narratives. The research also highlights the heterogeneity of spatial experiences contingent on the class and caste divide. An expansion of this study could further focus on heterogeneity and factors that impact the same. Additional research can incorporate the spatial lived experiences of young men from similar communities to draw parallels with those of young women and expand on the normative gendering of spaces within the specific context of homegrown neighbourhoods.

Concluding Remarks

I set out in this research to offer a nuanced understanding of the complex, lived spatial realities of young women from the homegrown neighbourhoods of urban India. Through the research study, I engaged with what it means for young women to live within the often "tight spatial boundaries, constructed through power relations and material inequalities" (Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 1991, p. 68). It was revealed that the placemaking practices of young women within their intersectional marginalizations are layered narratives of belonging, safety, exclusion, violence, fear, everyday resistances and reinforced gendered norms. The narratives help shift a binary understanding of young women as either victims or resilient individuals, as they shed light on the complexities of their spatial lives. The research offers an insight into the lives of young women who experience places through their Dalit or Muslim identities, though not merely confined to the imagined reality of what their lives ought to be. As agentic beings, these young women, individually and collectively, constantly challenge

the hegemonic discourse of being young women from the peripheries of urban cities. However, they are also seen to conform to and reenact gendered, classed, and casteist norms due to fear of violence or for acceptance. Studying the spatial lived realities and placemaking practices of young women with intersecting identities, an understudied area (Maria Rodó-de-Zárate & Mireia Baylina, 2018), is crucial to an inclusive feminist understanding of spatiality and placemaking scholarship.

In the end, I return to the words on Gauri, Diksha and Ayesha's counter-map. They talk about being disinterested in going anywhere else because they see Yerwada as a place of amazing adventures. "We will never forget these places, and this is how we collect our life data and spread it towards you". As messages, their counter-maps and stories tell the paradoxical reality of what it means to live spatial and embodied lives as young women from homegrown neighbourhoods. I intended to use my research as "a tool to talk back" (Anita Harris, 2004, p. 236). The (re)storying of community, homes, schools, bodies and online spaces through the lives of the five young women implies that places are always under construction, and in the process of being made and (re)made (Doreen Massey, 2005). Such a realization opens up the possibility of challenging the gendered nature of spatiality and eroding its traditional boundaries, ultimately ushering in a potential for change towards feminist goals of inclusive and equitable spatial lives for young women within the confines of urban cities.

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