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We Were Here, and We Still Are: Negotiations of Political Space Through Unsanctioned Art

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3.1 Introduction

Scandinavian exceptionalism effectively conceals a colonial history in which, for centuries, the indigenous Sámi population have suffered discrimination from the dominant culture and the Swedish state (Naum and Nordin 2013). Swedish artist Anders Sunna is devoted to addressing aspects of colonialism in the Swedish state's relation to the Sámi. His work concerns both history and conceptions of the future.

Before January 2011, the Ministry of Culture controlled all public expressions in Egypt and protest art was hard to find. When thousands of people mobilised against the Mubarak regime, street art became part of a

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change in political and artistic expression (el Hamsamy and Soliman 2013a, b). During the Arab Spring, feminist artist Bahia Shehab was one of many who painted messages at Tahrir Square in Cairo, voicing demands for an end to military violence.

In this chapter, we start with the work of Shehab and Sunna in order to address strategies of artistic criticism of the relations between states and their citizens. Both artists are protesting against contemporary processes relating to space, state and nation, and they express themselves in ways that are embedded in the aesthetics of unsanctioned street art.

This expression constitutes an interesting form of politics, situated somewhere in-between, or alongside, party politics and the practices of civil society. Our aim is to describe and discuss what we see as specifically effective and dynamic themes in the chosen expressions—the use of space as object and methodology, and the production of iconic imageries within fantasies of protest. The stencils and spray paintings of Shehab and Sunna offer us keys to exploring efforts to artistically reveal and dismantle national and neocolonial power.

We work from the supposition that space is always ideological (Cresswell 1992) and that it needs to be thought of as something ongoing, a ‘heterogeneity of processes’ (Massey 2005: 107) that together form, and reform, notions of what space can be/come. We also discuss the uses of space and style in relation to the critique of state and colonial power, focusing on how these two artists’ anti-colonial strategies are articulated via uses of space and place, both physical and digital. The studied expressions are regarded as political, both in the sense that they constitute examples of public contestation of otherwise taken-for-granted or covered-over power relations, and that they visualise, and criticise, a dimension of conflict that is constitutive of society (Mouffe 2005). Their political dimension is fuelled by ideological fantasies that ‘give them direction and energy by pointing to things that are desired or rejected’ (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 145–152), e.g., a desired freedom or a rejected colonialism. Such contestations, however, are not always appreciated, either for their content or for their form or place of display. Mouffe (2013: 299) has identified what she calls a ‘moralization of politics’ at work when expressions are dismissed, which defines opponents in moral rather than political terms. As a consequence, argues Mouffe, opponents

are seen not 'as opponents but as enemies', whose work can be prohibited by the state rather than responded to; the content of the criticism neglected not as an act of censorship but because its form is deemed illegal. This does not mean that passers-by do not interpret the forbidden paintings as important political statements. In fact, their forbidden status may even encourage such an interpretation.

The focus on street art partly implies a centring of visual expression, which necessarily excludes other ways of communicating and experiencing protest (e.g., written, spoken or sung communication, physical pain, emotional reactions). We draw here upon Lisiak (2015: 4), who concludes that: 'analysis of revolutionary iconography is important because it is [...] protesters' lingua franca' (see also Buck-Morss 2002). However, the delimitation to visual expressions still offers a variety of possible perspectives. We start by briefly delving into the analytical possibilities opened up by relating the studied expressions to the associations, practices and aesthetics associated with street art.



Fig. 3.1 'To colonialism'. Stencil and photograph: Anders Sunna. Courtesy of the artist

3.2 Street Art

Street art—often referred to as urban art, guerrilla art or independent public art—has become a growing artform with a broad audience. As expressions of street art are primarily performed in open and easily accessible areas, its aesthetic has almost become an admissible voice within the urban landscape. However, despite its familiar appearance, its expressions carry both political and democratic possibilities. Through its frequent targeting and politicising of aspects of the social that have become invisible and untellable, street-art expressions open up spaces for reflection and negotiation. In this sense, Gayatri Spivak's (1988) old question, of whether the subaltern can become comprehensible and speak, can be revisited via street art, which constitutes efforts to call attention to voices that are otherwise excluded from established venues or made unintelligible in certain geographical locations.

Hence, street art dislocates public space and makes it vulnerable; it unsettles 'the settled spaces of the city' (Young 2014: 129), not only through its unsanctioned—and in some countries forbidden—status, but also because of what it makes visible and tellable. McAuliffe and Iveson (2011) suggest that an important role of street art is that it reminds passers-by that the material urban landscape is co-produced and shaped by each and every one of us; a suggestion which implies that the social is necessarily an ambiguous thing.

This function of reminding us of the inherent incompleteness of the social is not only accomplished through the content of the artworks. The expression 'cultural jamming' is sometimes used to indicate practices whereby urban surfaces that are owned and funded by others—such as buildings and commercial ads owned and funded by private property owners and commercial interests—are used to creatively and artistically change the messages that these otherwise communicate (Klein 2000; Ferrell and Weide 2010). There is thus reason not only to delve into the meanings inherent within street artworks themselves, but also to acknowledge how such meanings occur partly as an effect of, and a response to, the spatio-political contexts within which they are produced and with which they communicate.

While street art is mostly associated with the surfaces of urban public spaces, researchers have pointed to how such spaces are constantly getting narrower—because of both risk and security discourses and marketisation. As a consequence, Mitchell (2003) has stressed the importance of defending public spaces as democratic sites for political expression with active participation through spontaneous and unanticipated activities by citizens (see also Olsson 2008).

But the notions of a narrow public space also have other spatial biases. This is surely the case in discussions about street art, where the spaces of public artistic contestation are often unproblematically taken to equate to urban or even metropolitan space. It leaves protests about spatial injustices, expressed by people who inhabit so-called ‘peripheral’ spaces, almost incomprehensible in terms of protest or artistic activism. Protest and protester identity are thus revealed to be anything but neutral. Apart from being caught up in notions of youth and masculinity (Bobel 2007), perceptions of protest and protester identity have long been intimately entangled with urbanism and expected forms of resistance (Scott 1985; Nilsson and Lundgren 2018).

Street art has been defined as a movement rather than merely an art-form. As such, it is multifaceted and changing. Despite its inherently mutable character, street art has become increasingly established during recent decades, with a growing art market, galleries, workshops, guided tours and products springing out of artistic expressions. Because of this, it is often stated that ‘street art is dying’ because it has become a safe art product that it is possible for anyone to consume (Jones 2011).¹

Its central feature of communicating (often illegally) on the surfaces of public space has been transformed as more and more street art is being produced and disseminated digitally. Waclawek (2011: 184–185) contends that, today, the internet is ‘not only a source of information about graffiti and street art, but also swiftly becoming the primary vehicle for an encounter with the work’. Some researchers have cautioned that the digitalisation of street art depoliticises it and detaches the audience from the artwork and its original context (e.g. Bengtsen 2014),² or that it merely calls for ‘feel-good’ slacktivism, where liking a piece is as far as political engagement goes (but see Serup Christiansen 2011). Yet others suggest that the digitalisation of street art disguises the ephemerality that is an

in-built part of the genre as it is often removed by property owners and changed or overpainted by other artists (Riggle 2010; Young 2014). It has been suggested that this ephemerality works to invite citizens to become active in the artistic process and to partake in the debate over public space. However, such invitations also occur in the virtual world (e.g., Menor 2015; MacDowall and de Souza 2017).³

The above criticism targets the significance of space and the meanings attributed to acting and being in a space. In this chapter, we argue that it is nevertheless important to reflect on the power relations that structure space—privileging some places and people as *proper* locations and subjects of protest—and how uses of the internet also constitute important aspects of the power-laden situatedness and force of artistic protest. Space—the location of forms of artistic protest as well as the spatial negotiation of power and meaning that they engender and constitute—thus seems to be an important analytical entrance point. Focusing on the intersections between art, space and protest, we are interested in following and scrutinising the decentring and destabilising movements of street art as it claims space and performs politics.

As a focal point for the discussion, we draw on the two empirical examples introduced at the beginning of this chapter—the artistic expressions of the Egyptian artist Bahia Shehab and the Sámi artist Anders Sunna. The artworks in question have been encountered through digital ethnographic research on art with a special focus on state-critical street art. Via previous research on contemporary street art and with a transnational approach we found thought-provoking parallels between street art from Cairo during the so-called Arab Spring and current art from the Swedish part of Sápmi. The material contains both still and moving images, primarily exhibited online, and we made contact with the artists, who agreed to be published in this chapter. It is, of course, a difficult and perhaps counterproductive endeavour to try to establish or define the artworks studied here as street art. In some senses, they may be defined in that way, in others perhaps not. What is important, however, is that analysing them through the lens of unsanctioned art helped us to reveal what we perceived to be important aspects of the artistic critique of the state and neocolonial government.

3.3 A Thousand Times No

In Egypt, street art, graffiti and calligraffiti exploded during the Arab Spring (Saphinaz-Amal 2016; el Hamsamy and Soliman 2013a, b). Images appearing on the buildings and walls of Cairo included strong political messages for people in the place to see, as well as for the globalised media to show people around the world the news about Egypt. Some of these images have been removed, but many were documented in digital archives, blogs, books, articles and exhibitions.

In a TED talk, artist Bahia Shehab explains the background to her participation in this artistic explosion (Shehab 2012). In 2010, she was invited to participate in an exhibition at the Haus Der Kunst in Munich, commemorating 100 years of Islamic art in Europe. The invitation came with one important condition: she had to use Arabic script in her work. Contemplating what her contribution would be, she describes how she immediately knew that: ‘As an artist, a woman, an Arab and a human being living in the year 2010, I only had one thing to say—I wanted to say “No”.’ Shehab further explains that, in Arabic, a common expression is ‘No and a thousand times no’. For the exhibition, she therefore decided to collect a thousand different representations of the word ‘No’ that had appeared over the past 1400 years under Islamic or Arabic patronage. She called the finished installation *A Thousand Times No*, a work (process and pieces) described in detail in her book *A Thousand Times NO: The visual history of Lam-Alif* (2010).

The Egyptian revolution began in the following year, 2011. As military sanctions against the protesters became more violent, Shehab decided to participate more actively. She started to spray her thousand Noes publicly on walls all over Cairo (Shehab 2014). ‘I did not feel that I could live in a city where people were being killed and thrown like garbage on the street’, she explains in her TED talk and describes her first spray-painted work, which said ‘No to military rule’ in a script taken from a tombstone. That No was followed by a series of Noes that ‘came out of the book like ammunition’. Among the Noes that followed were: No to a new pharaoh. No to violence. No to killing men of religion. No to burning books. No to the stripping of veiled women (Fig. 3.2).



Fig. 3.2 'No to stripping...' Stencil and photograph: Bahia Shehab. Courtesy of the artist

The latter is one of the more famous pieces in the series, originally commenting on a notable incident in which a veiled protesting woman was violently stripped and beaten by military men. The incident was filmed and circulated on the internet, and international broadcasters such as CNN and the *National Post* covered the story of the beaten young woman. The media images show three policemen dragging the woman's unconscious body: her hijab and long black abaya ripped off, exposing her stomach and her blue bra. Shehab's artistic comment consists of a stencil of a blue bra and a footprint representing the military that reads 'Long live a peaceful revolution'. In her TED talk, Shehab says it represents a 'reminder of the shame' of Egypt for allowing such actions and that 'we will never retaliate with violence'. The blue bra quickly became a cultural product itself and a symbol of the protests after the Egyptian

uprising of 2011—against injustice, patriarchy and Egyptian military violence—and was also used by other street artists.⁴

Through the articulation of a plethora of different Noes—which related to phenomena both from the historical past and of the present—Shehab managed to produce/visualise power structures that positioned the sympathetic viewers of the artworks as united. They became parts of the same frontier, although they may not otherwise have taken an individual stance towards *all* of the articulated Noes. Even though Shehab herself, according to her TED talk, believes that very few can identify these connections, she thinks the resonance can be felt on the street. In this sense, the emptiness of the word No—or rather, its openness to inscription—allows for it to be recognised as a forceful signifier of protest. The ‘emptiness’ of No became a small part of the larger creation of a community of belonging.

In her talk, Shehab also mentions a well-known street-art piece on a wall in Cairo: ‘Tank vs. Bike’, originally by Mohamed Fahmy, known as Ganzeer. The piece started with stencils of a person riding a bike and carrying a large tray of bread, being confronted by a life-sized tank. A soldier is pointing a weapon at the cyclist. After reactions against the piece, protester Winged Elephant painted people protesting in front of the tank, siding with the cyclist, with blood pouring from them as they are run over by the tank and the words: ‘Starting tomorrow I wear a new face, the face of every martyr. I exist.’ This painting also attracted protest. Supporters of the army, the Badr Battalion, reacted to the new artwork by painting over the red blood with white and making the protesters into pro-regime supporters with flags. They added words about the people and army being united for Egypt. This was, again, followed by Winged Elephant, who painted a military leader as a monster in front of the tank eating a young woman in a river of blood. The Badr Battalion came back, leaving the tank but again painting white over ‘the blood’ and covering the face of the military leader with black paint. Other artists also joined in during the process—amongst others Sad Panda and the Mona-Lisa Brigades, who painted protesters with no facial expressions holding Guy Fawkes masks in their hands.⁵ Shehab also participated by spraying the whole piece with a range of her by now well-known ‘No’ stencils (amongst



Fig. 3.3 Elements from the ‘No’ campaign. Stencils and photograph: Bahia Shehab. Courtesy of the artist

others, the blue bra) and the words of Pablo Neruda: ‘You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming’ (Fig. 3.3).

‘Tank vs. Bike’ visualises political conflict and how co-produced street-art assemblages not only illustrate but also partake in the ongoing struggle over meaning. Years after the public protests and military-driven counter-reactions started in Egypt, this artwork still materialises the two dominant narratives in trying to define the gist of the conflicts. The dialogical movement in this artwork, between pro-army defenders and regime-critical protesters, constitutes a political space on the abutment of the Sixth of October Bridge in Zamalek (an area in Cairo). In doing so, the artwork also calls on passers-by to take a stance, or to join in. In a sense, such an invitation significantly destabilises not only the understanding of the conflict as such, but also the notions of what art is and who could be/come a political protester; the non-democratic order is thus also protested and challenged through the call for participation and collaboration.

To narrate is often seen as fundamental to the ability to socialise, to create ourselves and in some ways to survive. Homi Bhabha talks about

narrativity as a sign of civilisation, arguing that societies denying the right to tell are societies creating a deafening silence (Bhabha 1990: 291–322). In the context of Egypt, and more specifically political life in urban Cairo, street art has clearly been used as a way to disrupt the silence and create alternative narrations about contemporary situations in an authoritarian society. The book *Walls of freedom: Street art of the Egyptian Revolution* (2014) contains images and interviews with a range of street artists in Egypt, including NeMo, who claims that this artform became a forceful tool against a depressing culture, both before and during the Arab Spring. Street art provided hopeful images, often symbolising people united against Mubarak and the military regime, and it did so in the middle of the city, on walls that were visible to anyone passing by. Using the canvases of publicly available walls, street art turned into an alternative media that spread messages in sharp contrast to those of the state-owned press (Hamdy and Don Karl aka Stone 2014; de Ruiter 2015). Simultaneously, and importantly, it also constituted new points of identification and produced an alternative understanding of the political landscape.

The artists producing street art worked within norms signifying the Egyptian revolution, stressing peacefulness and inclusion, and aiming to mobilise the people at large within the state (independent of religion, class or other social factors) against the imperial ruling elite that was diminishing space for almost everyone.

Via street art meaning-making, small details became important symbols for this unity of the people. The blue bra used by Shehab and others is powerful because it reminds people of the well-known event of excessive assault. As the gendered aspects of the symbolised abuse are acknowledged in this cultural artefact, the bra has become equated with a feminist critique. A strength of the constitution of the blue bra as a symbol is that it transformed the memory of the person in question into feelings of having been wronged *as a people*; to critique and mobilise people at large against military rule and violence and to itself become a sign for the reclaiming of *democracy* (see Berg and Lundahl 2016: 274). Criticism of the Egyptian state, non-democratic leadership and military violence are articulated in this art piece in a simple but striking way, demanding a changed nation-state. Similar demands are made by Sámi artists in Sweden.

3.4 We Are Here, You Are Not

‘From the outset on, it is of importance to state that: The Sámi have not been subjected to discrimination by the State.’ The recorded voice of the State attorney from a court case between the Sámi reindeer community Girjas and the Swedish state (Gällivare Lapland District Court, June, 2015) introduces the YouTube clip WE ARE STILL HERE (Jannok 2016).⁶

Visually, while hearing this voice, which subsequently merges into Sofia Jannok’s singing, the viewer sees a snowy forest landscape with grazing reindeer. A man and a woman are creating two large canvases of approximately 3 x 5 metres, by winding transparent plastic between the trees. On one of these plastic canvases, artist Anders Sunna then begins to write, in red capital letters: YOU HAVE NOT BEEN IN THE AREA! He then continues painting.

On one canvas: portraits of two Sámi women. One is Elsa Laula Renberg, a South Sámi and a pioneer in the organisation of the Sámi people. She is stencilled after a well-known photograph of her as an older woman. The other woman represents a young contemporary North Sámi (Fig. 3.5). According to Sunna, these two portraits represent a united consensus that stretches across both time and space; it applies as far south and as far north as you can get in Sápmi (Eriksson 2016). The choice of women as the prominent figures is telling about Sámi culture, but also acknowledges the often-unrecognised role played by women, and specifically indigenous women, in protest movements (Jenkins and Rondón 2015; Sjöstedt-Landén and Fotaki 2018).

On another canvas: a skeleton of a reindeer dressed in traditional Sámi clothing is throwing a lasso (*souhpan*, *kasttöm*) towards a cat with its arms crossed, wearing a crown and dressed in a red suit with a tie. Or should it rather be read in the opposite direction? The Sámi people portrayed in Sámi clothing but also with a dead reindeer as a symbol of the future of traditional reindeer herding. And: a representative of capitalism/the state symbolised wearing a suit, its face covered by the mask of a predator? (Fig. 3.4).



Fig. 3.4 'We are still here'. Screenshot from video by Sofia Jannok feat. Anders Sunna. Painting by Anders Sunna. Courtesy of the artists

While Jannok sings, the viewer watches these paintings emerge, the transparent canvases making the snowy landscape and the grazing reindeer into part of them. As the sun sets in the forest and the music fades away, Sunna and Jannok finish the paintings, writing WE ARE STILL HERE! and the stigmatising and patronising word LAPP that has been used condescendingly for the Sámi population and that, appallingly, was also used in the speech by the State attorney that introduced the film clip. Towards the end of the video, a spotlight is focused onto one of the canvases, lighting up both the painting and the nearby reindeer.



Fig. 3.5 'We are still here'. Screenshot from video by Sofia Jannok feat. Anders Sunna. Painting by Anders Sunna. Courtesy of the artists

Anders Sunna is a renowned artist in Sweden. His art is dedicated to the struggle against colonialism and engages with the injustices of the Swedish state, the racism against the Sámi people and the exploitation of natural resources in Sápmi. Although he also works with more traditional artforms, Sunna is perhaps best known for his street art and street-art aesthetics. When trying to put into words what his art is about, he claims that a central theme revolves around his own family history and 'what the Swedish government has been doing to the people in the community' (Struggle 2018⁷). In some of his works on this theme, characters in Sámi clothing are seen with weapons, masks, balaclavas and allusions to Pussy Riot hats, clearly positioned as rebellious and protesting, sometimes with skulls instead of faces. One example is a stencilled image of a person, dressed in male Sámi clothing, back turned to the viewer and holding a bomb in his raised left hand. Sometimes this figure is accompanied by the

text ‘To colonialism’, as a way to explain the target of the bomb. Photos of this figure stencilled on various public surfaces can be found several times on Instagram under the hashtag #sápmistreetart, posted by different accounts, but always ascribed to Anders Sunna. Sunna himself shares photos of the image hashtagged #tocolonialism (Fig. 3.1).

The aesthetics partly resemble other artistic protests, e.g. the works by street-art collective Suohpanterror, a (partly) anonymous art collective that directs harsh critiques against colonisation via community art, posters and performative actions. Central to all of their cultural expressions is a critique of nation-states that do not respect indigenous rights. They have made numerous posters using recognised motifs and symbols alongside comments on contemporary events. Like Sunna’s, their work represents a deep conflict between the state and the Sámi people, with suggestions of a possible escalation of conflict symbolised by illustrations of mask-covered faces, weapons and physical violence.

There are many reasons why the described Sunna/Jannok YouTube clip works well as a starting point for a discussion about street-art protests. Most obvious, perhaps, is the way in which the street-art aesthetic connects the two paintings with notions of protest—even without the song’s lyrics or the written slogans, and regardless of the non-urban location. But equally important, or so we think, is the location of the filmed artwork. The forest space manages to make visible how the normative space for artistic protest in this form is the city, with its walls and streets constituting the canvases and spaces for producing and consuming artistic messages. The choice of the forest space requires Sunna to himself construct the canvases on which to paint. Using transparent plastic film is a solution that not only makes his art possible at all, but also allows for the forest context—trees, snow and animals—to become a part of both motif and message.

Space is also made central at a denotative level through the explicit texts that are being written onto and thus included into the artwork. ‘You have not been in the area!’ and ‘We are still here!’ both attribute significance to the place. The location of the artwork and whether or not one has been there are thus rendered of immense importance. Referring to the long history of the Sámi people having their land circumscribed, narrowed down or taken away from them, this has an ‘always already’ feeling

to it that simultaneously points towards history and into the future (cf. Sandström 2017). It also nods specifically to more recent events in Sweden when the management of a mining company seeking to explore an area answered a question about the local people with an ignorant counter-question: 'What local people?' Angelika Sjöstedt-Landén (2017) has shown how the management's counter-question made it visible that it is not possible to either see or recognise the existence of people in certain places from within a strictly capitalist logic. The effect is not only that people's needs and rights are not taken into consideration, but also that they are discursively deemed redundant, unnecessary and not worthy of consideration. When the YouTube clip made by Sunna and Jannok highlights the phrases 'You have not been in the area!' and 'We are still here!', this must be interpreted as a conscious participation in the debate about existence in space.

The painting of the two women may be seen as an effort to inscribe the inhabitants of the allegedly 'empty space' into the landscape; a strategy of radically populating spaces that are seen as empty in the eyes of the coloniser (Sjöstedt-Landén 2017). In a sense, the painting therefore symbolises and *insists upon* the presence of a population whose violent subjection the state refuses to recognise as discrimination. It works as a claiming of space and a represented identification with space, but also, simultaneously, as a humble reminder that the Sámi were always already in that space.

We have focused specifically here on an artwork produced within a music video posted on YouTube. On the one hand, it is certainly an established practice for musicians to spread their work digitally through music videos. On the other hand, if we view the artwork as being itself a protest, the space of the forest is unlikely to attract many viewers, sympathisers or co-protestors if the information is not made available digitally. Digital media (including social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) may thus be specifically necessary for protests localised in peripheries, not just to disseminate information, but also as a medium that itself contributes to the population of space without being dependent upon, or confined by, the geographical coordinates of that space (Dahlberg-Grundberg and Örestig 2016; Sjöstedt-Landén 2017). In the latter sense, it is telling us about the spatial conditions for performing protest (Fig. 3.4).

3.5 Space as Objective and Methodology

Engaging a focus on space as constitutive of unsanctioned public art activism means recognising how space may be evoked both as an objective and as a methodology. In several of the cases presented in this chapter, the politicisation of space and of power relations between state and citizens was the explicit goal of performing the art. The artworks consciously and overtly dealt with questions of who has the right to land, access to human and democratic rights, and to exist in the public eye. They addressed how some spaces are specifically vulnerable to precarity; how, indeed, there is a 'demographic distribution of precarity' (Butler 2015: 67) which includes geographical differences that render some spaces more exposed than others. The art activism also focused on time, as in: what has happened in the history of Sweden and the history of Egypt, and who is to be included in the future? What stories will be told? In this, their art is associated with a broader postcolonial criticism of past colonial relations and how these extend into the present.

Judith Butler (2015; Butler and Athanasiou 2013) has argued that *the form* of resistance may exemplify the values under contention. For example, struggles for solidarity that are fought through the constitution of alliances of solidarity, and struggles to become acknowledged and have one's rights recognised that are fought through public demonstrations where protesters make their claims by placing their bodies where they will be seen and heard.

The way in which the described artworks work methodologically with space in order to achieve their objectives is therefore worthy of reflection. Shehab's stencils on the walls around Cairo, especially Tahrir Square, manifested a public contestation of the regime by highlighting aspects symbolising values that she forcefully rejected. To have the symbols of such rejections painted on the walls of centres of power is a demonstration of a logic of politics (Glynos and Howarth 2007) that destabilises orders which are constructed as natural. Shehab's stencils certainly took part in the public contestation of the regime, and they pushed the boundaries of who could act and speak publicly. In that sense, they also shed light on how taking space may come with considerable risks (Butler 2015), as the woman in the blue bra exemplifies.

However, the stencils also worked to regulate the public memory. Through embodying certain narratives about experiences of the past, they constituted a kind of historiography or public memory of the meanings of space. The painted reminders of the murders and violations that have taken place on those streets work as a protest against what the Egyptian nation had become but also as a testimony to what it did (cf. Awad 2017).⁸ When protester Winged Elephant wrote 'Starting tomorrow I wear a new face, the face of every martyr. I exist' in the 'Tank vs. Bike' assemblage, he similarly laid claim to having existed, and to wanting to represent that existence materially.

Similarly, it is possible to read the choice to locate the recording of the Sunna and Jannok video in a forest as a dislocation of the established notions of what constitutes public space in the first place, and of which populations are allowed recognition and to be heard. The place of the recording was fundamental to the very construction of the political message, which itself centred an otherwise peripheralised space.⁹ It reveals the conflict between, on the one hand, *knowing about* a place and the people living there (e.g., the knowledge of the state and of mining companies) and, on the other hand, *knowing the place* through being anchored there and embodying its culture and history. This distinction is central to the written message because it emphasises being in place as crucial to legitimacy. Thus, not adhering to the norms of the 'proper' space for art is itself a statement, and a way to push the notions of the proper space for protest. Here, the general claim that the street-art aesthetic cannot be understood outside its urban context (Ferrell and Weide 2010) clearly works as an important backdrop to the interpretation of the video, its aesthetics and place of recording. In the video, the street-art aesthetic contributes with an extra dimension precisely *because* it is performed in an unexpected space. The fact that we find it compelling and unusual for street art to be performed in other realms than the urban is not only telling of where we usually find this kind of expression. It also reveals how protest as such may actually be difficult to articulate in certain spaces; how protests and protest art are conditioned by and dependent upon space (connected to urban spaces and identities). In Sweden, the politics of zero tolerance against graffiti was perhaps most noted in Operation Safety 1995 by Stockholm Public Transport, and hence graffiti has been discussed and dismissed as vandalism, primarily in urban areas (Kimvall 2014).

Engaging a focus on space as constitutive of street-art activism also means acknowledging that street art is increasingly being disseminated and produced in online contexts (Waclawek 2011; Glaser 2015). The digitalisation of artworks invites viewers across space to take part and join in the protest. In this sense, the digital medium manages to transgress space and interconnect otherwise disparate subjects/struggles. For example, the Sunna/Jannok video has received over 100,000 views on YouTube and it was also posted on Jannok's and Sunna's respective Facebook walls. Without digital media, it is likely that the location of the forest would not have been chosen. The exclamation 'You have not been in the area!' turns the physical detachment into one important political point, but it needs digital technology to disseminate the message to a wider audience. The same goes for the works of Shehab, even though, obviously, her art is also found on urban street walls. There is also the extensive online sharing of her pieces and the TED talk that itself worked to spread both images and explanations of her art. While her stencils constitute important protests against state violence at the very location where they are painted, their digital dissemination is an equally important part of the mobilisation, with the hope of international support.

The usage of different digital media tools such as hashtagging also work as labels that de facto link the art pieces to other contexts so that they are immediately contextualised in specific ways (MacDowall and de Souza 2017; Lindgren and Cocq 2017). The music video 'We are still here' is tagged with #girjasmotstaten (*eng*: #girjasagainstthestate) and #wearestillhere. On Instagram, Sunna frequently uses hashtags such as #sápmistreetart (collecting photos of Sámi-related street art), #indigenousart (collecting photos of art produced by indigenous peoples from all over the world) and #contemporaryart (collecting a broad variety of contemporary artistic expressions, of which street art is just one). The hashtags thus succeed in unifying the disparate experiences of the people who use it. They function as important symbols connecting the artworks with expressions and audiences from very different geographical areas and with partly different struggles and demands.¹⁰ And, just as street art itself may be said to attract participation (as 'Tank vs. Bike' made visible), hashtagging invites people to participate and make their personal expressions part of a bigger movement.

3.6 Fantasising Revolution Through Iconic Imageries

There has been some discussion about whether iconic images can work as monuments to protests.¹¹ Still, there is reason to explore the meanings of such images, regardless of whether they are short-lived or more permanent, as they have important things to say about the ideological, and gendered, fantasies of protest.

The protester icons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were often bare-breasted women who worked as allegories for the struggle, for freedom or for the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997). According to Hobsbawm (1978), these female allegories were succeeded by a masculinisation of the protester icons during the twentieth century. Lisiak (2015), elaborating on Mitchell (2012), contends that there has been a recent resurgence of revolutionary images that again centre on women.¹² In her analysis, she shows how the current trend actually embodies women in two different ways: as revolutionary allegories and as victims of revolution. As a revolutionary allegory, the female body symbolises a new beginning that ‘transcends earthly limitations, inspires crowds, awes with her beauty, and speaks the unspeakable’. As embodiments of the failures of revolution, the female body is ‘rendered speechless, choking on her own blood, beaten into unconsciousness, or reduced to a single gesture, color, or piece of clothing’ (Lisiak 2015: 16).

The works chosen in this text—by Shehab and Sunna—partly reflect this division. The two women in Sunna’s painting are indeed historical persons rather than mere allegories, but they are used as inspiring symbols of hope and struggle. Shehab’s blue bra, on the other hand, can certainly be seen as a symbol of revolution that thrives on the feelings of dismay evoked by seeing the abuse of the girl wearing the blue bra. Iconic images such as the blue bra that represent horrifying points of remembrance can, of course, also come to forcefully symbolise conviction and political will. Hafez (2014b) has shown how feminist activists used the blue bra and reversed the shame and the stigma of the vulnerable, half-naked woman’s body and transformed the state’s metaphors of control into battle cries of dissent and resistance.

But other personae also recurred within the studied artworks. There is a facelessness to many of the portrayed figures, because of either their masks or their overpainted faces. In Sunna's paintings, such anonymity is applied to the painted representatives of power and the state, associated, perhaps, with the facelessness of power. But anonymity is also central to portrayals of protesters, accomplished through the use of Guy Fawkes masks, balaclavas, allusions to Pussy Riot hats or, in a few cases, through turning their backs to the viewer. When allied to portrayals of protesters, such symbols carry intertextual references to heroes and villains of popular culture, whose individual identities are, at least partly, unknown to the surrounding community.

Being 'partly' unknown is something upon which Sara Ahmed (2000) focuses in her discussion about the cultural position of the stranger. She argues that the stranger is not someone who is *not known* but rather someone who is *known as unknown*. Translating this discussion to the construction of nations, Ahmed argues that nations are constructs that are 'invented as familiar spaces' in relation to, or against, something which is constituted as the unfamiliar. The unfamiliar, she argues, is embodied in the stranger, so that the stranger appears to be what 'the nation is not, and hence as a way of allowing the nation to be' (2000: 97). Seeing the stranger as a known unknown of the nation—the nation's constitutive outside—opens up space for new interpretations of the portrayed anonymous and masked figures. On the one hand, these anonymous figures embody the core of the artistic critique; namely, that it is not about being poorly treated as citizens of a nation; the issue here is not being recognised as citizens at all. On the other hand, the interpretation that the anonymous figures embody strangers to the nation leads their masks and suggested violent intent to take on new and potentially horrifying meanings.

In nations that have faced traumatic, sometimes genocidal, acts executed by their own governments—such as apartheid in South Africa, the atrocities of the Balkan Wars and military repression that destroyed several countries in Latin America, dictatorships such as in Egypt and harsh suppression against indigenous peoples such as the Sámis—there are obvious needs to learn about what happened to all the people who disappeared, were murdered, violated and/or became museum objects. Merely

setting the injustice right is not always enough. Some form of revenge may become a motive—even a necessary one (Jasper 2018: 154).

One example representing revenge is Sunna's previously mentioned stencil 'To colonialism' depicting the male Sámi carrying a bomb. Sprayed onto walls in public spaces, such figures seem to stand in loco *personae*, as symbols installed to deliver messages and harbour emotions that it is otherwise not possible to speak about openly. The simultaneous articulations of, on the one hand, allegations of state violence and, on the other, the illustrations of weapons and violence and the uncanny anonymity of the figures, provide protesters and supporters with an agentic and decisive model subject who stages a fantasmatic resistance. The fantasmatic character of this desired resistance is not only important because it provides people with positions of identification that give them direction and explain the social to them. Ideological fantasies also become important through people's identification with *the enjoyment* that resides in the collective transgression of the boundaries of sanctioned political practices (Glynos 2001, 2008). The enjoyment offered by these fantasies of a brutal resistor may work well to drive identifications and protests. It constitutes the 'grip' that the fantasy may continue to hold, even when, or because, it is admittedly recognised as problematic or even prohibited due to its 'transgression of publicly accepted norms' (Glynos 2001: 209–210). In this way, the anonymous and threatening figures become important because they symbolise potential leverage against the cultural and legal processes that have long proven difficult to manoeuvre.¹³

Thus interpreted, the figures enact what has sometimes been termed *survivance*—efforts to simultaneously perform survival and resistance (Vizenor 1993; Chisum 2013). Chisum has suggested one of the key elements of survivance practices to be self-representation on social media for the purpose of combatting stereotypical representations and 'subverting the dominant paradigm' (2013: 123). But connecting resistance with survival also introduces associations with morality. If resistance is performed as a way to survive previous and contemporary injustices, it becomes more possible to understand it as reasonable, legitimate and fair. Such legitimisations shed light on how survivance practices, such as certain street-art expressions, also contribute to the visualisations of space as entangled in moral geographies that are themselves complex and

changing. The transgressive acts of street-art performances of survivance may be condemned by parts of the establishment, but this will be so for different reasons. While some may focus on the prohibited paintings on public surfaces, others may take a more nuanced stance, actually siding with the expressed criticism. As Cresswell (1992: 330) writes, ‘just as dominated groups are not a homogenous and unified body, the dominant are multiplicitous—different parts of the establishment have different reactions to graffiti’.

The uses of symbols of threat also constitute strong and recognisable trademarks, either for individual artists or for specific struggles more generally. In that sense, they appeal to the savvy onlookers’ feelings of being insiders who know what the symbols imply.

3.7 Conclusion: Symbolising Protest, Making Space for Mobilisation

Lyman Chaffee (1993: 4) argued in the early 1990s that ‘street art can shape and move human emotions and gauge political sentiments. Language and visual symbols help shape perception. Clichés, slogans, and symbols—the substance of political rhetoric—help mobilise people.’ The suggested mobilising capacity of street art motivates people to take it seriously, and not accept the ‘moralization of politics’ (Mouffe 2013) that would reject its content due to its prohibited form of expression. Its destabilising effects and alternative narratives about the social make street art interesting as an expression of civil society or, rather, as practices performing politics in-between or alongside the more traditional civil society and party politics. The literature on civil society acknowledges a change in the organisation of civil commitment (Wijkström and Zimmer 2011), and has broadened its scope to comprise less organised initiatives (Pichardo 1997) based on the ‘recognition of oneself as part of the social fabric, oriented toward influencing the way society works’ (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017: 3). Still, it is likely that some would object to defining street art as an expression of civil society. It certainly expresses opinions

and challenges norms, but it is unclear what or who street artworks represent (other than what the artwork itself claims or implies).

In this chapter, we have delved into some examples of how street art may protest issues to do with space and citizenship, thus constituting a political voice and challenging the political landscape. Doreen Massey's (2005) notion of space as a heterogeneity of processes has served as an important figure of thought that urged us to recognise how spaces were engendered and evoked within particular artworks as well as between artworks and their social and physical contexts. Rather than focusing on the acting and appearing (taking place) in space, or focusing on where something appears, we argue, with Butler (2013: 194), that what was at stake was a kind of spacing of appearance, a 'performative plane of "taking place"'. The examples we have chosen are very different. Still, they offer insights into the meanings of space as objective and artistic method, the significance of aesthetics, and the immense importance and cultural meanings of iconic imageries and ideological fantasies. One important insight was how the forms of protest—and the notions of space, aesthetics and revolution upon which they are built—are also impregnated with notions of citizenship and morality. In this sense, the unsanctioned art we have analysed can be viewed as claims to alternative ways to understand and structure space, but also, with Cresswell (1992: 329), as transmitting 'ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate'. As such, they certainly prove that street art contributes to the constitution of political space.

Notes

1. Studies on graffiti, and subcultures in general, often state that subcultures which become incorporated into the market risk appropriation, having their autonomy compromised and their potential for change disarmed (see Kramer 2010; Lachmann 1988). However, discussions regarding street art being disarmed exist primarily in a western context, and research about street art is mainly concentrated in metropolitan environments in the USA, Europe and a few larger cities on other continents. But street art is, of course, not exclusive to these areas, and art-forms differ and change in relation to both geographic and spatial contexts.

2. Peter Bengtson (2014: 154) states that the potential for street art to instil curiosity towards the environment is very much 'contingent on the promise that a physical (and somewhat unpredictable) interaction with the environment is taking place'. Anna Waclawek (2011: 185) has similarly argued that the movement into the virtual realm 'unifies those who have access to it, but fundamentally distances its users from physical experiences with the works themselves'.
3. In a book chapter on the Ana Botella Crew, Menor (2015: 59) describes how internet tools were used to disseminate and articulate 'artistic interventions that challenge the hegemonic uses of public space', e.g., through disseminating a template of Ana Botella's signature (Botella is known for having pushed through restrictive legislation on graffiti) so that it could be downloaded by any Internet user to sign their own street art. A similar example of protests that encouraged people to engage in digital street art was the critique of a condescending statement about social media by Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott. Hashtagged #electronicgraffiti, a spray-painted stencil of Abbott and the Instagram ideograms indicating '0 comments, 0 likes, 0 new followers' began to circulate on social media soon after the statement (MacDowall and de Souza 2017).
4. The incident and the production of the blue bra as a symbol of revolution has evoked a lot of scholarly interest, inter alia, (Mitchell 2012; Abaza 2013; Hafez 2014a, b; Lisiak 2015; Nicoarea 2014; Awad 2017; Linsen 2018).
5. Guy Fawkes masks, also known as Vendetta masks after their role in the graphic novel (and film) *V for Vendetta*, are often associated with the hacktivist group Anonymous (Majid 2019), but appear repeatedly in political street art. They have been described as central to the political iconography of public protest (e.g., Kohns 2013; Koch 2014).
6. Ironically, Sunna had created the paintings that adorn the walls in the courtroom where the Girjas case was held (Eriksson 2016).
7. 'Struggle # 1' with Anders Sunna, YouTube video. 'Anders Sunna sees his art as a tool to fight against the colonialism of the Swedish State and the exploitation of natural resources in Sápmi. This portrait of the series Struggle highlight his view on Sápmi and the future of it.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owKXQGztVx0>, 181008
8. Abaza (2013) has described the importance of digital media (e.g., recordings on mobile phones) in saving and disseminating the memories of street art produced during the Arab Spring, because the physical expressions were soon whitewashed over by the authorities.

9. Furthermore, the 2011 protests in Tahrir Square, albeit taking place in the middle of Cairo and covered by the national media, were quickly disseminated worldwide via #bluebra on Twitter (Lisiak 2014). Primarily used to mobilise protests, this hashtag was also used to spread information, to support the protests and to take a stance.
10. E.g., the hashtags #wearestillhere and #nottrespassingwithoutconsent have been used by protestors against mining exploitation (Sjöstedt-2017), climate politics and indigenous rights (Sandström 2017). It thus comprises different movements and goals, but connects and consolidates the anti-colonial critique of states that do not acknowledge the rights of local and indigenous peoples in Sweden and Scandinavia, as well as globally.
11. Mitchell (2012) has argued that the ‘empty space’ of the public square is the primary monument to the 2011 revolutions. Although recognising the significance attributed to more short-lived iconic images, the blue-bra girl being one of them, he suggests that there are ideological reasons for protesters to *refuse* the construction of ‘avatars’” and that these reasons are rooted in the democratising ambitions and horizontal ideals of the protestors. Others have questioned the effectiveness of graphic design in creating unifying symbols, and instead emphasise the strength built through online communication. Reflecting on Adbuster’s ballerina ad for Occupy Wall Street—depicting a ballerina gracefully balancing on the raging bronze ‘Charging bull’ in New York with #occupywallstreet texted beneath it—Bierut (2012) writes: ‘The ballerina didn’t matter. The bull didn’t matter. The headline didn’t matter. Only one thing mattered: that hashtag at the bottom’ (<https://designobserver.com/feature/the-poster-that-launched-a-movement-or-not/32588>).
12. Lisiak (2014) primarily questions Mitchell’s notion that representations of female bodies often achieve symbolic status in protest because of their connotations of non-violence. By solely equating femininity with non-violence, ‘Mitchell dismisses historical and contemporary representations of women as aggressive, possessed, and sadistic’ (2014: 5). It could further be added that the connotations of non-violence are related to the much wider traditional notions of femininity and the positions of women in society that have made them suitable as general representations (e.g., of cherished common values and nations) rather than as representations of historical subjects (e.g., kings, writers, presidents) (Warner 1996). The choice of the female body as a symbol of common values such as ‘freedom’ is thus unlikely to be related *only* to the issue of

violence/non-violence, but also to the general position of women and femininity in culture and public design.

13. Anonymity is also accomplished, however, via overpainted, and thus hidden, faces applied to painted representatives of power and the state, and can be associated with the facelessness of power.

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