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MSc Thesis Chair Group Sociology of Development and Change

‘Good kiss’ versus ‘bad kiss’;
an ethnographic study on the meanings and
practices of security for women in Varkala, South
India



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“Can I tell the story?”, she asks Prashand. Without waiting for a response, she turns to me and says she had come to the café on a very hot day and had found Prashand his wife complaining about the heat. Sarah went up to her and was about to pin the hair up to reduce the heat for her. The wife refused, and Sarah asked why she wouldn’t put her hair up. The wife answered by saying that it would uncover the back of her bare neck, which she was not allowed to do.”

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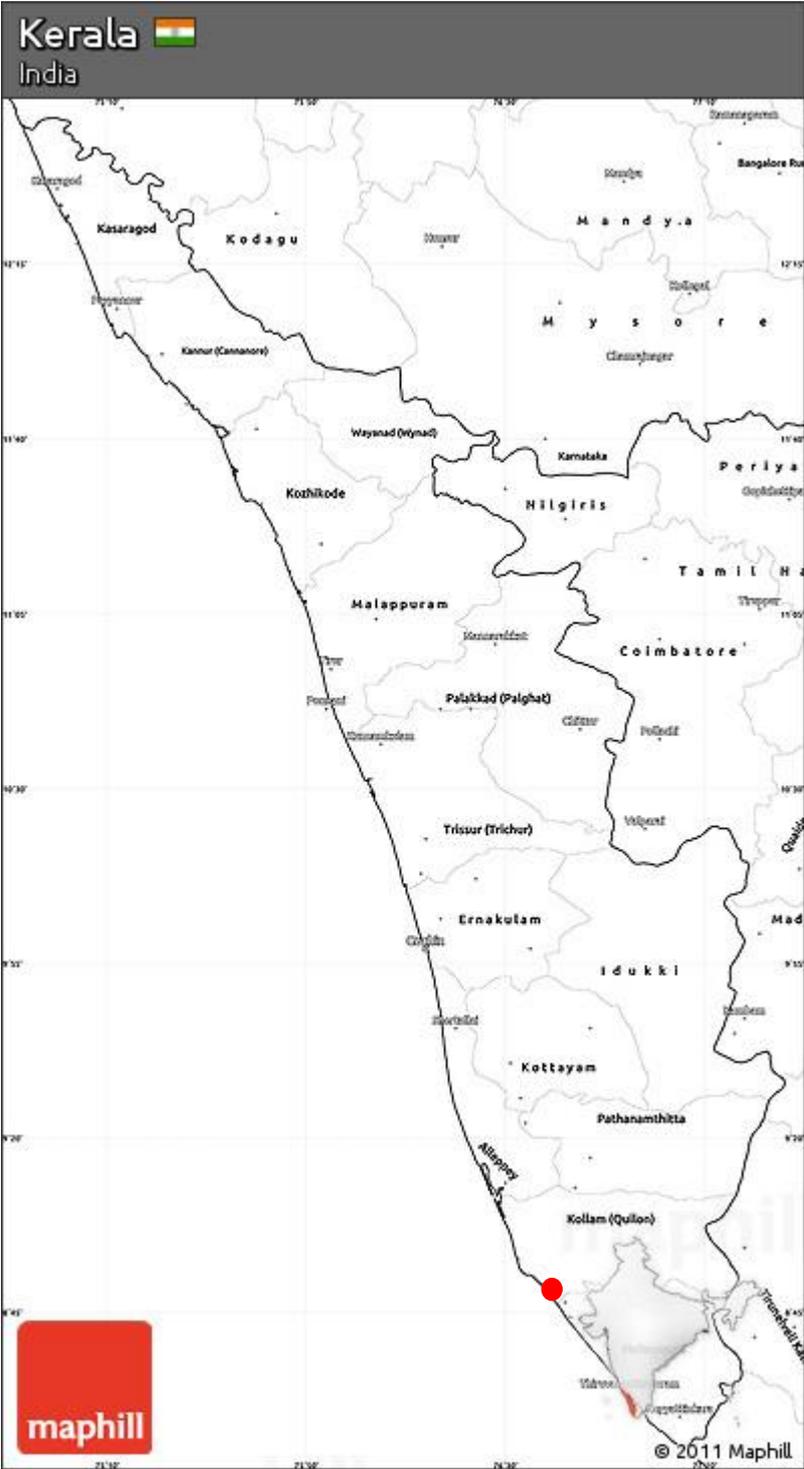
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Abstract

Kerala has been an example in India of development on various levels in the society and the state has shown an improvement on gender issues when it comes to births, literacy, employment and on other gender indexes. However, there have been some discussions and concerns on the issue of gender equality. This research brings forward the importance of security for women and how its meanings and practices have become a framework – a discourse of security – in the everyday lives of women in Varkala. The restrictions on clothing, mobility, marriage and relations as a source of protection, have had consequences for women that have created a gap between men and women. Young girls are taught the difference between a “good kiss” and a “bad kiss” at a very early age. In this research, it is argued that there is a masculinist protection that reinforces *inequality* between men and women because women are *othered* and *boundaries* are set between men and women. This results in fear and distrust in society and between men and women, that strengthens the discourse of security that is so important in Kerala. The narrative of protection, has created a narrative of fear that ensures the boundaries set up for women. Many women feel they are limited in their freedom because of the restrictions, yet they have adjusted to this lifestyle because of the importance of loyalties to the family and the fear to ‘lose face’ in society.

Map of Kerala, Varkala



Map retrieved from www.maphill.com; free blank location map of Kerala, accessed: 21 June 2017. Varkala is indicated with the red dot.

1 | Introduction and research

This is an introduction to a qualitative ethnographic research about women in a small village in Kerala, a Southern state in India. It first describes the issue of security in the lives of women, where security and gender equality are linked together. Then it discusses the situation of women in India and the concerns for gender equality and women empowerment there. Following the problem statement, the research approach explains the various aspects of gender and security that this research will try to elaborate on to provide a theoretical basis for this research. Then, the research question is explained with complementary sub-questions. In the methodology, the context of this research is explained together with the way data was collected and analysed. Finally, this chapter lays out the different personal reflections that came out of this research and the limitations to this ethnography.

The argument in this research is that the meanings and practices of security for women in Varkala and Kerala reproduce inequality for women because of the restrictions that come with it. Moreover, the need to protect women from danger, has become a reinforcer of fear and distrust. I argue that the meanings and practices of security have created a discourse that is reproduced through interactions in the everyday life of women and men in Varkala and Kerala.

1.1 | Women and security

Worldwide, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime (WHO, 2016). Women and security are a dangerous match in a world where, according to Hollander (2001), vulnerability to violence is a core component of femininity. In his study, he shows that the female body is believed to be inherently vulnerable and male bodies as potentially dangerous. He argues that these ideas about gender have become so integral that they are “natural”. Thus, the vulnerability of women is reaffirmed through “everyday talk” about feminine vulnerability and masculine danger. Women still face many security challenges because of their sex. Security and safety – both often interchangeably used – have been central to both human rights and gender equality, yet the problems regarding women persist (UNSD, 2015).

Both gender and security are social dimensions of a culture. “Gender”, as Moussa (2008) puts it, is about the rules, norms, customs and practices that translate biological differences between men and women into socially constructed differences. Gender is also relational and discursive, with the possibility of analysing power relations between men and women. Gender is about the meaning of being a man or a woman, which is often translated through meaning-making systems, like language (Henry, 2007). It is thus a part of culture where these rules, norms, customs and practices are constructed and reconstructed. In the same way, security has many different dimensions, like; social

security, food security, economic security, etc. It is understood as the notion of being “safe and free from harm”, as Henry (2007) argues. Both notions of gender and security constitute the way people give meaning to certain aspects of their lives. Moussa (2008) argues that by linking gender and human security, one can explore the socio-cultural aspects of human security. Gender equality is closely linked to human security because both revolve around notions of power. It is about the elimination of “domination and subordination”, as Henry (2007) puts it, that results in security. The same thing applies to gender equality, where power is one of the things that men often have more access to than women (Ridgeway, 1997). This makes one group more powerful and dominant over the other group, creating insecurity for the other group; women. The rules about this division between what is a ‘man’ and a ‘woman’ and what they can or cannot do, are part of the culture in which these rules are created.

The main aim of this ethnography is to help understand the implications of security in a culture where ‘women empowerment’ is promoted and - at the same time - the fear of sexual harassment keeps women from simply going to the nearest shop alone. It is the experiencing of this same fear that leads to questions of where this fear comes from and how it affects the lives of women in Varkala. Thus, it does not aim to focus on the prevalence of violence in the lives of these women, yet it aims to focus on the social construction that underlies the fear of violence. Why are it particularly the women that must fear violence and thus adapt their behaviour in their everyday lives?

1.2 | Problem statement

In India, gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution and women’s empowerment has been recognized as a goal for development (Shamshad, 2007). It is recognized that gender equality and women’s empowerment are key to the health of the nation, as the National Family Health Survey in India suggests (2005). Different indicators are given as a prerequisite for gender equality, such as; sex ratios, infant and child mortality by sex, ages of marriage by sex, access to education, employment and other aspects of men and women’s lives. In Kerala, much progress has been made when it comes to these indicators of gender equality. However, rising levels of violence against women and increasing rates of depression, has created new discussions on the notion of equality in Kerala. This will be explained in more depth in the second chapter (see Chapter 2, p.21).

Traditionally, much of the Indian culture is male dominated and patriarchal. This has meant that many socially constructed norms and rules were not always in line with the rights granted to women through the Constitution. Mohapatra (2015) argues that “what is practicable and possible by women and useful for them, in fact, is not within their reach”, meaning that the cultural values were different than those used in the Constitution regarding women in India. The traditions of *purdah* (“curtain”) have had strong legitimation in the Hindu and Muslim cultures as the principle that segregates women and men through a hierarchical division. Also the tradition of *castes* in the Hindu religion has had strong implications for the position of women against that of men (Hale et al., 1989).

Women have been excluded from education, employment, politics and religious ceremonies. Issues of dowry, arranged marriages and widow sacrifices have been named as the things that Indian women have gone through by means of societal obligations or pressure. “Woman is viewed solely as the mother and the wife and those roles are idealised”, according to Manu in Mohapatra (2015). As Shah (2004) argues; culture and tradition were conceptualized in a way that reinforced “the women’s position subservient to the male”. These things will be explained in more depth in the next chapter regarding the women in Kerala specifically (see Chapter 2, p.21).

The resistance against these various forms of oppression by the Indian women has also had a long history and women’s movements are not uncommon in India. Different authors discuss the ‘waves’ of feminism in India dating back to 1850-1880 (Anagol, 2005; Desouza, 2011; Shah, 2004). Many women’s groups have sought for resistance and empowerment within their societies and a broad framework of policies for the promotion of women empowerment are set in place (Shamshad, 2007). However, there is still a gap between policies and practices that involve women. Inequality is still prevalent in different levels of society, ranging from education, economic opportunities, political representation and other parts where women have lesser access than their male counterpart (Upadhyay, 2010). One of the most striking things, is the fact that the inequality between men and women in India goes along with very high rates of violence. An article by the Huffington Post in 2014 reads: “848 Indian women are harassed, raped, killed every day” (Basu, 2014). The notions of violence and security still play a significant role in the gender discussions worldwide, especially in India.

This notion of security among the aspects of gender inequality is what substantiated this research. This research aims to understand the magnitude of the role of security in the lives of women in India and how this affects gender equality for these women. The research question is; “*How do the meanings and practices of security influence inequality for women in Varkala, South India?*” The meanings and practices of security and the issues of gender equality in Kerala will be explained in more depth in the research approach and the theoretical framework, in the following paragraphs.

1.3 | Research approach

The following section briefly describes the theoretical basis for the analysis in this research. It describes the notions of the discourse of security, the capabilities approach and inequality reproduction that serve as the basis for the analysis of the research data that was collected in Varkala, Kerala. These notions will help build the sub-questions that serve to answer the main question. These notions are explained in detail in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 3, p.27). To understand the implication of security in the lives of the men and women in Varkala, it is important to argue that there is a framework in which the meaning of security is produces and practices of security are carried out. That is why the following paragraph introduces the notion of *discourse* as an important concept in this research.

The notion of *discourse* is an important part of this research because it tries to encapsulate the way security is more than meanings and practices, it is about a framework. I use this notion to emphasize the way security is part of the culture and part of the everyday lives of the people in Kerala. The notion of discourse stresses the prevalence of a framework that is produced and reproduced through interactions and relations where the meanings and practices of security come about. What are the meaning and practices of security for women in Varkala? How is the notion of security visible in interactions and relations and how does this contribute to the discourse of security? These questions will guide the analysis of the qualitative data from the fieldwork. This *discourse of security* will then be used to explain how it affects the capabilities of women and reproduces inequality.

Firstly, the capabilities approach is explained. This approach serves as an indicator and a justifier to the extent in which one can argue that a certain situation can be labelled as *unequal*. Sen (1995) wrote about the *capabilities approach* to understand gender inequality by using the concept of 'justice'. In this research, this approach helps to legitimize the notion of gender *inequality* as women themselves are the ones arguing the unjustness of their situation and their lack of capabilities. To understand the influence of the discourse of security on gender inequality, it is important to use ethnography to understand how women view their position and what they think about their capabilities in relation to that of men. Adding to this, the following paragraph explains how inequality can be *reproduced* in society and this again adds to the notion of *discourse* as discussed first.

The works of Schwalbe et al. (2000) discusses a few notions that can be used to understand and substantiate the process of the *reproduction of inequality*. They explain notions of *othering*, *subordinate adaptation*, *boundary maintenance*, and *emotion management* to describe how one group can be more dominant than the other group and how these processes are a way to maintain positions of inequality or to reproduce these. These notions help to explain the reproduction of inequality in this research. This adds to the notion that there is a discourse of security that is a reproduction because of these processes of the reproduction of inequality. This framework of security, is the same framework that reproduces the gender relations that are unequal. These things will be explained in more depth in the rest of this research.

As Moussa (2008) puts it: "Much human behaviour is not the result of individual preferences but is governed by institutional rules [...]". 'Institutional rules' means the social order in which men and women exist. Many studies have shown that culture shapes the content of what is gender; e.g. Cuddy, Crotty, Chong, and Norton (2010), Henry (2007), and Moussa (2008). To be a woman in India is determined by birth, yet the meaning of that 'label' in society is relational, discursive and socially constructed in the Indian society. This research aims to use parts of the past and current context of the women in Kerala to understand their position as a female. Religion, traditions, caste-systems and other cultural aspects; all play a role in the hidden 'rules' that guide the behaviour of women and men.

1.4 | Research question and sub-questions

Following from the problem statement and the research approach, the following question is the main research question:

“How do the meanings and practices of security influence inequality for women in Varkala, South India?”

The following questions will help to guide the analysis of the data and answer the main research question;

- 1 What are the practices of security that are visible in the lives of women in Varkala?**
The first question will look at the practices of security in the lives of these women that revolve around the safety and security of these women. What limitations are there for women in Varkala when it comes to their accessibility to resources? This question is about the things that differentiate women from men. What symbols, rules and actions of security are common to women, but not to men? This question is about the capabilities that women do or do not have.
- 2 What meanings does security have for the women in Varkala?**
From the narratives of the women; it is important to understand how women feel about their position as a female. What is important for them? How do they see their position within their family, their community and society? What does ‘security’ mean for these women and how does it affect their lives? From this perspective, the capabilities are assessed by the women and analysed accordingly.
- 3 What processes of inequality reproduction can be distinguished in this context?**
Using the processes as described by Schwalbe et al. (2000), the data will be further analysed; how is inequality reproduced in the culture of Varkala? What processes can describe the reproduction of inequality and thus add to the discourse of security. The notions described by Schwalbe et al. (2000) will help conceptualize the different aspects that form the framework of everyday interactions between men and women in Varkala.

1.5 | Methodology

This section explains where the fieldwork took place and introduces the context of this research. Following, it discusses the research population and how the recruitment was done. It describes how data was collected and which methods were used, how data analysis was done and what structure this research will be. Lastly, and complementary to this research, a detailed explanation will be given of the experiences as a female researcher and reflections on the process of this research.

1.5.1 | Research context

This research was done in the Southern state of India, in Kerala. Kerala has been an example to sustainable development over the last few decades, with green and gold as their regional representations of the fertility and prosperity of the state (Parayil, 1996). People speak of ‘a Kerala model of development’ when it comes to the major changes the state has seen in child mortality rates, literacy, high standards of public health, life expectancy, and more since the 1970’s. Especially when it comes to sex ratio, Kerala has the highest number of females in comparison to men with 1084 females to a 1000 males (national average: 943 females to a 1000 males), according to the Census in 2011. Also, women have been able to study and pursue careers as part of the development objective in Kerala. This puts Kerala in a comparatively advantaged position to other states in India as Kerala ranks one of the best states in India, according to the Human Development Index (HDI) in 2011. However, Jeffrey (1992) in his portrayal of this development of men and women in Kerala wonders whether the role of women has really improved. He argues that “women’s roles have changed”, but at the same time argues that the roles might not have necessarily changed for the better. These things will be explained in more detail in the third chapter (see Chapter 3, p.27). The dichotomies of the female position, as explained there, are the reason for this research into the lives of the Keralite women. Once a proud possessor of the title “matrilineal society”, Kerala is still rigged with notions of dowry, sexual abuse and “rising levels of misogyny” (Arun, 2017).

The research was conducted in a small village in the southern part of Kerala, in Varkala. Kerala is an interesting case study for this research because of its wealth and development with a very conservative ideology, as explained later. This village was chosen because of the accessibility through the gatekeeper and the initial contacts that were made at the start of the fieldwork. The importance of trust in the relationships is a very important factor in the Indian culture and more so among the Malayalee people in Kerala. As Nanda explained when I asked her why nobody spoke out any greetings or wishes in public spaces, she said: “People don’t trust each other. We keep to ourselves and what we know. If someone lay on the middle of the road, we would think twice before helping them because we might risk ourselves”. This was true since random connections were more difficult and the initial connections very valuable and resourceful to this research. Through a mutual Indian friend in the Netherlands, I met Savio, who lives in Kochi, in Kerala. He was my initial gatekeeper and taught me many things about the state and about women there. He introduced me to some of his friends who helped me find my contacts outside of Kochi, in Varkala. There I met Abi, whom I see as my second gatekeeper because he said he would be my *anna* “elder brother” and help me with anything I needed. He spared nothing to help me and introduced me to his network of friends and relatives.

1.5.2 | Research population

Coming to Varkala, the plan was to find initial informants and see if they would offer me a place to stay in return for some money. I intended to live in an Indian household

to observe and participate in their daily lives. What I soon noticed, was that within the families, trust is very high, where once you are welcomed in, they are very hospitable and open. Yet, outside my initial contacts I felt that people were reserved. As Sarah – also a foreigner – said; “They really don’t like us”. She has been living in Varkala for 22 years and she meant that the Malayalees don’t like foreigners. Moreover, Malayalees don’t trust each other as I noticed in many conversations. “We can’t trust anybody”, was a phrase I heard very often. It was important to approach with caution and build trust before engaging in deep conversations with other people. Thus, I felt that it was going to be very hard to be invited to stay in an Indian household for a while. However, after having been in a few different hostels, I stumbled upon Abi his hostel in the second week of my stay in India. Since the high season was over, I was usually the only one in the hostel and joined Abi and his employees in their daily business. Abi runs the hostel with his brother-in-law and nephew and has two employees; a female cook and a male cleaner. He also owned a small café next to the hostel with a close friend, Prashand, where we would sit in the afternoons with Sarah and talk to people who came into the café. This small group of people became my gateway into the Varkala culture and they gave me many opportunities to meet local Malayalees.

Different methods were undertaken to connect with my research population in Varkala. Initially I intended to speak to a group of elderly and a group of younger women, to compare analysis of both groups of informants. I did notice that many women were reserved on the streets and some did not know English well enough, so they would not speak to me. That is why it was difficult to find a lot of female informants on the street to talk to. Moreover, it was difficult to find elderly women who spoke English well. Even with a translator, the analysis would have been compromised since one group was translated and the other was not. To find local women in Varkala I joined yoga practices, visited local colleges, and often had random conversations in the shops and on the streets if women were willing to speak to me. Though, especially through the gatekeeper, Abi, *network sampling* was used to find many informants. These informants were usually close relatives or friends of the initial contacts I made. Since families were so large, it was easier to gain new contacts through *respondent-driven sampling* (Bernard, 2011). It meant that I would ask my informants if they knew any woman who could speak English and would be willing to speak to me. Also, the initial informants would suggest their friends or family members to me to talk to. Thus, I did not manage to make a comparative analysis of elderly women versus younger women. However, I did speak to male informants, which resulted in an insight into the male perspective that turned out to be very useful in this research.

1.5.3 | Data collecting methods

Among the informants were many younger girls, aged 18 to 28, simply because many adult women had trouble speaking English. One day was spent in the village with a young English teacher, who translated interviews with elderly women – age 30 to 65- in the village for me. However, the co-dependency and double-subjectivity of this method, as explained by Temple and Young (2004), were a reason not to do this in the future

conversations. A total of 38 interviews were held; ranging from informal interviews to semi-structured interviews. Men were also interviewed because of the difficulty finding female informants and because of the prevalence of male persons to speak to. It was very insightful to listen to both male and female perspectives because the rhetoric of security and protecting women was prevalent in both conversations since one group was on the protecting end and the other on the receiving end of protection. Each informant was introduced to this research and ensured of their anonymity. Due to some of the topics discussed, like the limited freedom that women felt, the names of the informants have been changed so that nothing can be traced back to them. I chose not to record the interviews because of the loss of flexibility since I had a lot of informal interviews and ones that lasted a whole afternoon or a day. It would have been difficult to transcribe all that recording time. Instead, I tried to jot down most conversations and add to them from memory as I wrote them down properly in the evenings or mornings after the conversations. Following, the diverse types of interviews are described with an explanation of their use with different informants:

- *Informal interviews* – total lack of structure (Bernard, 2011). These types of conversations were usually held in the café next to the hostel, on the streets with vendors or on the beach with people whom I met randomly. Also, with the people I spent most time with, in the daily conversations I would pick up things that seemed interesting and jot them down.
- *Unstructured interviews* – letting people express themselves in their own terms during a sit-down with them. These types of interviews were mainly held at the beginning of my research when I did not have as much knowledge about Kerala or Varkala. I would ask someone if they would answer some questions and I would continue asking them questions based on what they were telling me.
- *Semi-structured interviews* – having a list of questions and topics to discuss during a sit-down with an informant. As my research progressed, I had certain topics I wanted to discuss with the informants whom I interviewed. Examples of topics that I usually discussed, were; their position in their community, their ideas about marriage, the challenges and opportunities they face, the importance of family, the importance of freedom and security, etc.

With five women, I had the opportunity to spend an entire day or multiple days with. I got closer to these young women and got invited to their house to talk to them and join them in their daily practices. Often, neighbours and family members would come to observe the ‘foreigner’ and greet me. It was very insightful to spend more time with these women because of the valuable conversations that we could have. They would tell me about their situation with their husbands, their in-laws or other topics that could be very personal, e.g. menstrual periods. This was relevant because it complemented the interviews that I held with them to see what is important in the lives of these women and how they deal with certain issues in society.

1.5.4 | Data collection

Ortner (1995) argues that ethnography is the attempt to understand another life using 'the self'. The researcher attempts to be part of the 'field' and attempts to understand the lifeworld of the population by using all his senses. To do this, it was very important to build trust with the people I met through experiences and communication. Very important in my interviews, was the way I dressed. I had anticipated on a stricter way of dressing and had mostly brought loose-fitting and covering clothes. Still I was surprised at the extent of this dress-code and what implications it had. I was reminded time and again by Abi to dress well and I noticed that people were surprised seeing me so 'covered' because foreigners are usually judged for wearing too little. I remember sitting in the café with Abi and a foreigner walked by in shorts and a bikini-top. We were watching as Abi said that it was not good that girls dressed that way because it drew too much attention of the men. He said; "You dress nicely, you are a good girl". Adapting myself to some of the customs of the locals was one way to gain their trust.

Most interviews were held at the homes of women, which was most pleasant for both interviewee and interviewer. It was both easier for the informant and more valuable for me to see them in spaces where they feel comfortable and observe their daily practices. It also reduced *reactivity* of the informants, which increased the validity of the observations when people feel comfortable and they trust the interviewee (Bernard, 2011). Most interviews were informal for a few reasons. If I joined women in their daily practices, the conversation would sometimes be halted because of the children or because of other things that were part of the lives of these women. Also, after coming to the same house a few times, it meant that other topics would come up too. The level of English for some of the informants could also make it hard to follow one line of questioning because they would not understand some things I said. It is common to bring gifts when you visit Indian houses in Kerala, so often I would bring some fruit or snacks for the people I talked to multiple times. Some interviews only lasted 15 minutes, yet others were divided over 2 or 3 days with only separated parts in the conversation applicable to this research.

In addition to the interviews, I tried to find ways to participate in the daily practices of women. This turned out to be very difficult, since many women work at home and will not let guests clean or cook. This made me more of an observer than a participant. Instead, I would walk around a lot and observe people on the streets and in the shops. I went to an Indian wedding and joined the local temple festival in the village. The period of my visit in Kerala was at the height of summer. This meant that a lot of people do very little during the hottest period of the day, between 12 am and 4 pm. A very interesting scene was the beach, where people would come after 4 pm to see the sunset and play in the water. It was an appropriate time to observe people and join in small talk with the families there. People felt more at ease on the beach and would come up to me more easily.

1.5.5 | Data analysis

Throughout the fieldwork, I kept a log and jotted down all the interviews and observations in my fieldwork diary. This data has been structured and digitalized. As Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013) explain; analysis is something that is an “inherent and ongoing part of qualitative research”. This means that throughout the research and data collection, certain themes came up that became a *discourse analysis* of the situation of women in Varkala. As Ritchie et al. (2013) argue, discourse is about the adoption of implicit theories that help make sense of a social action. The discourse of security was initially extracted from the data and is now part of the question why inequality still exists in the lives of these women. The data is categorised and labelled according to the *non-cross-sectional* method as described by Ritchie et al. (2013). This means that various parts of the raw data have been looked at separately, instead of having a set of common categories to apply to the data. The data is then summarized and structured into the distinct parts of this research accordingly. Each analytical chapter uses the theoretical base as described in the Theoretical framework (see p.27) to help analyse and answer the research questions.

1.6 | Reflections and limitations

“Like trees, they are a couple; one cannot be taller than the other”

An informant said this to me as I sat down with him and talked about the importance of women. He argued that men and women should be the same, though both unique in their capabilities. Being a Christian myself, I find myself wondering if men and women should be equal. Through my religion I believe what the Bible says; “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:25). Though, at the same time, I am arguing for a feminist reflexion on the problem of ‘masculinist protection’ as discussed later. Still, I believe hierarchy is not necessarily unequal but often becomes unequal when the subordinate is aware of the limitations that it experiences without the consent to such. As an ‘intruder’ to a culture where things are ‘normal’ that seem not normal to me, I find myself wondering if I should be the one pointing out things that might not have been a problem before. I wonder whether I am not enhancing the problem by being the ‘free, solo, female, traveller’ and giving women reason to doubt their own position. Savio told me the second day of my visit in Kerala; “We were so surprised, we have never thought about some of things that we talked about last night.”. I was happy to hear this but realised that I was stirring things up that were previously hidden and thus not a problem. However, I noticed a discontent of people by speaking to them; they were the ones pointing out that there are many problems in Kerala. In some conversations, I would notice how people would start off quite pleased with their situation yet realize the issues as I asked some of the deeper questions. This is when they would talk more passionately about the problems they found in their culture.

“It is just the way they are, they can’t help themselves”

Sarah said this to me as she was warning me for the way men look at women in Varkala. I had never experienced danger in the way that I felt here for the men. It was in

the air. So many people warned me about going out onto the streets after 6 pm, my friends dropped me off at the place I stayed and would call to see if I was in my room safely, and every door had at least three locks. At the first place I stayed, the owner came up to me late in the evening and tried to offer me whiskey and invite me to come drink it with him and his 'friend' in his room. I could not sleep that night. Everywhere they told me to take precautions; do not get into a random taxi, do not trust the rickshaw-drivers, find foreigners in the trains to sit with, cover yourself in public, close your door, do not look men in the eye. Most of the time, the explanation would be; "...because you are a blonde, solo, female, traveller in India". These 'labels' are part of what made me vulnerable there. Even fully dressed, I felt underdressed and undressed in public. These feelings of danger made me cautious in my mobility and my interactions with people, which limited me in my research. Still, nothing bad happened, which begs the question of whether this fear was necessary. I spoke to other female and male travellers and usually the females would feel the same way as I did, and the males were completely baffled by it; they did not feel any of those things.

"Female researchers must work especially hard to achieve an impression combining the attribute of being nonthreatening with that of being a credible, competent professional." Gurney in (Pante, n.d.). Beforehand, I thought it would be easier to talk to women in Kerala because it would make them feel more comfortable. However, I noticed that it was easier to talk to men; probably for different reasons. I did not feel that people did not take me serious for my age or my gender, which I was content with. Being 'white', of course, had an influence on the way people treated me. People are more interested or less interested because of this; treating me like a queen in their house or calling names as I walked down the street. Since Varkala is common to tourists, many people were also used to 'white' people and would be willing to have interviews with me. The fact that some people had seen a lot of tourists, might have also influenced their judgement on their own position. This, however, turned out to be very limited because I had the same type of answers in the village where there are no tourists.

Some limitations were anticipated on in this research, namely; the language barrier, getting used to the culture, traveling time and adaptation to context and climate. However, others were less anticipated on, like; the difficulty finding a place to stay with an Indian family, the difficulty participating in the daily practices of women, the difficulty of holding long conversations with certain women and especially the feelings of fear letting me down and making me distrustful of people around me.

The timespan of the fieldwork was not enough to differentiate between diverse types of women or men, e.g. to do regulated interviews with women from different castes or different age-categories. To generalize the conclusions of this research is difficult because of the limitations and the limited number of interviews. It is even more difficult because of the severity of the issue. I do not wish to reproduce any of the issues regarding the women in Kerala through this research, yet mainly wish to lay out a theory to explain how security can have different consequences for people, mainly women.

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“As I am walking through Varkala the first week, I have been trying to connect with people: greet them and have small chats. However, I am noticing that some men – since most of the people on the streets are men – came up to me and show a little too much interest for my taste. The look in their eyes is unpleasant and I tell Sarah what I am experiencing. “Ah”, she says, “that is the thing; I never look men in the eyes!”. She tells me that it is uncommon and that it invites men that are not used to such interactions to do more. What have I done?”

~

2 | The women in Kerala

2.1 | Introduction

This chapter tries to lay out an introduction to various parts of the Keralan society and what role women play in them. It serves as a contextualization of the data explained in this research; a background for the understanding of women's current position in Kerala. It explains the patriarchal system, different forms of religion in the state and the caste-system that has been a great part of the Kerala society. The main aim is to show that there is still a difference in the position of men and women in Kerala when it comes to their accessibility to resources, which serves as a justification for this research to find out why the gender inequality persists.

Kerala is one of the 29 states in India and represents wealth and beauty with its rich agriculture and fertility. With a population that is larger than that of Canada, but a land mass that is 250 times smaller; Kerala has seen a tremendous transformation in the past 50 years (Parayil, 2000). Though contested, the origin in 'Kerala' is argued to come from the word 'Keram' ('coconut') and 'alam', meaning land-space or territory. Thus Kerala has become the "land of the coconuts", which is confirmed by the many coconut trees that adorn the land (Sadasivan, 2000). The people in Kerala are referred to as "Keralites" or "Malayalees", which refers to the language they speak: Malayalam. Many rivers run through the green land of Kerala and the backwaters are an infamous spectacle for visitors and an important source of transport and trade for the Malayalees. The location of Kerala makes it the beneficiary of two Monsoons in a year which make for all the great flora and fauna and the 'Ayurvedic' herbs with their homeopathic properties (Sadasivan, 2000).

"God's Own Country", as the Malayalees say, has a legend that says Kerala was reclaimed from the deep blue ocean by the gods. The Dutch, Portuguese and the British set foot on the soil to make claims on the precious herbs and spices on the land. "Pre-modern Kerala was a cauldron of caste oppression, aptly described by the nineteenth-century Hindu reformer Vivekananda as a 'mad house'" (Parayil, 2000). After British independence, Kerala became the first place in the world to democratically elect a communist party (Nossiter, 1982). Though the Party represented a long history of struggles by oppresses castes and classes; the short period they were in power marked the beginning of the social and economic changes that would be named "The Kerala model of Development" (Parayil, 2000). Though both contested and praised, Kerala managed to implement growth-based and planned development programmes to reduce the high poverty rates, high infant mortality rates and increase their population growth rate up to a point where women exceeded the men in numbers and life expectancy is now over 70 years in Kerala (Parayil, 1996). Kerala has achieved almost complete literacy with the population and the largest health care and education spending in India, despite low per

capita income. This was because large parts of Kerala did not industrialize and Keralites stayed dependent on agriculture (Jeffrey, 1992).

“Where births are kept down and women aren’t”, was a title in the *New York Times* (Jeffrey, 1992). The influence of women grew too in the time of rapid development. Since the 1880’s, women’s status and autonomy was unusual and fluctuating. Some women had less autonomy than their ancestors had had, but still had more influence over their lives than other women in India. Jeffrey (1992) argues against the presumption that women were experiencing ‘improvement’ since the process of development had started. They were able to gain literacy and take jobs, yet their presence in politics and other places was still low. Franke and Cashin (1994) argue that, despite “impressive gains”, women in Kerala still suffer from traditional problems that other women in India suffer from, like; misogyny, violence, dowry, etc.

2.2 | Matriliney and patriarchy

Kerala is one of the few places in India that knew a matriliney system. ‘Marumakkathayam’ as it was called, was especially prevalent among the Nairs (see: Religion and Caste, p.23). It is a form of hereditary succession or other inheritance through the matrilineal line. The system gives huge importance to women in the family hierarchy, meaning that property was traced back through the female relatives of a family. Women had a higher social status and were not to be married away or killed at birth, as some other Indian traditions (Williams, 1975). However, matriliney never meant matriarchy. Much of society was still patriarchal. Also, the Nairs themselves were the ones who changed the matrilineal laws slowly between the years of 1896 and 1976, to abolish matriliney completely on the 1st of December 1976 (Jeffrey, 2005). Thus, as Jeffrey (1990) argues, it was not the government that abolished matriliney, but the matrilineal people themselves. He also argues that with the dismantling of matriliney, women lost at least as much as they had gained. Both European and Indian ideologies of monogamy and patriarchy have, according to Jeffrey (1990), pressured the matrilineal people to become patrilineal and monogamous. Yet, still, the pressure did not withhold girls from education or women from employment. Also, many authors argue that matriliney was part of the reason why the ‘development model’ in Kerala – unlike trials in other states – was such a success (Jeffrey, 1990; Simister, 2011). However, Simister (2011) his study also shows that even though women enjoy a better position than some other women in India, many aspects of women’s lives in Kerala is still similar to other women in India.

2.3 | Education and employment

Though progress had been made since the 1930’s, the female labour force participation rate in Kerala has been very low over the past decades. Regardless of the fact that Kerala has ranked first among Indian States in terms of Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI), the unemployment and labour force participation rates have declined (Devi, 2002). For both men and women, it has declined,

yet especially women have stayed back in their participation. As Mukhopadhyay (2007) argues, that in spite of high female literacy levels in Kerala due to rapid development; the state has among the lowest rates of female participation in the labour force. Her study shows that women do not enjoy the kind of 'freedom' one would expect. She calls it the 'enigma' of the Kerala women, others call it 'paradox' (Saradmoni, 1999; Sreekumar, 2007). One reason Mukhopadhyay (2007) gives, is the fact that most indicators of gender development and equality do not show the nuance that is needed to understand what, for example, 'female literacy' really entails. For many women are literate, yet still fall out of school or never start a job once they are finished with school. Instead, the men often go the Gulf to earn money. With a 36 per cent of the domestic product from remittances in Kerala, the state has a large sum of money coming from the Gulf countries where more than 2,4 million Keralites work, according to a World Bank report (2017). Women tend to quit their career because – by the simple virtue of being born a woman – they might be married off and adhere to the *Manusmriti*; subordinating themselves to the position of a housewife. Participation in the labour force and earning money might not necessarily mean the woman has control over that money (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). These things must be considered when it comes to the notion of gender equality, where it is not necessarily in the numbers whether men and women have equal opportunities.

2.4 | Religion and Caste

Caste and religion still play a significant role in the lives of people in Kerala. Though more than half of the population consists of Hindus, the other half is mostly divided by Muslim and Christians (Census, 2011). As the matriliney customs slowly eroded, the Hindu and Muslim customs were adopted by all castes and were mostly patriarchal in nature. Though officially abolished, the caste system "is still in the minds of people", Abi said to me. There used to be about 420 different *jati* ("castes") in Kerala, where an average village had the ability to contain about 17 different caste groups (Hardgrave Jr, 1964). These castes used to be separated from each other through customs, norms, rituals and through space. Castes were "mutually exclusive, exhaustive, hereditary, endogamous, and occupation-specific", as Deshpande (2000) describes. Though very diverse, the castes can be divided by the following 'main' castes;

1. *Brahmins*: these are originally the people of knowledge and wisdom, but often poor. They had both an important ritual status and were very important in politics.
2. *Kshatriyas*: were the fighters and the rulers who were essentially upgraded from the Nairs.
3. *Nairs*: occupied by the largest part of the population. These were the traditional landlords of Kerala.
4. *Ezhawa*; are the highest of the "backward caste" or the "polluted castes". They were and are the agriculturalists in Kerala and South India.
5. *Vishwakarma*; are the engineers. They were only allowed in the temple when they had to repair something.

6. *Scheduled* caste or “*untouchables*”; you can still see that the ‘darkest’-skinned people do the hard labour, like picking coconuts. (Abi ;Hardgrave Jr (1964)).

The first three categories are the “forward castes” and the latter three as the “backward castes”. Within each caste are many sub-divisions that create a wide array of categories to which people belonged to. As Jeffrey (1992) describes: “In the old Kerala that began to dissolve rapidly in the 1920’s, a low-caste man put ‘his left hand on his breast, and his right over his mouth’, if he dared to speak to his superiors, ‘for his breath may pollute the air’.”. In the ‘old’ Kerala, people were recognizable by their clothes as to which caste they belonged to. How hair was tied, or jewellery was worn, were subtle characteristics that associated one person to its caste. A research by Deshpande (2000) has shown that disparities still exist in the Kerala society, as will be exemplified later in the data analysis of this research.

As for women; the remnants of caste-divisions and the importance of religion will show to be important in the understanding of the current position that women have in the Kerala society. The *Manusmriti* in the Hindu religion, underlines the importance of the women to adhere to the rule that ordains a women to be subordinate to her father as a young girl, to her husband in adulthood and to her son when she is elderly (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). These things will be explained and shown in more detail in the following chapters.

2.5 | Rising crime rates and depression

As mentioned before, Kerala enjoys a high sex ratio with is often seen as an indicator that women in Kerala enjoy a good health. However, increasing mental health problems have raised questions about this statement. Suicide rates in Kerala are three times the national average along with increasing rates of depression and anxiety. Some argue that it is because of high education rates but low economic opportunities for women (Chacko, 2003). Kerala inhabits about 3,1 per cent of the total population in India, yet accounts for 10,1 per cent of the suicide in the country and especially among women (Mitra & Singh, 2007). Some of the main causes of suicide among women, are; fear of poor academic performances, social reputation and unhappy love affairs. The study by Mitra and Singh (2007) shows, that ‘unhappy love affairs’ is mostly about women with illegitimate pregnancies who commit suicide because of societal humiliation and shame. These numbers have caused several discussions about the issues in Kerala in general and among women.

2.6 | Conclusion

Kumari wrote in 1996 that “Kerala women have literacy, health care, but they are the most backward, especially during this decade” (Sreekumar, 2007). What is interesting, that Sreekumar (2007) says is, that this ‘gender paradox’ that seems so pervasive in

today's discussions about Kerala, has become "an overwhelming context of imagining women in Kerala today". Though UNICEF praised the Kerala women for their "sense of self-worth" and many others have also argued that women have been the "cause and effect" of Kerala's development process, there seems to be an 'enigma' or 'paradox' that differentiates women from men in the process (Sreekumar, 2007).

This research tries to explain and understand some of these controversies between men and women in Kerala. Kerala exhibits both opportunities and challenges as it has become one of the wealthiest and most developed states in India. Still, the meaning of development has changed as the results have been stalled and issues for women have increased. As Saradmoni explains in her critical analysis of 'gender paradox', she argues that it is more about "freedom, equality, personal development, self-assurance and dignity", that should define the woman's position (Sreekumar, 2007). These indicators cannot be measured in percentages yet will turn out to be a central concept in many of the interviews held with informants in this research. Especially 'freedom'. What is important for women, is not easily described by sex ratios or literacy. This research will develop this assumption further and give meaning to the 'paradox' that seems to exist in Kerala.

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“Stay away, Miss!”, the chief yells at Nanda as we try to mingle in the bargaining between the boys of our group and the police officers of the Nature Conservation office. We have trespassed on dangerous property by accident and have been escorted to the local police office. I ask Nanda why we are not allowed to join the conversation. She explains that a female police officer must be present if they want to interrogate us, so to avoid any issues or accusations related to gender discrimination.

How refreshing to notice that we are still discriminated on because of the anti-discrimination rules. “If it had been only girls in our car, we would be free right now!”, Nanda laughs. Instead, the men in our group manage to bargain our way out of a court case, into a 10.000 rupee fine, down to the 3.500 rupees we eventually pay.”

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3 | Theoretical Foundation

For the analysis of the data from the fieldwork in Kerala, it is important to have a theoretical understanding of the different things involved in this research. The first section of this chapter explains the importance of *ethnography* and the role *feminism* has in this research. The purpose of this ethnography, is to listen to the narratives of informants and represent those perspectives as they are central to this research.

Since gender is a sensitive topic and gender equality even more so, it is necessary to touch upon the topic of *feminism* and the role that it has in this ethnography. Following, the notions of *gender* and *security* are explained in more depth, after which the *capabilities approach* is explained to allow an insight into the reasons why something could be viewed as *unjust*. The notion of *masculinist protection* is there to illustrate the problems it can bring when women are viewed as ‘vulnerable’ and ‘in need of protection’.

The last section explains *discourse* as an important part of this research. Central to this, are the interactions between people that create and recreate meaning. An example of a discourse is given in a research where women were concluded to generally be more ‘disciplined’ in their ‘lived spatiality’ than men were. It argues that there is a power in the way men and women should behave that create subtle differences between them. Finally, the works of Schwalbe et al. (2000) is explained, which is the framework in which the data from the fieldwork will be analysed. It describes the different processes of interactions that can result in the reproduction of *inequality* in certain contexts.

3.1 | Ethnography and female anthropology

As Reiter (2012) argues; sexual inequality is something that is widespread and the institutions within which this inequality exists have a long and complex history. She argues that it is important to trace the roots and origin of this phenomenon: “Our political critique must be based on this understanding of origins and development of sexism”. Ethnography is a way to understand how people make meaning of their world. Ethnography uses the researcher as the primary tool for data collection, which can be an uncomfortable thought for the critics who believe that science should be “objective”. “The product is an interpretive story, reconstruction, or narrative about a group of people (a community)” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Culture is a very important part of ethnography to understand how people think and do things.

In the case of gender inequality and studies about women, much of the ethnography revolves around notions of feminism and female anthropology. Ardener (1985) describes the critical difference between the ‘anthropology of women’ and ‘feminist anthropology’. She argues that the former is a field of study about women from any viewpoint. The latter is about a method or approach of study that is about any topic is society studied from a

woman's viewpoint. Since this is a study about women from a female viewpoint, this research could be seen as a 'feminist's anthropology of women'. However, feminist anthropology has been met with some critique. Also, feminist anthropology is argued to have always been about critique; about the problems with social structures and cultural ideologies that shape women's lives (Geller & Stockett, 2007). As some scholars have argued that there can be a problem in 'representation' when a feminist studies a field where the interpretation of the researcher is biased by the ideology of feminism (Strathern, 1988).

Still, it is important to understand the notion of feminism as being a way to comprehend how hierarchal divisions in society contribute to the social order and at the same time understand that the position of a feminist is marginal. Menon (2012) argues that this is because one chooses to take a stance against the privileged position in that division. Thus, men can also adopt a 'feminist' stance to argue against the patriarchies in society. Moreover, Strathern (1988) argues that the 'pluralism of feminist scholarship' comes from the same broad sources of thought shared by academic practices in general. She argues that there is not one 'feminist voice', but that it is an "assimilation of undifferentiated categories in itself". Every researcher in the field – whether feminist or not – is biased by the fact that the analysis comes from interpretations and observations subjected to the traits of the researcher. As Reiter (2012) says: "All anthropologists wear the blinders of their own civilization in approaching other cultures; our eyes are as conditioned as those of the people we study." (Reiter, 2012). It is important to understand this when doing ethnographic research, that is why the notion of feminism is mentioned and explained here. Also, in the next paragraph, an argument will be made for the importance of a feminist perspective when it comes to the notion of security.

3.2 | Gender, inequality and feminist security

Gender and *security* have both been briefly mentioned in the first chapter yet need more elaboration for this research. As West and Zimmerman (1987) started their argument about "Doing gender", they said; "In the beginning, there was sex and there was gender". They argue that these notions seem very distinctive from one another, yet that society shows us they are not as distinctive. An example is the notion of *mothering*, formerly thought of as a biological trait, is something that is also reproduced in the structures of work and family. West and Zimmerman argue that gender is not a property of individuals, but a feature of social situations: "both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society". To "do" gender is about accountability of individuals in social relationships and interactions; it is about the risk of falling under gender assessment. The difficulty of, for example, gay men not falling under the category 'hetero' that 'belongs' to being a man, shows how there are certain characteristics that belong to 'doing' gender. People are assessed based on these characteristics that are 'normal' for being a male or female. "In virtually any situation, one's sex category can be relevant, and one's

performance as an incumbent of that category (i.e., gender) can be subjected to evaluation.”(West & Zimmerman, 1987). These things explain how culturally constructed norms about gender can be challenging. The importance of ‘gender assessment’ when it comes to gender will prove relevant in the data of the women in Kerala. In this research, the aim is to understand how the construction of gender within a culture can result in an unequal gender relation. The ‘assessment’ of the female role in Kerala is much stricter than that of the male role, which introduces the notion of justice. This will be further explained in the next paragraph, which is about Sen’s (1995) approach to a ‘theory of justice’. It is about the question of *inequality*; when is something unequal?

Inequality is a complicated notion, as Sen (1995) describes, because it assumes a judgement of something being ‘unjust’. Sen argues that to observe something *unequal* as unjust, you must rely on theories of justice. Gender inequality is sometimes seen as ‘natural’ or ‘appropriate’ in certain contexts of men and women, it is tolerated because it is normal. Sometimes women themselves choose for actions that privilege boys over girls or vice versa, which will seem just in the absence of a greater unjustness. Sen uses John Rawls theory of justice, where Rawls argues that inequality about biological differences (e.g. male or female) is only justified when it advances the woman when a man is favoured in the assignment of a basic right and she accepts this. However, Sen criticizes Rawls theory for not being able to include complex ‘external factors’ in the judgement of primal differences between men and women. Instead, Sen proposes a *capability approach*. This approach is a normative framework for evaluating and assessing the well-being and social arrangements of an individual. It is about what people are capable of; what they can effectively do and be. Sen argues that this framework has been criticized because it assumes a general list of capabilities for people that one can compare and assess with. However, Sen argues that it is possible to make an inter-personal comparison by people regardless of “an agreed ‘comprehensive doctrine’”. “By looking at ‘intersections’ between different individual orderings, agreed judgements on capabilities can be made without invoking a single ‘comprehensive’ doctrine shared by all” (Sen, 1995). This means that women themselves can judge whether they have the same capabilities as others – women or men –, like; freedom, happiness, mobility, etc. This, to Sen, can be a way of assessing inequalities because it is about the judgement of capabilities by women themselves by making inter-personal comparisons. How do they feel about their capabilities; do they have different capabilities than those of men? This brings back the importance of ethnography to understand how people give meaning to things.

There is an enigma to the notion of ‘protecting women’ because it essentially implies good intentions by the protectors. However, this research argues that there is a different side to ‘protection’ that results in *inequality* for women. A notion that explains this duality of protection, is *masculinist protection*. Masculinist protection is a notion that is underrated in the feminist theory, according to Young (2003). It is a more benign form of masculinity that comes from the ideas of chivalry where the man needs to protect the woman from all the dangers in the world. The protector of the woman is the “good” man who protects from all the “bad” men outside. “Central to this logic of masculinist

protection is the subordinate relation of those in the protected position”, according to Young (2003). This means that the woman returns the favour by conceding to decision-making autonomy of the man. Because men feel this greater risk and burden of responsibility, it is assumed that the woman owes him deference and indulgence. Young argues that this is about patriarchal relations and the unequal distribution of power. Though the woman is subjected, she can feel the need to adore the protector and be happy in the position where she is protected. The “good” woman shows loyalty and submission, the “bad” woman refuses protection to claim the right to her own life. Young states the importance of feminist theory about security, where the rights and dignity of an individual should not be diminished because they need help and support. The next section explains the notion of discourse and the different processes that can explain why the discourse of security in Varkala can be the result of *inequality* and how this is part of the discourse.

3.3 | Discourse and the reproductions of inequality

Discourse is a notion that is a notable part of this research. This research takes the concept of *discourse* as described by Foucault in Pitsoe and Letseka (2013) as the social construct that is created and perpetuated by those who have the power and means of communication. It is power through knowledge that shapes interactions and relations. It is about the use of language and meaning-giving systems through which meaning is created and recreated. “Discourse transmits and produces power; it undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013). Discourse is a framework of language and non-verbal signs that limits what people can experience and give meaning to that experience, which influences again what can be said and done (Purvis & Hunt, 1993).

An interesting example is given in the research done by Bartky (1997) who criticizes Foucault for overlooking the forms of subjection that ‘engender’ the feminine body. She argues he overlooks the silence and powerlessness of the people that have been subjugated to some of the disciplines that Foucault talks about. Women are more restricted than men in their movement and their ‘lived spatiality’, as she describes, because there are significant differences for women when it comes to gesture, posture, and ‘general bodily comportment’. Women are more disciplined in the ways that they are subjected to constant criticism for not dieting enough, not applying enough makeup and contorting to societies pressures as exemplified in magazine’s and posters. “Feminine movement, gesture, and posture must exhibit not only constriction, but grace as well, and a certain eroticism restrained by modesty: all three”, Bartky (1997) explains. These things are usually unnoticed but are also a discourse within which women are restricted to the meaning society gives to the woman and keeps giving to the woman. In the same reasoning, Bartky (1997) argues that Foucault mainly focuses on specific institutions to discipline, like; schools, factories and prisons. However, Bartky (1997) argues for a reproduction of discourse that is also ‘institutionally unbound’ because of the absence of single authorities. This means that discourses can come from both authoritative

institutions that give meaning to social constructions but discourse also happens in everyday interactions between people.

Schwalbe et al. (2000) also include the notion of *discourse* in their explanation of processes that reproduce inequality. They argue in the same way that the reproduction of inequality – even when it seems institutionalized – ultimately depends on face-to-face interactions. From different qualitative studies, they have distinguished a few generic processes in the reproduction of inequality that show what happens in face-to-face interactions, how symbols and meanings are created and used to sustain a pattern of inequality, and how inequality itself is perceived. These processes are; *othering*, *subordinate adaptation*, *boundary maintenance*, and *emotion management*. Each of these things will be explained with the different sub-categories, because these processes can overlap and are often interrelated or interchangeable when it comes to situations like the ones in this research. Schwalbe et al. (2000) argue against the notion that *action* should be linked to *structure* to prove its validity. Instead, they stress the importance of recognizing action across time and place: “A distribution of resources, be it equal or unequal, is not a structure; it is a *condition* under which action occurs”.

Othering refers to the process whereby a dominant group defines into existence an inferior group. It is about putting people into categories. There is a form of *oppressive othering*, whereby one group defines the other group as morally or intellectually inferior. Othering can also create patterns that reaffirm the ideology of the dominant group or turn the subordinate group into commodities. An example is given of how “temps” are often defined by full-time employers as unambitious and incompetent. Schwalbe et al. (2000) include the notion of *identity codes* which are “the rules of performance and interpretation whereby members of a group know what kind of self is signified by certain words, deeds, and dress”.

Following, *subordinate adaptation* is given as a process of reproduction. This is understood as all the ways subordinate groups adapt or resist to their deprived position. Schwalbe et al. (2000) argue that most strategies of coping have dual consequences; they can challenge some inequalities yet reproduce others. *Trading power for patronage* is a strategy whereby the subordinate group accepts its status, while seeking ways to benefit from the relationship with the dominant group. An example is given of how women accepted sexist “compliments” by coal miners because they wanted affirmation of their femininity as a woman in a traditionally male job. “In these cases, members of a subordinate gender group accepts practices that demean and disempower them in exchange for a degree of approval and protection” (Schwalbe et al., 2000). The argument is, that subordinate groups reproduce inequality because they still allow their needs to be met.

Third process in question, is *boundary maintenance*. This is about preserving inequality by symbolic, spatial or interactional boundaries. It is about keeping possession of material and cultural capital in the dominant group to one’s advantage. *Transmitting*

cultural capital is one way of reproducing inequality by using knowledge, skills, habits, values and tastes to the advantage of the dominant group and limiting access to these things for the subordinate group. Boundaries are created because one group has more access to cultural capital and thus has more power to decide it for the other group. Boundary maintenance also happens in the form of *controlling network access* by the dominant group or with *the threat and use of violence*. The latter is the mechanism that keeps people “in their place”. In this research, it will show that both the threat of violence is used as a discourse to keep women in their place as a boundary from attaining the same kind of access to freedom as the men do. The threat of ‘shame’ is also very strong for females to keep them in their place.

The last process of inequality reproduction, is *emotion management* of which the first notion is *discourse*. “Discourse can be regulated to simultaneously quell some emotions and evoke others”, say Schwalbe et al. (2000). It becomes a tool of inequality when it regulated emotions to the point where *others* are easily identified.

3.4 | Conclusion

For this research, it is important to understand that many social phenomena are susceptible and interrelated to the context in which they are produced. It is made up of *discourses* as the frameworks in which things are given meaning to and experienced. The meaning of ‘gender’ is also a framework in which both women and men act the way they are ‘supposed’ to.

This chapter describes the importance of a feminist ethnography to understand why women often have different ‘rules’ of behaviour and interaction than their male counterparts. It describes how protection by males can be a problem because of the dependency that it creates; men feel responsible for the protection and women feel they owe men something in return. This can create a power imbalance where men have more power than women. When women view they have lesser capabilities than men, this can be seen something *unequal*, as described by the capabilities approach in this chapter. Moreover, this chapter describes how *inequality* can be reproduces through different processes of interaction.

These things together serve to lay out an analytical framework in this research that will help understand the position of women in Varkala and Kerala through the qualitative data collected in the field. The following chapters capture much of the data and lay out the analysis according to the capabilities approach and the processes of reproduction.

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“Bina invited me to her house for the second time, after I had been there for an interview and had spent the day with her. We are having lunch as she suddenly seems to want to add to the interview from the other day; “You know that women are seen as ‘dirty’ during their menstrual cycle?”. She tells me how women cannot sleep next to their husbands during their period and must wash themselves thoroughly each morning to become ‘clean’. Also, women can only go to the temple after 12 days from the start of their period.”

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4 | “Everywhere the men have power; we don’t”

The following three chapters are the result of two months of fieldwork, each chapter representing various aspects of the women’s lives in Varkala. This first chapter is mainly built on observations that differentiate women from the men in the daily practices and through traditions of the community. It will incorporate the different notions of inequality reproduction, like; boundary maintenance, othering, and subordinate adaptation. These will be incorporated into the framework of these following chapters to understand the meaning of the data. This chapter will also include some preliminary observations in the field that are interesting and necessary to include in the context of the issues regarding women.

4.1 | “We make the rules to break them”

Alcohol consumption is one of the striking characteristics in Kerala, where Kerala breaks the charts when it comes to an average alcohol consumption per person being 8,3 L a year. This is three times the national average and a growing number (Das, Balakrishnan, & Vasudevan, 2006). Counting the fact that women are not allowed to drink, the average per male consumption of alcohol is much higher. Savio would tell me; “We are not really allowed to drink, but everyone does it.” On Sunday, as you drive by the government-owned liquor stores at 9 am, there are large ques in front of the shops. Several studies have shown the correlation between the staggering alcohol consumption and violence against women (Abbey, Ross, McDuffie, & McDuffie, 1994; Das et al., 2006). Also the frequent use of alcohol in Kerala has been found to be associated with physical violence against women (Panda, 2004). Women can drink privately, but it is looked down upon. Like many things, it is looked down upon when women do it and not when men do it. “You can lose face”, is what my friends would tell me. You are not allowed to smoke, especially not women, but a lot of people do it secretively. There is “organized chaos”, as Savio would say, in Kerala where there are a lot of official and social rules that are broken. “We have big issues that are hidden”, was what one informant said about Kerala.

These were interesting observations during the first few weeks of the field work because they showed how important the “hidden” rules were in the culture of Kerala; how the social rules of society can be different than those written by the government. The government has strict rules about alcohol consumption and people have made them even stricter for women. It is looked down upon when women drink and smoke, they seem to have to carry more honour than the men to be able to lose it so quickly when they disobey the societal rules. The fear of ‘losing face’ is stronger for women than for men. This is where *boundaries* are maintained that benefit the men more because they have access to more material capital, alcohol and cigarettes, and more social capital in the way they have

more lenience to break societal rules. The notion of boundary maintenance will be exemplified more in this chapter and the following chapters.

Another thing I observed, is the fact that couples cannot show affection to one another in public spaces. It is looked down upon and even punished. Informants told me that they – the public – will throw things and spit at the couple holding hands or those who show any other form of affection. Interestingly, the “Pink Police” set up in a few bigger cities in Kerala to protect women on the street, have also been known to punish couples on the street who show affection. One informant, Krishnavery, told me this and said; “The Pink Police are supposed to support us, but they don’t agree with us holding hands.”. Still, I observed a lot of younger couples holding hands and cuddling in the remote corners of the village.

Again, this stood out because of the dichotomies that seemed to exist between the “hidden” rules and the official rules. There seems to be a friction between the conservative values and the modern values, as often younger informants would disagree with these social rules and some elderly informants felt that the younger generation was ruining the culture. Moreover, the “Pink Police”, which was set up by the government to promote women’s empowerment, also fights some of the

4.2 | “Kochi is a metropolitan, so there they know. They are free.”

This notion came back in many different conversations; the distinction between urban and rural. Also, the distinction between “us” and the people in the “United States and Europe”. The rural areas were described as “more traditional” and “backward”. “There, people are lesser educated so they will have stronger feelings towards tradition”, an informant told me (p.2). My friend Amita (p.10) said to me; “Varkala is a rural area. In the cities, they have more freedom than us.”. She added: “Their minds are more elaborate than ours.”. Another man (p.8) said to me that the village is “totally different” from the city. “I like the American and English values”, is what another woman told me in our interview. I told her that the Americans have problems too. She said: “We will only take their good things, not their bad things.”. Education and literacy seem to be key in many of the discussion on women and in the Kerala society. Many informants mention the good education in Kerala as one of the first things that they think is good about this state. “It’s not education, it’s schooling”, is what Sarah reminded me often. She argues that the quality is not necessarily guaranteed, yet everyone is very proud of their nearly 100 per cent literacy.

4.3 | “I am never alone”

One of the first observations in Varkala, was the fact that everything closed so early in the evening. Since Kerala is close to the equator, the sun sets around 6 pm and everyone returns home quickly after that. Especially the women; women are not allowed to be outside in the dark. Not as an official law, but something that many people told me; a social

rule. If I met women in the afternoon, they would often leave around 5 pm to go home with a family member or friend. “We are not allowed to go out alone”, was something I heard often. Also, only women must stay home after dark. One informant (p.20) told me that men can do whatever they want. “It is very difficult. In the night, I cannot go outside. It is not dangerous, but it is not allowed. I don’t like the men here, there is no respect for women.”.

Another thing that I observed, was the restrictions on clothing. It was also one of the first things women mentioned in many of the interviews. The “breast cloth” is something that nearly every girl wears; a cloth on top of the *salwar kamiz* attached to both shoulders that hangs on top of the chest to prevent men from seeing what is underneath. The entire day I can see women tugging the cloth to pull it straight and prevent it from revealing anything. The sari’s and *salwar kamiz* already reveal so little. Many young informants showed a distaste for the clothes that they had to wear. “I have to wear many clothes, I don’t agree with this” (p.23). Women would tell me that girls in the big cities would wear different clothes, but in rural areas it was still very strict and looked down upon if women wore anything revealing or modern. After a while, I could tell the visitors from the local people in Varkala just by looking at the clothes. I noticed a change in my own behaviour, feeling the need to cover myself more as my fieldwork proceeded. I felt more and more at ease judging foreigners for wearing too little as my local friends would talk about them. I felt more shame when I pulled up my skirts to go into the water at the beach and people were watching.

4.4 | “Why don’t you have one?”

The *mangala sutra*, a ceremonial object of the Hindu’s that is hung around the woman’s neck during marriage. As I was visiting the house of Abi’s family, the women showed me the gold chain around their necks with the names of their husbands engraved on the heart dangling from the chain. It is given to the wife on the wedding day by the husband. The wife is supposed to wear it her whole life to enhance the well-being of her husband. Also, the *bindi* – a red stroke of pigment drawn from the forehead into the hairline - on the head of women symbolizing their commitment to their husbands, is something that stood out to me. None of the men have these things that symbolize their marriage or commitment to their wives as the wives have. When I asked why the men don’t have it, the women laughed; “We are possessions.” (p.31).

4.5 | Conclusion

The first paragraph shows how important social rules are and how common it is to break them. Drinking is looked down upon in general, but especially when women do it. As mentioned earlier, the same mechanisms that are set in place to support women, are also discriminatory to them because they set women apart (p.26). The notion of the Pink Police, to promote women-empowerment, is not a solution to the problem that women are discriminated upon by the regular police; it establishes a greater divide by ‘othering’

them. Women need a 'special' treatment. The *identity codes*, as described in the theoretical framework, are different for women than for men, thus setting them apart.

The second noticeable thing, as described in this chapter, is the 'othering' in general. The 'others' in America, the 'others' in the cities; it stood out because people could be so proud on the one hand about their literacy and the women empowerment programs, yet always define the 'others' as 'better' and 'having more freedom'. This serves as a contextualization to the issue of women because it gives insight into the general thought of people about their situation. They were fully aware of their position and assessed it according to Western standards or 'civilized' and 'modern' standards.

To show the influence of discourse, I included part of my own experiences in the paragraph about clothing. The collective thought about something has influence on the individual, as it did on me as I became more aware of the way I dressed as my fieldwork progressed. In line with the vignettes (p.20 and p.37), the third paragraph explains the extent of the dress-code for women and girls in Varkala. All females were not allowed to go out alone or after sunset at 6 pm because it is dangerous, according to the rhetoric. As my personal reflections explain as well; there was a very strong rhetoric of dangerousness and being safe. Men are both the problem and the solution; men would tell me that "men are dangerous".

Lastly, the paragraph shows how women are set apart from men. They must behave decently, dress decently and be safe. Women are the exception, they are the possession. In general, this chapter gives an insight into the culture of Kerala and how the 'problem' of safety has created a very strong sense and rhetoric of dangerousness. This is also why 'fear' became a significant factor in this research. The *threat of violence*, that Schwalbe et al. (2000) talk about, is how women are kept in their place. Women have limited access to spaces and interactions, which is a form of *boundary maintenance* where women's access to network is controlled. Cultural capital, the notion of women's incapability to protect herself, is transferred and used to limit their capabilities even more.

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“When the heat of the afternoon sun has settled and the temperature has finally dropped to a bearable degree, people come out of anywhere to take a dip in the water or a stroll along the beach. I have been coming out onto the beach to observe this magnificent scene and talk to people there. It was only then, after several weeks, that I saw it; as men are joyfully playing in the waves and stumbling around with only their lungi around their waist, the women are at the shore. With their sari’s and salwar kamiz soaked, but their pants never lifted an inch from their ankles; they are divided by the waves from all the men and completely covered in austerity. Inexplicably subtle, but it reminds me of what Charlotte had told me; “Kerala women don’t dance”. They don’t dance in the waves like the men.”

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5 | “Kerala women don’t dance”

To understand the previous chapter and the following chapters, the discourse of security is explained as I found it what drives many of the decisions concerning women and how it affects their lives in a separate way than that of the men. This chapter explains how the notion of security influences marriage, which is a very important factor in the lives of men and women in Kerala. It will be argued that by keeping women ‘safe’, they are restricted and ‘unsafe’ in their everyday life. As Schwalbe et al. (2000) explain about discourse as something more than talking and writing; “it is a way of talking and writing”. They explain that by regulating a discourse, one can regulate emotion which then turns into a regulation of action. This chapter aims to explain that the discourse of security recreates the notion of the woman as being vulnerable and therefore restricted in her capabilities.

5.1 | “She is waiting for her marriage for freedom”

Wedding jewellery, wedding sari’s, wedding venues; everywhere one can spot the theme and conclude that weddings are an important part of the Kerala culture. One informant (p.4) said; “You can say anything in Kerala, but you cannot not be married and not have kids.”. It is very uncommon in Kerala that people do not get married. The first thing many informants showed me when I went to their house was their wedding album. A question I got asked every single interview was whether I was married. An informant (p.25) explained that parents “force” marriage on their kids so that they know the kids are settled. Parents also provide for their kids until they have a steady job, which can be up until they are 30 years old. Savio explained that the day he called his father that he got a job, his father put down the phone immediately. A few hours later his father called Savio again, to tell him that he had retired from his own job now that his son had settled. His mom did the same thing the next day. “They could retire now”, he laughed. One informant said (p.21); “We are born from our parents and they are most important.”. Another informant said that parents will relax more once their daughters are married.

However, for women marriage is even more important. Different female informants argued that they would be “free” as soon as they got married because it meant that their husbands could take them places they would normally not go to. Once a girl is married, the parents also feel less responsible for their daughters’ safety because a “respectable” (p.13) husband will take care of her. The women who marry generally feel more liberated because they have “more freedom” to go out with their husbands. As Abi explained that women think they have more freedom because now their husbands can give them permission to do things instead of their fathers. Abi his wife calls several times a day to ask him whether she can go to the market or other places outside of the house. Even his sister-in-law, who lives in the same house as his wife, will call Abi to ask whether he has really given his own wife permission to go outside. “That is because of fear”, he said

(p.15). He said that women were confused about freedom because they think they get more freedom once they get married. One informant explained (p.32) that there is a saying that a father takes care of a girl when she is young, a woman is taken care of by her husband, and an elderly woman is taken care of by her son. Most of the marriages in Kerala and Varkala are “arranged marriages”. The other type of marriage, is “love marriage”. Many of the younger informants I spoke to, wanted a love marriage. Abi explained how the process of marriage usually goes;

Parents tell their daughters at an early age that they are seeking alliances, so the girl understands that it will be arranged for her. Then, when she is around 20 years old, the parents start looking for a proper husband. This is also the part where *caste* becomes very important. In the matrimony-section of the Malayalam newspaper (see Appendix 1, p.50) there are listings of potential brides and grooms looking – through the parents - for their proper other half. Even though the caste-system is abolished, one of the first things in the ‘add’ is the caste of the bride or groom. This is because inter-caste marriages are still a problem in Kerala. One informant, an English teacher, told me that she was about to get married to a man from a higher caste. This was a problem at first, but they were eventually getting married. Once the add has been placed for a groom, different men can respond – through their parents – to the add and will be invited for a meeting at the house of the bride-to-be. Either conversations will happen with both parents present or the men will get half an hour of time to talk to the woman alone. Abi told me that he was one of more than 20 men who came to meet his wife at that time. After he had spoken to her, Abi went to the father of his – soon to be – wife and told him that he liked her. The father in turn liked Abi very much and went to his daughter to ask whether she liked Abi. When both sides agreed that they liked each other, they waited a year to get married. During the time that the parents arrange the wedding, both the bride and groom are only allowed to call each other through the phone and they only see other in person at the wedding. A few things are very important when it comes to choosing a “respectable” husband;

1. He must be of the same religion and caste;
2. He must have a good education or job;
3. He must be at least four years older than the bride; this is because men must be ‘mature’, according to one informant (p.10). It means that when the man is too old to take care of himself, the woman can “serve” him since she is still young.
4. He must come from a good family;
5. And, he must have a matching *jathaka porutham*; this is about matching horoscopes (Amita, p.24).

Whenever I asked why these were so strict, most informants would tell me that it was so important to have a “good” husband that protected them. The chances of a “good” man were dependent on the aforementioned variables. “Love marriages” were thus looked down upon because parents could not control whom their daughter would marry. “The neighbours and family-members will scold us if I have a love marriage”, Amita told me.

5.2 | “That’s the only boundary we have”

Interestingly, many women would start very positively about their position. They would argue that Kerala was a good place to be because they had education and employment. Many times, they would refer to the “nearly 100 percent literacy”. However, as soon as I asked whether they faced any challenges, they would often quickly say; “We don’t have freedom” (p.8). Sarah reminded me one day that “freedom” might be a difficult notion for me to mention to people because of the independence war with the British that Kerala experienced. Instead, she said, I might consider using words like “independence”. However, I noticed that the notion of “freedom” usually came from the women themselves. “Everywhere the men have power, we don’t”, is what Amita said to me. “Our biggest problem is security”, another informant told me (p.18). Krishnaveni said: “I am happy, but I don’t have freedom”. Deepa (p.12); “Security is an issue”. She said she was scared for her daughter to go to school because it was dangerous out on the streets. “I teach my daughter about the ‘good kiss’ and the ‘bad kiss’; on the forehead or cheek it is ok, on the mouth or anywhere beneath the clothes it is not ok.” (p.12). A woman in a Ayurvedic-shop said; “I want a war”. “Only safety is a problem”, she said; “We have to take care of ourselves” (p.5). A brother and his sister whom I spoke to on the beach said; “As I am talking to you, I feel the need to watch my sister all the time” (p.14). His mother calls twice during our interview to ask whether his sister is alright. “Many things have to change”, he argues. “Men look differently at girls, I fear for my daughter”, Manisha told me (p.21). “I tell her to keep a safe distance from men”, she said. Often women would say there was equal rights for girls and boys, but the biggest problem was safety. “We hear about a lot of problems in the newspaper”, one informant said (p.22). “We don’t have the guts to protect ourselves, we are not strong enough the face the problems”. “I want to go out at night, but I can’t”, a female dentist told me (p.22). “We can’t believe anyone, so we cannot depend on anyone”, her colleague added.

5.3 | Conclusion

The importance of marriage stands out in this chapter and was very distinctive in many of the conversations throughout this research. Everyone must get married and for women it often is a way to “freedom” that they long for; they can do more when their husbands have the authority to allow them to go places instead of their fathers. There is a form of *emotion management* when women are happy to marry into a situation that is ‘less’ constricting than the one before that. Like Abi said, that women are ‘confused’ about freedom when they think that they will gain more of it in their marriage. It seems the boundaries for women are different within their marriage, yet they are still boundaries that are different than those of men. Not getting married, is not an option. It is part of the discourse that people fear humiliation and shame when they do not comply to the social norms of marriage. It is part of the framework that marriage is a complier to the narrative that women should be kept safe, that they need a good husband and that they need to find a good husband for their daughters.

This chapter lays out the importance of freedom for women, the presence of danger everywhere and the need to be 'safe'. These are recurring themes. Women have to get married in order to get more "freedom" with the man that the parents have chosen as the "perfect" contestant to provide the safety that the woman needs. "Parents think that marriage is the best source of protection for girls", a female dentist told me. Women are 'othered' because they are not capable of protecting themselves. It is also about *boundary maintenance* that the women's capabilities to protect herself and choose her own husband are out of her hands. It is a rhetoric of danger that keeps women from participating fully in public. There is a discourse of security in dialogues and relations that strengthens the cultural traditions of arranged marriages and conservative clothing for women.

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“Bina and I are sitting on the porch as she tells me how she got married on the 1st of August and her husband left four weeks later, on the 28th of August for Dubai, for an entire year; she had already been pregnant then. “Women have to get pregnant within two months of marriage”, she laughs; “Relatives and neighbours will come and ask; “Any good news yet?” “Life is not enjoyable because of this, you have to stay home and get children.” She argues that she has adjusted to this life; “I enjoy my life”. Though she argues that she cannot be seen talking to a strange man outside of the house because neighbours and relatives will be watching. “That’s the fear why girls don’t mingle with boys”, she adds that instead men can do anything they like. “My husband trusts me, but people don’t.””

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6 | “I want a war”

Chapter 4 showed how women are differentiated from men in public spaces and how this results in the *othering* of women. While women have access to education and employment, they still have more restrictions than men have when it comes to clothing, mobility and interactions. Following, chapter 5 explained how these things relate to the importance of security in the lives of women and how this is reproduced in the traditions and norms of the Kerala culture; especially through marriage. Finally, this chapter describes how many of the younger women responded to this discourse of security and how this affects their position as they described it in the interviews. This aims to explain how the system of inequality is reproduced through language and interactions among the people in Varkala.

6.1 | *Paradushanam*

As Nanda said she would think twice before helping someone who lay in the middle of the street; “We keep to ourselves and what we know” (p.2). Also, “loosing face” as a woman when being caught smoking or drinking, or talking to a strange person in the street, or sitting next to a strange man in the bus, was one of the central themes when women were asked ‘why’ they would not do something. On the bus home, Amita showed me a picture of her “fiancé”, a guy she has been friends with for a very long time and whom her parents know well. However, she told me that her parents don’t know that they secretly love each other and got engaged. She giggles, and I ask her why her parents don’t know. “Oh, no. That is very bad! He is too young.”. She tells me that he is perfect because he has a good education, has a good family background, is from the same caste and religion, and even has a good zodiac sign; yet, he is only 8 months older than her. This is a problem since men must be at least four years older. She tells me to keep it a secret because it will be a big problem when her parents or relatives find out. “They will scold me” (p.17). Her neighbours and relatives will look down on her, she tells me. “They think love marriage is the cheapest thing in the world.”. Her brother can get a love marriage. When I ask him why, he tells me “because I am a boy and she is a girl!”. Amita says; “See! It makes no sense. He can have a love marriage and I can’t!”. One night at the café, Sarah revealed the secret behind the reasons why women are not allowed to go out or have love marriages; “It is because of *paradushanam*”, she laughs. *Paradushanam*, she explained, is what people are most scared of in Varkala. It is when neighbours or relatives start gossiping about you. As Sudha (p.19) told me; “I can never go to the beach or the cinema because people in the neighbourhood will watch me and talk *paradushanam*”. Her husband – like many other women’s husbands – works in the Gulf, so she can only ever do those things when he is in the country. “There are many restrictions for a woman”, she said; “I don’t like this lifestyle”. We had been in the kitchen nearly all day to cook for breakfast, lunch and dinner with the mother-in-law. She told me that her mother-in-law would not let her go anywhere without permission.

6.2 | “Broken”

As we were talking about the importance of marriage, KG said to me that having kids is just as important. “People will constantly ask you things like: “Any good news yet?””. When you do not have babies soon after you married, they will think you are “broken”. In the same line, Bina told me how important it is to be pregnant within two months of marriage because people will start talking *paradushanam* (p.42). When I asked Savio, KG, Hashjeem and Nanda whether they would do the same for their kids; get them an arranged marriage and follow their own parents in the traditions; most of them said they did not like it, but they would do the same. “We want to break the system”, but at the same time they wanted to respect their parents because family is so important. The lady who said to me that she wanted a war, said that the traditions of the past should not come into the new generations. “The new generation does not think arranged marriage is good”, is what she said. This was also confirmed in the conversations I had with younger girls and boys. One guy said that he thought men and women were equal; “We are the same”, and he had a lot of girls as friends. Yet, his mother was not allowed to meet strange men or go out late. “Many things have to change”, was a common phrase when I talked to younger informants. A lot of younger people have girlfriends and boyfriends, secretively, that they have to break up with once they get the arranged marriage. Though, for men it is easier to try and marry their girlfriends. “There should not be a difference”, a young man told me. A lot of the younger people are “breaking the rules”, as someone told me. Secretively holding hands or kissing in public is not a crime, but “the normal society does not accept it”, Abi told me. An older lady did not agree with the younger generation; “They don’t accept their heritage and their culture”. “We need our freedom”, a female dentist said. “I don’t like this lifestyle”, Deepa told me when I was at her house and she had been cooking all day. She told me that she can never go to the cinema or the beach alone because people will be watching and her mother-in-law will not allow her. When her husband gets back from Dubai, she will get more freedom. Another informant said; “At night I cannot go outside. It is not dangerous, but it is not allowed”. When I asked her who tells her it is not allowed, she said; “When we marry, our husbands tell us, otherwise our parents tell us”. When I asked why, she said; “It is our culture!”. Bina said she had adjusted to her life (p.42). “We have no choices, but it is ok for me”.

6.3 | Conclusion

“There is a generated fear” is what a local priest told me. He argued that it creates a system of dependence for women to get married and do as they are told. The fear is produced and reproduced through the importance of status; people do not want to ‘lose face’. Especially for women, the fear of being seen with a strange man – being a “bad” girl – keeps them in their place. The rhetoric of security, that every man is dangerous and that nobody can be trusted, causes the restrictions to women which are enforced by the *paradushanam*; the social control. Women are constantly watched for their protection, but also for the sake of societal control to see whether women behave or not. To blame women

when something goes wrong or when they cannot bear children, is a way of *othering* them and maintaining the boundaries set by society.

The interesting thing is, that many – both men and women – argued against the system and wanted to ‘break’ it or wage a war. Still, the discourse is embedded in the culture in such a way that some informants also argued that they would do the same. The loyalties to parents and families to uphold the dignity and respect, are very strong. The magical word of *paradushanam* ensures women stay within the boundaries that are set up for them. You are ‘broken’ when you cannot perform the way you should as a woman. Women have ‘adjusted’ to this position; they have traded *power for patronage* as described in the Theoretical Framework. They have traded their power to protect themselves and their power of independence, for the protection by men from men. The notions of *othering*, *boundary maintenance*, *subordinate adaptation*, and *emotion management* overlap in these different notions.

7 | Conclusion

As Mukhopadhyay (2007) stresses; “[..]contrary to received wisdom, the woman of Kerala is yet to earn her ‘freedom’. Prometheus-like, she needs to break free from her shackles before she can realize the full potential of her capabilities”. This research has aimed to listen to the stories of Keralite women and their concerns for their position as females. As stated in the introduction, the argument in this research is that there is a rhetoric of protection and security for women that creates practices of security that limit the capabilities – especially freedom – for women. This is the discourse of security that reproduces inequality for women in Varkala and Kerala. The reproduction of inequality is signified by practices of *othering*, *boundary maintenance*, *subordinate adaptation*, and *emotion management*.

The *masculinist protection* is very strong in Kerala, where men are both the protector and the source of danger in society. This is where hierarchy is created because men attain more power to control certain aspects of the lives of the women; the ‘others’. The rhetoric of a persistent ‘danger’ and the need for protection is visible in various aspects of the lives of women in Varkala and Kerala; they need a “good husband” to protect them, they need to dress properly, they cannot go out alone, they need to be inside after 6 pm. These are some of the most visible indicators of *othering*. This *transmission of cultural capital* as a part of the everyday discourse in society, has allowed for the hierarchy to persist. This rhetoric of danger and the power of the men have contributed to boundaries for women which men do not have. It has created a *discourse* of security that seems to keep women safe, yet also limits them in their freedom.

The *threat of violence* and the limitations of women to the societal *network*, are indicators of an *unequal* distribution of power and therefore the things that women are capable to do in comparison to those things that men can do; dress the way they wish to do, have “love marriages”, come home at the time they please, and most of all; to have no fear for the other sex. Referring to the *capabilities approach* by Sen, the conclusion from the observations and interpretations in this research argues that the limitations to women’s capabilities – as they themselves have argued – is a form of *gender inequality* in Varkala, Kerala. Women do not like their position yet have ‘adjusted’ to it; *subordinate adaptation*. Women have sought ways to *trade their power for patronage*, they accepted their limitations for the protection of their fathers, husbands and sons. This form of *emotion management* by the men has segregated the women from the men as part of the culture in Kerala.

The importance of family and loyalty as part of the *discourse of security*, is a strong enforcer; you cannot lose face because everyone is watching and talking *paradushanam*. The threat of shame is almost as strong as the threat of violence; both need protected from. This brings back the notion of *discourse* because these things are a recurring aspect in the

lives of each woman and therefore more than meanings and practices of security. It is a framework in which men and women exist in Kerala and interact. It is effective and contagious for foreigners like myself. It becomes part of everyday life for women in Kerala.

As argued before, this research is only a limited representation of the reality because of the limited time in the field, a lack of experience as an ethnographer, a lack of cultural experience in Kerala, the small sample of informants, and the fear I experienced through the narratives I listened to. However, the last emotional reflection is also an example to the argument that women are indeed limited by fear which is not necessarily grounded yet mostly constructed through language and practices. Future research could include a more comprehensive and comparative analysis between men and women, young and older people on what the meanings and practices of security mean to them. To understand the meanings and practices of security, could help understand the “Kerala model of development” better and possibly add to the understanding of the complexities of *gender inequality* in general.

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