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Original Research Article

Policy dissidents: Understanding girl activism as creating "Tactical Crevices"

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Abstract

Global policymaking often seeks to create processes for the effective delivery of public goods and services. What happens when individuals critique or dissent such policies? In this paper, we examine the case of two activists—Greta Thunberg and Disha Ravi—who have been mobilizing attention toward climate change since their teenage years, and who have been both celebrated and vilified for it. While climate change policies emphasize the importance of gender mainstreaming and youth participation, reactions garnered by these two activists are instructive in highlighting the narrow notion of "participation" that undergirds climate policy. Specifically, we show that Greta and Disha's tactics do not readily jive with the postfeminist, neoliberal conceptualization of youth participation that emphasizes apolitical exercise of citizenship; valorizes girls' activism only insofar as it enhances national economic growth; and views girls as symbols of hopeful futurities. Greta and Disha are instead what we call, "policy dissidents," whose activism creates "tactical crevices." We theorize tactical crevices as tentative and fleeting interruptions by the powerless that puncture prevailing logics through strikes and protests, and through consumption of discourses and materials in ways that those in power do not intend. The paper contributes to the study of girl activism broadly, and to notions of youth engagement (or disengagement) specifically, within the spheres of local and global politics.

Keywords: climate change, youth activism, girls' activism, greta Thunberg, disha Ravi

In recent years, we have witnessed a rise of non-state "third sector" actors who operate outside the formal domain of politics to influence policy processes. This paper takes a particular interest in two such third-sector activists—Greta Thunberg and Disha Ravi—who have mobilized attention toward climate change since their teenage years and have been both celebrated and vilified for their activism. The celebratory discourse that surrounds them can be situated within the broader attention to girls and gender mainstreaming in international policy and practice in recent years. Feminist scholars have, however, been critical of celebratory narratives that portray girl activists as saviors and have been attentive to ways in which these activists deviate from the postfeminist script in important ways (Lesko et al., 2015; Bent, 2020; Switzer, 2018; Taft, 2020). We join this critical turn in girlhood studies and take a particular interest in such deviations—i.e., when girl activists dissent global policies—to advance the broader study of global girls' activism. We ask: How might we conceptualize the impact of dissenting girl activists on global policymaking?

Greta Thunberg's name has become synonymous with youth activism for climate change. Many girls and young women explicitly acknowledge Greta and her activist strategies as their inspiration.

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Some of these activists like Xiye Bastida in the United States and Disha Ravi in Bengaluru, India have, in fact, even been dubbed as "the Greta Thunberg of the United States" and "Bengaluru's Greta," respectively. While Greta's contribution to founding a global youth movement for climate change is not contested, scholars have been troubled by how obsession with Greta erases longer histories of youth climate activism and the activism of girls of color (Huang & Bent, 2022; Mundy, 2023; Ortiz, 2022). Methodologically, scholars have addressed this invisibilization by highlighting the efforts and stances of girl activists of color (eg., Barnes, 2021; Huang & Bent, 2022). In this paper, while acknowledging the different racial, class, and national locations of Greta and Disha, we nonetheless place them alongside each other to draw attention to how girl activists as third sector actors forge a politics of coalition *across* difference. In other words, we detect patterns in their activist tactics in an effort to name and identify a global critique, and theorize their impact on climate policymaking.

We track Greta and Disha's activism over the years, as they transition from teenage into their twenties. The line between girlhood and womanhood is arbitrary and socially constructed. It is also a line that is racialized with nonwhite girls often being cast as "women" or being seen as achieving sexual maturity earlier (Khoja-Moolji, 2015a). Accordingly, following Vanner and Dugal (2020), we understand "girl activism" to include activism undertaken by girls and young women and view it as belonging to a singular arena of activity. Specifically, through a close reading of writings by and about Greta and Disha, and a review of the mediatized publics that have cohered around them (specifically, hashtag campaigns #FridaysForFuture and #StandwithDishaRavi), we notice that their activist tactics do not readily jive with the postfeminist, neoliberal conceptualization of girls' participation in the sphere of politics. These conceptions emphasize apolitical exercises of citizenship, valorize girls' activism insofar as it enhances national economic growth, and view girls as symbols of hopeful futurities.

Greta and Disha, in contrast, reject the postfeminist valorization of the individual, refuse to abide by climate policies that privilege nationalist and economic interests, and fashion ephemeral oppositional publics by making-do with limited resources. While their tactics are not new, what is new is that cyberspace has enabled them to create a broad authorizing narrative of opposition, a narrative within which other activists may situate themselves. The digital then furnishes an additional site where third-sector actors participate in a networked conversation to raise awareness of social issues, build solidarity, and interrogate sedimented ideas of youth participation in politics. To assess the impact of activists like Greta and Disha then we have to move away from dominant modes of assessing girls' participation within policymaking processes and toward a study of the ways in which they interrupt sedimented logics and ways of doing politics.

Accordingly, we call Greta and Disha "policy dissidents" whose activism interrupts the decorum of the powerful and identifies fallacies in their logics. We theorize their influence on policymaking as creating "tactical crevices." In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Michel De Certeau (1984) offers strategy and tactics as two modes of political functioning; while strategy is the purview of the powerful, tactics are employed by the non-powerful to make-do with what the powerful offer in the service of their own empowerment. Relatedly, (Devgan, 2013, 2015) has theorized crevices as fissures that fragment dominant, static, and rigid representations. In our theorization of "tactical crevices," we seek to name the impact of moments when young people—often without institutional backing and access to capital—come together in ordinary life and in cyberspace to puncture prevailing logics through strikes and protests, and also through consuming and making-do with discourses and materials in ways that those in power do not intend.

Crevices, however, do not restructure prevailing logics immediately. In fact, there is often a visceral and forceful reaction against such tactics. Scholars of youth activism further note that the activism of girls of color is often disregarded in favor of investing authority in white activists (Huang & Bent, 2022; Ortiz, 2022). We track precisely these mechanisms of disregard experienced differently by the two activists at the heart of this paper. We show how each girl, in her own context, has been undermined and even incarcerated. Additionally, the intensity of the reaction against Disha and the relative valorization of Greta further shows that these girls bear different burdens, and that race and social capital may protect some girls more than others. At the same time, visceral reactions from powerful patriarchal and statist elites signal that the "tactical cervices" that the girl activists are creating indeed have a resonance. In attempting to name the impact of these resonances on the policy landscape our paper responds to Tichenor, Merry, Grek, and Bandola-Gill's call in their 2022 thematic issue for *Policy and Society* as well as to Tim Legrand and Kim Moloney's call in the current issue to rethink what constitutes impact. Whereas the former interrogate prevalent modes of global public policymaking arguing that its

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focus on quantification limits how we think about wellbeing and prosperity, the latter urge scholars to craft new theorizations that account for the influence of third-sector actors. In this paper, we highlight one arena in which a policy paradigm shift may enable the identification, and crucially naming, of processes (girl activism) whose impact on climate policy making has received minimal attention.

Global girl activism

In recent years, the figure of the girl has gained prominence in international development policy and practice. Whereas politicians and policymakers view girls' education and empowerment as a panacea for wide ranging societal problems from poverty and terrorism to climate catastrophes, scholars such as Khoja-Moolji (2015b, 2018), Taft (2020), Bent (2020), Moeller (2018), and Desai (2016), among others, have interrogated these desires noting that they transform girls into saviors and do not furnish long term, structural solutions. Importantly, as Khoja-Moolji (2018) argues, the notion of girlhood held out as an ideal in these discourses is premised on white middle-class sensibilities, it valorizes individualism over community, assumes access to capital, and privileges economic wellbeing over other modes of relationalities that may be meaningful to girls. It is, in other words, a specific kind of girlhood, an "autonomous postfeminist subject" (Gill, 2007, p.13) that is celebrated in girl empowerment discourses.

The postfeminist girl power discourse brings us optimistic narratives about self-made, assertive girls who embrace a can-do attitude (Hains, 2009; Lesko et al., 2015). Within the broader scope of this girlhood, girl activists, as Jessica Taft (2020) notes, "have gone rapidly from being a present but basically unrecognized political force to celebrated cultural figures" (p. 2). But, as this paper will show, such celebratory narratives of girl activists are tentative and conditional. When girls protest and critique corporate and statist policies, or when they emphasize movement-building, they deviate from the valorized scripts of neoliberal girlhood and acceptable activism. Such girl activists are increasingly marked as "bad activists." Greta and Disha are a case in point.

Greta Thunberg

Greta Thunberg appeared on the transnational mediascape in August 2018 when, at the age of 15, she started sitting outside the Swedish parliament holding a sign that read: Skolstrejk för klimatet (School strike for climate). Her message was simple: World leaders must do more to address the climate crisis and that she would strike until something was done about it. She was soon joined by youth activists from not only Sweden but also other European nations. In due course, youth activists from the global South too used the tactic she had introduced—of school strikes—and joined her on Fridays, intervening, as Ortiz (2022) notes, in "adult-dominated policy and lawmaking processes to safeguard their futures" (p. iii). The movement is now known as Fridays for Future. Greta is credited with launching the climate activist movement, particularly among schoolchildren.

Within a few months of her strikes, in December 2018, Greta was invited to speak at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (more commonly referred to as the Katowice Climate Change Conference or COP24) in Poland, and the following year at the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York. In 2019, Time Magazine named her "Person of the Year" and a "Climate Warrior." Greta is often portrayed as a prophet or messiah that everyone had been waiting for. Journalist Naomi Klein (2019) notes that Greta speaks in a "prophetic voice," and news headlines to this effect abound as well: "The prophetic utterance of Greta Thunberg" (Tyson, 2019); "Greta Thunberg, a prophet for Advent" (Reese, 2019); "Greta Thunberg: Teen Prophet" (Randall, 2019). The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Sir Rowan Williams, has compared Greta to biblical prophets: "God has raised up a prophet in Greta Thunberg in a way that no one could predict… She has said things that no one else could have said. Thank God for her!" (cited in Remix News, 2021). Prophets are usually marginal figures in their time who nonetheless speak truth to power, often at great personal cost. They foretell the future and call on people to reform their ways. Greta emerges as a harbinger of the future and a singular voice calling for reform.

Disha Ravi

Disha Ravi is an Indian climate change activist and founder of the India chapter of Fridays for Future. While active since her teenage years, it was only in 2021 (when she was 22-years old) that she gained

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media attention and notoriety. Disha edited and shared a protest manual or "toolkit" about the then ongoing farmers' protests in the country. From 2020 to 2021 Indian farmers, mainly from the states of Punjab and Haryana, launched a prolonged protest against three farm laws passed by the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party government. Together these laws sought greater private sector involvement in the agricultural sector which the farmers feared would lead to the dismantling of *mandis* (or state-run agricultural markets) that guaranteed them a minimum price for select crops. The toolkit that Disha participated in editing contained information about how to support the farmers. It included suggested actions and listed relevant contacts.

On 13 February 2021, Disha was arrested for her involvement in the toolkit. As the story goes, the Canada-based primary creators of the toolkit were believed to be sympathizers of a banned separatist movement—Khalistani movement—that originated in Punjab demanding a separate state for the Sikhs. Disha was accused by the government of "global conspiracy" and charged under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for conspiring with Khalistani sympathizers "to promote disaffection against India" (State v. Disha A. Ravi, 2021, p. 2). Apart from defaming the country, the information in the toolkit was also seen by the Indian state officials as being responsible for creating unrest within the country (Anon, 2021). But what bothered the Indian state was the circulation that the toolkit received via social media. Disha is believed to have shared the toolkit with Greta who in turn retweeted the document. The two activists thousands of miles away had aligned in cyberspace in ways unimaginable in the past. Greta's retweet encouraged others, including dominant media and government personalities, such as American singer-song writer Rihanna and U.S. Vice President's niece Meena Harris, to retweet in solidarity with the Indian farmers. An ordinary advocacy tool had garnered unprecedented attention due to a unique combination of Greta's endorsement and the circulatory power of social media.

Rather than trying Disha in the city of her residence, she was brought to Delhi, India's capital city, remanded in police custody, and produced before a magistrate without a lawyer. Her private chats with Greta were leaked to Indian media. She was granted bail after 5 days in police custody, 3 days in judicial custody, and upon the payment of one lakh rupees. Despite being granted bail, bureaucratic delays around her passport application meant that she was unable to attend the COP26 summit (Ravi, 2021a).

While both Greta and Disha appear in global imaginaries as prominent climate activists, Disha's race and geopolitical location meant that her activism became visible only when she was thrust into the limelight due to a harrowing experience of being accused and arrested as an enemy of the state (Duvall, 2022). In fact, activists like Disha have themselves spoken out about the "environmental racism" (Gan, 2021) that invisibilizes the voices and experiences of people from the global South. Scholars of girl activism, such as Huang and Bent (2022), argue that the publics that valorize Greta often disregard visions of equitable futures advanced by girls of color, like Disha; and that Greta's influence whitewashes climate activism. They further note that: "While Thunberg's visibility may facilitate new forms of political power for girl leaders on climate justice, her presence just as easily erases their being recognized as activists in their own right" (Huang & Bent, 2022, p. 48). Others such as Jessica Taft (2020) have observed that while girl activists are often desired by publics as they offer hope, when the same girls advance more radical politics, they are transformed into harmful figures. Girl activism thus has an ambivalent presence. In this article, we join these conversations about girl activism by noting how both Greta and Disha refuse the dominant logics of girl power. It is in their refusal and oppositional politics that we can discern an impact on global policy that punctures the prevailing logics of girl power and shows the narrow permissible space for youth to participate in climate policy.

Tactical crevices: From "Good Citizenship" to "Bad Activism"

To encourage girls' participation in policymaking, certain kinds of activities are posited as examples of "good citizenship." In India, for example, schools and colleges have made participation in voluntary community-based projects integral to their curriculum to remain competitive in the educational landscape (Chacko, 2020). These voluntary activities are often apolitical: students read to the elderly, clean up parks and roads, and plant trees. Policymakers, politicians, and parents enthusiastically applaud these efforts as training for good citizenship and self-development. In contrast, activities like protesting by skipping school or disrupting institutional discipline deviate from permissible scripts of good citizenship. When young people take up such forms of organizing (that is, forms not sanctioned by adults in

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power), they veer away from "good citizenship," move toward "bad activism" and invite surveillance, and even, incarceration (see Kennelly, 2009).

Below we outline three ways in which Greta and Disha destabilize established normativities and hence become bad activists: they emphasize collective action and movement building; they refuse to contribute to the nation in scripted ways that privilege economic contribution, and they reject apolitical modes of civic participation in favor of more politicized forms. While their activism does not radically reconfigure the policy landscape, it does create what we are calling, "tactical crevices," which can produce change over time.

Refusing postfeminist individualism

In global policymaking, girls appear as "promissory object[s]" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 38)—that is, a range of promises from the alleviation of poverty and elimination of terrorism to societal progress and family harmony accumulate in the figure of the girl. Greta and Disha, however, reject these hopeful feelings associated with them that often abstract them from histories of climate activism and connection with other activists. They instead emphasize that it is social movement and political action, and not the postfeminist individual girl that can produce change. Their insistence on a different vector for change opens a crevice or crack in ongoing sensibilities.

Greta has often insisted that she (and other children) should *not* have to bear the burden of the climate disaster that is created by adults. In her 2019 speech at the UN's Climate Action Summit in New York, she expresses this reluctance and the resulting anger: "This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you?" (Thunberg, 2019). In particular, she refuses the burden that girls' empowerment discourse puts on girls: "You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words" (Thunberg, 2019). Greta reroutes hopeful affects away from her person and toward collectives recognizing the interconnected nature of both the problems and solutions of climate crisis. An interaction captured in a Netflix documentary on Greta's life is instructive in this regard: when she joins a march where hundreds of young people have gathered, a peer-colleague tells her that they have all gathered for her. Greta rejects her valorization and insists that they should do this political work for *themselves* and *their* future, not her.

Greta has also emphasized that climate change is neither a new issue nor an issue of the future that she is alerting people about for the first time (as prophets do). During a speech at Stockholm, she said: "I am not saying anything new, I am just saying what scientists have repeatedly said for decades" (Thunberg, 2019). Through social media and speeches, she recognizes the numerous activists (including those from the Global South such as Disha) who have engaged in this struggle as well as the much longer environmental activism and scientific research that inform this work. She has spoken about her work with activists from Fossil Free Dalsland before she started the strikes; about how she was inspired by students at Parkland who refused to go to school after the shooting at their high school; and about the scientists whom she frequently asks for help (Thunberg, 2019). In doing, Greta rejects the celebrity status accorded to her and gives her activism a genealogy, a history that is often erased. As Khoja-Moolji (2015b) shows abstracting girl activists (like Malala and now Greta) by erasing their histories and influences is a tactic of power because it makes their activism around key issues (from girls' education to climate) appear as a new phenomenon. But by reminding audiences of the long history of climate activism, Greta points to the long *inaction* of governments and corporate elites, and holds them accountable.

Similarly, Disha has expressed dissatisfaction with the forms of activism deemed permissible for children and youth. In India, where politics is primarily fought over caste and religious divides, environmental activism is considered harmless by the Indian middle-classes (Lutringer & Randeria, 2017). Indian parents, as Ranjan (2021) points out, deem it a zone of permissible civic action for their children:

> The Indian middle-class does not mind its children joining movements on such [environmental] issues. They believe that it just involves getting one photographed wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with slogans or holding placards. Since these movements do not harm anyone and talk about broad, often intangible issues, they are harmless. The middle class does not fear that participation in such movements can hurt the career of their children. (para 6)

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In fact, Disha admits that she too started off with such a "white-washed version of environmentalism" (Chan, 2022, para 7; Mundy, 2023) that focused on individuals adopting climate friendly practices like recycling and veganism. Her involvement with Fridays for Future, which made her a part of a global network of young climate activists, however, compelled her to embrace a stance that put her in conflict with statist elites. It entailed insisting on speaking up about the unilateral ways in which political institutions pushed through the development agenda in countries like India and its debilitating impact on communities (Chan, 2022; Ortiz, 2022). Like Greta, Disha too learned the importance of building movements: "We need to build movements that aren't dependent on one person – [firstly] because it puts too much pressure on that one single individual and also because it lets authorities attack one person, which can often be discouraging for the larger movement" (as cited in Chan, 2022, para 9).

While Disha's incarceration made her acutely aware of the dangers faced by young climate activists, she also used the public and media focus on her to draw attention to other young activists like Umar Khalid, a student activist who has been languishing in jail since September 2020 under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act for allegedly master-minding Hindu–Muslim riots in Delhi in February 2020. The UAPA is the same law that had been used to charge Disha for sedition and conspiracy. Her explicit support for other youth activists who have been declared "enemies of the state" thus ceases to make Disha's case exceptional and instead draws attention to a deepening political culture in her country that ruthlessly punishes young people who dare to dissent government policies. Wishing Umar on his birthday Disha tweeted, "As Umar Khalid spends another birthday in prison, we must keep him and others in our minds who are paying the price for exercising their constitutional rights" (Ravi & @disharavi, 2022a). Unsurprisingly Disha faced backlash for this tweet with one person referring to Disha and Umar as "a bunch of glorified Indian haters." Youth activists like Disha and Umar are often viewed as members of the "*tukde tukde* gang," a catch phrase coined by the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party to condemn its political opponents. *Tukde* means "piece" in Hindi and "*tukde tukde*" refers to the intentions of these young activists to break India into pieces; the slogan marks them as enemies of the state and accordingly incites violence.

Girl activists like Greta and Disha break the mold of the empowered girl, happily working to lead the world toward a prosperous future. Instead, these girls are the killjoys: they do not want to be pushed into this role. But when they are, they reject postfeminist valorization of the individual, insist on collective power-formation, and refuse apolitical practices of citizenship.

Refusing nationalistic and economic rationale

The gender mainstreaming discourse posits girls in the global South as useful only insofar as they are able to contribute to the national GDP. The World Bank calls for investing in girls' education because it is "smart economics." This logic has been variously described as "the girl effect" or "the girl dividend," and has been usefully interrogated by scholars such as Khoja-Moolji (2015b), Moeller (2018), and Murphy (2013). Girls' empowerment has also become a valuable marketing instrument for political leaders in the global South as they use it to enhance the reputation of their countries (Lesko et al., 2015). Girls are thus celebrated as nation builders only when can contribute to the economic and reputational status of their nations. The work of girl activists like Greta and Disha, however, does not align with these objectives. As noted earlier, Disha was arrested when the Indian state viewed her activism as threatening its international reputation; and Greta has consistently called out the exploitative practices of large for-profit corporations. Disha and Greta offer their audiences a rather different representation of girls' empowerment, and in doing so, become crevices in longstanding discourses about girls' contribution to nation-building. There is extensive work on Greta's interventions, including her identification of "corporate greed" and "short-term profits" as driving forces in fossil fuel industries (carbonbrief.org), therefore, in this section we focus on Disha's activism.

Disha's activism in and around the city of Bengaluru has comprised primarily of creating awareness about the *negative* environmental impact of the Indian state's development projects. Consider Disha's protests about the Bengaluru Metro project. Bengaluru Metro is christened as "Namma Metro" or "Our Metro." Here "Our" is an appendage that seeks to highlight people's consent and enthusiasm for a government initiative meant to manage the exploding traffic in this megacity. The project's website clearly spells out its policies aimed at environmental protection, renewable energy, efficient waste management, and sustainable water management. The project was widely hailed as a "greener alternative." However, in 2021, Disha and other climate activists drew attention to the lack of public consultation

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in decisions about the metro project as well as the destruction of natural resources to build the metro. The Metro project resulted in the felling of over nine thousand trees (Athavale, 2022). Disha shed light on these shortcomings as well as other ways in which indiscriminate infrastructural development in Bengaluru made possible by the state-corporate nexus has led to this landlocked city getting flooded annually during the monsoon season. As Disha tweeted, "This organized [land] grabbing & coverage [of storm water drains, lakes and wetlands] led to blocking off the flow of water & percolation of groundwater, causing the flooding. These flood-prone regions are now home to IT firms (who are not considered encroachers) & oppressed castes & Muslims (who are considered encroachers)" (Ravi & @disharavi, 2022b).

Pro-government supporters on Twitter and in the media decried protests by girl activists like Disha as stalling development, hindering the provision of public transport, spreading misinformation and stopping "the progress of Bengaluru" (see replies to Ravi & @disharavi, 2021b). It is therefore not surprising that one of the charges leveled against Disha was that her environmental activism compromised national "economic security." In 2012 the United Progressive Alliance, led by the Indian National Congress Party, which is now the main opposition party, amended Section 15 of the UAPA to expand "security" of the nation to include economic security, thereby bringing any activity that threatened the economic security of the country under "terrorist activity." As Mishra (2021) states, "climate activists who advocate for the reduction of carbon footsteps then become 'terrorists' for jeopardizing the economic security of India, while all that they are doing is opposing the policy of the government" (para 6). Young woman activists like Disha are therefore branded as "anti-national." Disha did not mince words when she stated this in a 2019 interview:

> In India, people continue to suffer because of laws that are anti-people. We live in a country where dissent is suppressed. We in Fridays for Future India were labelled as terrorists for objecting to the draft EIA [Environmental Impact Assessment] notification. Only a government that puts profit over people would consider asking for clean air, and a liveable planet an act of terrorism. (Anon, 2019)

In fact, Disha had already faced the government's ire during the protests against the draft of EIA. The EIA is a legislation that was introduced by numerous countries across the world to ensure that a thorough assessment of a development project's environmental impact is undertaken before its implementation. In 2020, the Indian government proposed a new draft of the EIA, which was condemned by various groups including environmental activists, student organizations, lawyers, and politicians for its attempts to dilute the environmental clearance requirements (Ranjan, 2021). Disha and the Indian Chapter for Fridays for Future (FFF) played a pivotal role in raising awareness about the government's actions by creating an EIA toolkit and undertaking an email campaign. The government responded by blocking FFF India's website, sending notices under the UAPA, which was later revised to an Information Technology Act 2020 case before it was finally withdrawn (Ranjan, 2021). Disha had again breached the norms of permissible youth citizenship and activism.

When activists like Disha dissent they also destabilize norms and imaginations of how girls and women from the global South are supposed to engage in the issue of climate change. As Khoja-Moolji (2018) and Desai (2020) have shown, within global development imaginaries girls from the global South are imagined as solutions and women as paradigmatic victims. The agency that rests with girls is often not extended to women, whose active sexuality, alignment with religious communities, and privileging of familial welfare over personal empowerment, place them at odds with postfeminist sensibilities. The inclusion of women from the global South in policymaking therefore is often based on their presumption of vulnerability and victimhood (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Bee & Park, 2022; Molyneux, 2006). While Disha, as noted earlier, began her activism as a girl, she has continued it into her adulthood. She thus models a movement from girlhood to womanhood that cannot be easily categorized from agency to victimhood. In a context where women are positioned as a "conduit of policy" (Molyneux, 2006, p. 439), and are meant to pave the way toward rather than get in the way of development, Disha stands out as an obstacle.

Crafting (digital) oppositional publics

Whereas postfeminist girl activism valorizes individual action, both Greta and Disha have focused on building movements locally as well as digitally. Their foray into digital spaces to forge a resistance is worthy of note. The publics that cohere around them are transnational and ephemeral, refusing capture

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while still leaving a trace. We would therefore be served well by viewing these digital publics as yet another crevice that forms across uneven terrains. In this section, we engage in a close reading of some activists who cohere around Greta to highlight the formation of this digital public and its impact.

Greta's personal impact on schoolchildren is palpably visible in the following tweet by a 13-year-old girl from Oxford, UK. In it, the young activist who calls herself Climate Worrier wishes Greta on her birthday and explains Greta's influence on her:

> Happy Birthday @GretaThunberg!
> I strike alone and can't get anyone to join. At school I'm laughed at and called climate girl. But you've shown me that quiet children can make a difference – because we aren't too small! Thank you so much. I'm not sure I'd do this without you. (Climate Worrier [@ClimateWorrier3], 2023)

Climate Worrier credits Greta with giving her the inspiration to continue to stand up for her beliefs. Greta acts as an absent–present figure for Climate Worrier who, in spite of living miles away from her, sees a companion in Greta. But beyond the personal impact, what we want to highlight is the formation of a digital intimate public in/through girl activists like Greta (and even her allies like, Climate Worrier). Within 12 hours of this tweet, it had received over 21 thousand likes and over 720 thousand views; it was retweeted over 2 thousand times, and received 500 responses. A cursory look at the responses shows the formation of what Lauren Berlant (2011) describes as "intimate publics"—when strangers form a community through affective ties. BBC journalist McCubbin @Megan McCubbin (2023) replied, "Where are you protesting? Let me know! I'd love to join"; others, such as Lillys Plastic Pick up (@lillyspickup, 2023) consoled Climate Worrier: "Always know that small steps lead to change. Mother Nature needs you. All small actions join to create something BIG. You have a friend in me"; and yet others, such as Christian Christensen (@ChrChristensen, 2023), a Professor of Journalism at Stockholm University, said, "You're a credit to your school and to humankind. Don't worry…history will prove you right and those who laugh wrong. Thanks for what you're doing." What we see in these comments is not just an expression of a shared worldview and orientation toward climate change but the building of a loose alliance, one tweet, one reply at a time.

The digital publics that cohere around Greta then are not simply consumers of her messages but co-producers. The conversational thread across Climate Worrier, Lillys Plastic Pick up, Megan McCubbin, and Christian Christensen is a case in point. Through each reply, each retweet, a collectivity is (re)made. The social media ecology within which Greta operates enables her to amplify her influence. As Thomas Olesen (2022) has observed, the social media ecology has provided Greta—who began her school strikes with limited economic and organizational resources—with a decentered communication platform, and an audience that is not only a receptor public but also a co-performer. Like Greta, Disha too has energized digital publics who have come out in support of her. Numerous activists formed an intimate digital public using the hashtag #StandwithDishaRavi when she was arrested. Consider this tweet shared by Ugandan climate justice activist Vanessa Nakate and numerous others (as part of a Twitter campaign): "Freedom of speech and the right to peaceful protest and assembly are non-negotiable human rights. We won't be silenced. We #StandwithDishaRavi" (Nakate & vanessa_vash, 2021).

A distinct combination of digital publics and focus on collectives (as opposed to individuals) marks Greta and Disha's activism but what kind of resistance do such digital publics undertake? Writing about social media activism, Shruti Devgan (2023) argues that it is the aliveness of social media, its daily work that enables activists to register their resistance to powerful institutions. Analyzing the Twitter and Facebook feeds of Ensaaf, a non-profit organization that posts photographs daily about those Sikhs who have been disappeared (abducted or killed) by the Indian state, Devgan notes that what social media does in these cases is leave *digital traces* of their presence. Such traces cast doubt around their death, and keep these men and women alive in collective memory. In Devgan's formulation, social media appears to be a tool of the marginalized; the tool of those who often do not have enough resources to resist the Indian state directly and hence do so in muted yet powerful forms of memory work. Thinking with Devgan, we can understand the digital publics that cohere around Greta and include activists from the global South—such as Disha—as giving us a peek into the making of a digital collectivity that resists suppression. Climate Worrier is a case in point. Strangers came together to resist Climate Worrier's daily mocking at school by bolstering her in a different location: cyberspace. Separated by thousands of miles, individuals with unequal access to resources came together in a single twitter-feed exchange to

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articulate their support for this young activist and their collective cause. This digital public alleviates Climate Worrier's anxieties and gives her a sense of affinity. In fact, a study by Haugseth and Smeplass (2022) shows that Greta has become a unifying inspiration for young people who were already concerned about the climate crisis in Norway.

Such digital affinities may be ephemeral but they are nonetheless powerful as their repetition continues to shape the political and social actions of the individuals concerned. The ephemeral quality of social media affords girl activists the necessary conditions for autonomy. The digital ecosystem allows people separated by miles to create networks of support and shared felt communities (Khoja-Moolji, 2021). The interactivity of social media enables a sense of belonging, in a disembodied form.

Discussion: Slow, cumulative impact

Greta and Disha's activism is fragmented and lacks institutional backing. These girl activists have limited access to capital: whereas Greta (and others like Climate Worrier) use discarded cardboards for placards and stand outside their schools or the parliament to strike; Disha creates do-it-yourself toolkits to enhance public awareness about environmental impact of state and corporate policies and programmes. At the same time, as the previous section shows, these girl activists benefit from the recent inroads that internet connectivity has made. Digital publics are not only able to transcend the usual barriers of borders and capital but they are also tentative and ephemeral, which gives these girl activists a certain measure of protection. Even so, the protection is not guaranteed as Disha's arrest shows.

To understand the impact of girl activists like Greta and Disha on global policy processes, against this complex context of promises and perils of girl activism, we have to move away from thinking about policy impact through the usual metrics of gender mainstreaming. We have to develop different analytics. Our naming of dissenting activists like Greta and Disha's impact as creating "tactical crevices" seeks to do just that. Through the investigation of these crevices, we have highlighted how girls consume postfeminist valorization of girl activism and social media *differently*.

Writing about indigenous people colonized by the Spanish, Michel De Certeau (1984) argues that while they lacked the means to challenge the dominant order, they "escaped it without leaving it" (De Certeau, 1984, p. xiii). De Certeau (1984) therefore argues that to uncover the resistance of indigenous people we have to investigate their ways of using the products, rituals, ideas, laws, and representations imposed on them; indigenous people often subverted the dominant colonial order by making it "function in another register" (p. 32). They remained within the system but instead of rejecting and altering it, used it with "respect to ends and references foreign to the system" (De Certeau, 1984, p. xiii). Accordingly, to identify how dominated populations resist, we have to investigate how they operate, use, or make-do with that which the powerful make available to them. It is such modes of operation that might highlight for us how the powerless exercise power in ways where their impact may not be immediately recognizable and may even not be legible by the usual metrics of resistance. It is by investigating such "procedures of consumption" (De Certeau, 1984, xiii) of the dominated that we can uncover their impact.

De Certeau's findings are instructive for us as we have tried to illuminate how Greta and Disha consume the opportunities made available to them—accolades, visibility, and social media—to "make-do" and register resistance in another tenor. Recollecting Fridays for Future's involvement in the email campaign about environmental impact assessments, Disha shared,

> But, at this time, they [the Ministry] were very sneaky about it: they put it up online and didn't have the public consultation. They said 'Email us your suggestion'—instead of having it in person…—so we did. We set up an email template so that people could come on our website to read it and then choose to hit send. It started taking off and influencers started posting and—one night before the deadline—there were 100,000 emails. (Mundy, 2023, paras 25–26)

By making tactical use of emails put in place by institutions in power Disha interrupted statist processes of domination, even if in a soft manner, akin to a fissure or crevice. We see other similar modes of consumption in the examples cited throughout this paper—when Climate Warrior pivots to social media to seek solace and forge a community; when Greta refuses the accolades and insists on collective action; and when Disha uses social media to secure greater circulation for her toolkit. These procedures of consumption interrupt ongoing patterns of thought and action.

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In naming Greta and Disha's activism as "tactics" creating crevices, we also seek to draw attention to how their utilization of social media gives them a certain autonomy. De Certeau (1984) notes that "a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy" (emphasis in original, p. 37). Social media and digital space confer this necessary autonomy but its impact is also ephemeral. Ephemerality, however, does not mean an absence of impact, it means that the impact is cumulative and unfolds over time, just like a crevice produces deeper cracks over time. Indeed, Rilling and Tosun (2021) note that through the work of groups such as Fridays for Future, climate change has slowly "regained public and political attention" (p. 99). The galvanized public demand has also created concrete results whereby several cities and municipalities in Germany have declared a "climate emergency." In thinking about the impact of girl activists as creating tactical crevices then we want to draw attention to the impact of their practices as a conglomeration of small cuts, made by a wide cross-section of society, in more-or-less discrete manner yet united tentatively and ephemerally.

Even as we have strived to outline how digital media affords girl activists some pathways to move beyond narrow conceptions of citizenship and postfeminist individualism, we remain attentive to the fact that Greta and Disha are differently-positioned. This not only opens up and constrains their capacity for action differently, it also exposes them to violence differently. As explained earlier in the chapter, Disha has not only been arrested, she has also been marked as an enemy of the state. Violence against Disha was also perpetuated symbolically through calumny. Hindu nationalists spread misinformation about her claiming that she is a "Christian," "pregnant," and "single mother." In a country in the grip of religious nationalism and polarization, branding Disha as Christian, establishes her as the Other; the traitor who has betrayed the nation by conspiring with secessionists and foreigners, hinting at her collaboration with Greta. And, in a society where premarital sex continues to be taboo, Disha's depiction as pregnant or a single mother conjures images of her uncontrolled sexuality. Recalling the treatment she received upon being arrested, Disha says: "Standing in the police station in Bengaluru, I listened to the senior police officer berating my mother for raising a rebel who refuses to stay silent. He had plenty of advice on how mothers should raise daughters to follow the system" (Ravi, 2021a, para 1). Articulating Disha outside the pale of ideal Hindu femininity transforms her into a legitimate target of statist masculinist violence. Cyber bullying and incarceration at the hands of state machinery and right-wing netizens thus follows, and is meant as a warning not only to Disha but also to other young people and activists. At the same time, Disha also points out how her association with Greta (and her whiteness) as well as the public attention that she received as a result may have softened the state violence aimed at her: "At least I couldn't be beaten on worse in prison because I was in the news. They couldn't hurt me physically so they hurt me mentally" (as cited in Sacks, 2022). Disha's experience calls on us to account for the different burdens that individual activists carry; some burdens are heavier than others.

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Conflict of interest

None declared.

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