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”I expected a male reporter”

A qualitative interview-study of the Kerala working culture in
media newsrooms

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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative interview-study of the working conditions for female journalists within an Indian and Keralan context focusing on the female body and spaces. The study takes place in the Keralan society focusing on how women journalists cope with working in a traditional male dominated area and how the female body somehow is seen as an invader in the journalism field, based on pre-assumptions on sex and gender and female placement. From a perspective of gender theory, mainly drawn on Judith Butler's and Nirmal Puwar's theories on gendered spaces and the female body, the study discusses strategies based on the female interviewees own perspectives and experiences working as professional journalists in a society as Kerala, where patriarchal structures still play a dominant role in the division of labor in both the private and the public sphere.

In line with the personal experiences of the interviewees, the thesis finds that their work is repeatedly defined through their femininity and with an underlying focus on their body and appearance – a *space invader* in the journalism field. Although, several of the interviewees experienced a greater focus on gender sensibility within the media newsrooms in India over the last years and a greater improvement in gender equity. Furthermore, the study concludes that the women journalists still struggle with combining their role as journalists and mothers because of strong family norms and traditions in Kerala that affect women's possibilities in working on the same conditions as men. The thesis also states that the great focus on the female body as symbol for motherhood or sexual object is strong, constantly being valued and judged when entering a certain field.

Keywords: Gendered spaces, embodiment, movements, femininity, female empowerment, strategies

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1. Introduction

My starting point of the research has been inspired by older and current news on working conditions for female journalists in India, regarding discrimination, exclusion and harassment, in both social media platforms but also directly in workplaces. Indian newspapers almost daily report about harassments targeted against female journalists - report about female journalists being groped, teased, pinched and abused. Social media have also become a platform where female journalists face daily discrimination such as abusive comments. Only this year, the Indian newspaper Broadly has reported over 30 assaults mainly targeted against female journalists in India, as well as one case of death¹.

In April 2015, India's minister of state for external affairs, V.K Singh, created the term 'presstituted' as a revenge on female journalists who had criticized him. The term has since then been widely used among trolls to insult female journalists in India². Much of the harassments are focused on female journalists who are outspoken, active in so called 'male areas and identify themselves as feminists. The term presstitute can therefore be defined as a *highly gendered* form of discrimination, debasing women who have journalism as their profession, closely linked to the word 'prostitute' that has a low status, so too in the Indian society. In the beginning of 2015, the well-known Keralan journalist VP Rajeena working for the One Media Group, faced massive harassments after writing a detailed post on her Facebookpage regarding sexual harassment against her and her classmates in Kozhikode, Kerala, many years ago. Her post, that was seen as highly controversial, made her receive death threats and thousands of abusive comments on social media.

The focus on many of the comments were targeted directly against her look, her religion and her truthfulness. The case with Rajeena started a new wave of debate in both Kerala and whole India about conditions for women journalists and how newsrooms and social media can be used as a platform to demoralize and demonize women journalists who are present in a traditionally male dominated area in society³.

¹ https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/female-journalists-called-presstitutes-face-extreme-harassment-in-india

Last visit 2016-12-06

² Ibid

³ <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/what-sparked-the-madarsa-controversy-what-did-vp-rajeena-write/1/532132.html> Last visit 2017-01-06

1.1 Objective: Aim and research question

The aim of this study is to investigate *how* women journalists in India, and more specifically in the Keralan context, experience working in a patriarchal area as the journalism field, focusing on strategies, bodies entering forbidden areas and the focus on the female body itself. The fact that discrimination against women journalists are not an unusual part of the working culture, this thesis seek to understand how this is expressed through the concept and status of the female body.

Furthermore, the red line throughout this thesis will be put on gender, spaces, the female body in relation to the male, showing examples of how this can be understood in a Keralan journalism context.

My main research question:

- How do the women journalists perceive the newsroom culture in Kerala, in an everyday context, seen from a perspective of gender?

The following sub-questions will also be added in order to gain a deeper understanding and wider picture of the topic:

- How do the interviewees challenge the subordination?
- Which strategies are being used?
- What is the significance of bodies, embodiment and movements in this context?

1.2 Previous research: Women in journalism

Much of the previous research on women journalists and women entering traditionally male areas, have been focusing on how women are struggling with breaking into deep rooted newsroom patterns excluding them from taking career steps and trying to not only be told to cover the so-called 'soft news' in the daily newsroom work. The relationship between female and male journalists have also been highlighted and discussed. The term *gendered journalism culture* was formulated by the Media scholar Margareta Melin in 2008 in her book *Gendered Journalism Cultures*, in which Melin presents two fields of journalism, seeking to understand how their gendered nature and culture work⁴.

⁴ Margareta Melin (2008) *Gendered Journalism Cultures – Strategies and Tactics in the Fields of Journalism in Britain and Sweden*, University of Göteborg. p 6

Using Bourdieu's theory of *social fields* and Yvonne Hirdman's *theory of the gender system*, Melin tries to understand how women are operating in gendered newsroom-cultures in two case studies made in Sweden and Britain. She concludes that gender is 'hierarchical power'⁵ and in line with both Butler and Bourdieu, gender must be seen as a social construction where gender roles are highly dependant on each other to be able to exist⁶. Using Bourdieu's theoretical framework of male dominance, using the terms *habitus* and *doxa*, his theory is highly interesting to apply when doing research on male discrimination against female journalists in India.

Melin argues that that *symbolic violence*, structured by habitus, is used by the dominating group – men - in order to control women, *the doxa*, in journalistic newsroom culture⁷. Looking closer into the terminology of discrimination against female journalists, using Melin's framework about gendered hierarchy and status among men and women, can give us a hint that the gendered *habitus* are also dependant on a lot of other factors, like class, marital status and religion.

Like Melin states, married women with children have traditionally had a higher status than unmarried women or women without children⁸. Melin's study therefore gives a glimpse of how social discourse and gender roles can be connected to the working conditions for female journalists in Kerala, even though Melin's analysis takes place in another part of the world.

According to Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming in *Women in Journalism*, female journalists can be seen as a paradox. Whilst women still today tend to be marked as 'the other', compared to their male colleagues, men are being seen as the neutrum⁹. Based on male journalists being the norm, female journalists are constantly being *gendered*, though their work and profession is defined by their femininity¹⁰. Hence, the female *body* is put in a central highlight when understanding how female journalists work is being signified. This reality, that was already discussed in 2004 when the book was released, has had a huge impact on the understanding of female journalists working conditions and status, constantly being separated from men's.

⁵ Ibid p 45

⁶ Ibid p 64

⁷ Ibid p 74

⁸ Ibid p 75

⁹ Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, & Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, London, UK: Routledge, 2004, 288 pp, p.1, found as pdf: http://samples.sainsburysebooks.co.uk/9781134496204_sample_529070.pdf (Last visit 2016-12-13)

¹⁰ Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, & Carole Fleming, *Women and Journalism*, London, UK: Routledge, 2004, 288 pp, p.1

The growth of visual media have also had affects on they way women journalists are being marked; sexualization of women and women as decoratives in media have reached a new kind of level. Women news anchors and correspondents are on a daily basis being judged by their look and appearance, while their male colleagues tend to be put out of that judgement criteria. Concepts of femininity and neutral masculinity is therefore a big part in the understanding of the gendered newsroom and how this have changed and increased over time.

In *Failed Theories: Explaining Gender Difference in Journalism*, the Journalism Professor Linda Steiner argues that women have been constantly regarded as intruders, problems and exceptions in journalism and mass media¹¹. An underlying *glass ceiling* affecting women in their journalistic profession is built upon presumed sex/gender differences and the notion that women and men's abilities are different¹². The fear that women's incursion into journalism would lower salaries and drive out men, Steiner writes, created a turning point in many journalism areas¹³. This, in turn, have affected the way female and male journalists see themselves when entering a male dominated area.

Further, Steiner points out that the gender gap among journalists has a long history grounded in the assumption that men and women have different interests. A turning point came when a survey among communication students in the U.S was done and where female students didnt want to cover 'traditional female news' such as cooking and fashion, and regarded themselves as 'unusual' if they covered other topics¹⁴. Steiner also mentions a study done by Elmore in 2007, where fifteen female journalists who quit their profession, were interviewed. In the study, the female jounlists described a highly male dominated newsroom culture where they had to adopt male norms and try to fit into the male culture in order to survive in the field¹⁵.

The news decisions were, according to the respondents, based upon traditional male and female concepts, where females should be rescued from covering 'dangerous' or risky topics such as war, and where men could set the daily agenda of news production¹⁶. Central in almost all discrimination against female journalists is the ongoing focus on the female body and look.

¹¹ Linda Steiner, (2012) "*Failed Theories: Explaining Gender Difference in Journalism*", *The Review of Communication* Vol. 12, No. 3, (pp. 201-223) p. 203ff

¹² Ibid p 202

¹³ Ibid p 202

¹⁴ Linda Steiner, (2012) "*Failed Theories: Explaining Gender Difference in Journalism*", *The Review of Communication* Vol. 12, No. 3, (pp. 201-223) p. 205f

¹⁵ Ibid p 210

¹⁶ Ibid p 210

Within feminist theory and psychology, objectification theory is often used in order to understand how women's self-objectification affects their mental health and motivation in both the private and public sphere¹⁷. Using the female body as a tool for discrimination, is an effective method to control women and their status. Given the fact that journalism in many ways is a highly visible profession – you however expose your profession to a larger group of people on a daily basis. Thus, targeting the female body is a well-known strategy to lower women's status, especially in contexts where gender equity still is a sensitive topic.

The writers states that how an increased attention on objectification theory can be useful when researching women's substance use or abuse. Although the study does not focus primarily on a newsroom field, the theory is applicable on many areas that affect women's role in society¹⁸.

1.3 The question of gender in Kerala

In order to place the theoretical framework in a context, this part will provide a short overview of gender related to Kerala and Kerala history of women, from a working perspective.

Gendered working culture

The state of Kerala in Southern India is unique in terms of female literacy and social progress and gender development, apart from other states in India. The Historian Anna Lindberg describes in her book *Experience and Identity: A Historical Account of Class, Caste, and Gender among the Cashew Workers of Kerala, 1930-2000* that Kerala is far more advanced than the rest of India when it comes to social indicators; literacy, infant mortality, life

¹⁷ Dawn M Szymanski, Lauren B Moffitt, Erika R Carr (2011), "Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to theory and research", *The Counseling Psychologist*. p. 8. Found as pdf: 2016-09-30:

<https://www.apa.org/education/ce/sexual-objectification.pdf>

¹⁸ Linda Steiner, (2012) "Failed Theories: Explaining Gender Difference in Journalism", *The Review of Communication* Vol. 12, No. 3, (pp. 201-223) p 14

expectancy and birth rate¹⁹. This also regards the status of women and women development and increasing participation in the working market²⁰.

Lindberg describes a rapid transformation and development of Kerala in the last eighty years, and describes how Kerala in many ways is to be compared to Western countries in this sense²¹.

By conducting interviews with female and male cashew workers in the Keralan Cashew Industry, focusing on issues such as gender, class and caste; including marriage and family-oriented issues, her research shows that 'gender coding of work tasks has been culturally and ideologically legitimized'²². Lindberg also looked deeper into how her interviewees expressed their experiences on male and female coded duties within the cashew industry, and according to her study, three of the main processes in the industry were defined as 'female occupations'²³. In short, this was legitimized as female duties and based upon biological assumptions on female and male differences, where females were seen as more patient and better on duties such as shelling, peeling and grading the cashew nuts²⁴.

Further, males were seen as more naturally connected to machine-oriented duties, and Lindberg also describes how women often were grouped into the 'women and children' category²⁵. She concludes that women in the cashew industry in Kerala have certain characteristics to women, such as 'nimble fingers and 'patience, while male characteristics were described as being physically strong and having the capacity to handle dangerous machines or operations²⁶.

This view, according to Lindberg, is still very rooted in the Keralan society and taken for granted. Although she describes that this gender-typed working duties have changed over time: long back, these were all duties that men, women and children made. An interesting finding in her research is also the direct view of men who were still working in the female-dominated shelling and peeling sections. Lindberg describes how these men were defined as 'non-men' and not compatible with masculinity, rather these men were considered weak and

¹⁹ Lindberg, Anna, (2001) *Experience and Identity: A Historical Account of Class, Caste, and Gender among the Cashew Workers of Kerala, 1930-2000*, Department of History at Lund University (Studia Historica Lundensia, Lund, p 11

²⁰ Ibid p 11

²¹ Ibid p 11

²² Ibid p 103

²³ Ibid p 122

²⁴ Anna Lindberg, (2001) *Experience and Identity: A Historical Account of Class, Caste, and Gender among the Cashew Workers of Kerala, 1930-2000*, Department of History at Lund University (Studia Historica Lundensia, Lund, p 122

²⁵ Ibid p 122

²⁶ Ibid p 122

non-able-bodied men²⁷. Women, on the other hand, were not at all labelled in the same negative way as men, since their work was seen as typically female skills.

Lindberg states that the social order of the 1950s created a stricter gender division of labor compared to in the 1930s, and the thinking of masculinity and femininity became somehow stronger. What Lindbergs defines as *gendered language* became stronger among factory owners and trade union leaders²⁸. Since this view and assumptions; specific male and specific female duties, were based upon assumptions of biological differences between men and women, this view somehow was seen as natural and not questioned.

In Lindberg's analysis, she highlights that this new gender division of labor, that became stronger after the 1950s, also became a bit of a sensitive topic among the interviewees,. She writes: 'maybe even reflected a shameful past, when women were considered less feminine and men were seen as not masculine'²⁹.

Family first

Like any society, gender roles are defined by the socio-cultural well rooted norms. The family tradition, still being very strong in Kerala, is highly gender divided. This is to be shown both in the private and the public sphere, where women tend to be responsible for the domestic role while men are being active in outside world activities – even though women in Kerala today are also active in the working market³⁰. As presented later in the analysis chapter, there was not even a discussion of who is staying home with the children the first years, or cooking and cleaning the house. This, being an integrated part in the Keralan society, shows that the family tradition is strong and difficult to challenge.

Walking in the city centre of Keralas capital Trivandrum, one can easily note that men are being more present than women in the streets; the public spaces are mainly dominated by men, although changes are in progress. Not least in public transports such as trains or buses, and one rarely sees women walking alone without any company, while that is common for men to do. The right to public space have being discussed all over India by many scholars and feminists, not least since the rape-incident in New Dehli in 2012.

²⁷ Anna Lindberg, (2001) "*Experience and Identity: A Historical Account of Class, Caste, and Gender among the Cashew Workers of Kerala, 1930-2000*, Department of History at Lund University (Studia Historica Lundensia, Lund, p 128

²⁸ Ibid p 131

²⁹ Ibid p 131

³⁰ Kerala Development Report, 2008:419

Exemplifying how the changes in economics opened up new possibilities for women in the working market in India in the last 40 years, as well as changes in cultural rules and norms, the female body is still under a constant scrutiny, being analyzed in the public space for what it wears and how it behaves, based on the strong values of what a woman body *should be*³¹.

2. Theoretical framework

Separating women and men and their professional abilities have been highlighted by many scholars using gender theories to understand how discrimination can be understood within a gender context; one of the most prominent scholars in the gender field is Judith Butler. In this chapter, I will present the theoretical framework that will permeate this study and which is used to analyse and understand the findings of this thesis.

2.1 The gendered female body

As the Gender scholar Linda Steiner points out, gender research has traditionally been focusing mainly on women and less on masculinity³². Since gender research of women in media often is characterized by describing women as the intruders or the problem, Steiner therefore highlights how these theories are grounded when doing research about women in journalism³³. Issues on women in journalism are often viewed as a consequence based on presumed sex/gender differences; sociobiological notions that women have other natural talents that are separated from men's³⁴. This in turn, affects the atmosphere in the whole society; workplaces and at home. The feminist theory book *In other words: writing as a feminist*, the authors Gail Chester and Sigrid Nielsen points out one of the major challenges for female journalists that is highly relevant for the qualitative study seen from many aspects. Taking into consideration that journalism in India is still an area where few women have become very successful, talking of discrimination or abuse 'can easily seem like whining, like an excuse for your own inadequacies'³⁵. During the interview process, it has been crucial to

³¹ <http://www.femina.com/how-indian-women-are-reclaiming-their-right-to-public-space-in-delhi/> 2016-12-13

³² Linda Steiner, (2012) "*Failed Theories: Explaining Gender Difference in Journalism*", *The Review of Communication* Vol. 12, No. 3, p 202, (pp. 201-223)

³³ Ibid p 202

³⁴ Ibid p 202

³⁵ Gail Chester, Sigrid Nielsen (2012) "*In Other Words (RLE Feminist Theory): Writing as a Feminist*" (Routledge Library Editions: Feminist Theory, p 211

bear in mind that this, being a sensitive topic, could bear an underlying perception like the one stated above, and affect the answer of the interviewees. As stated by Larsson, a *cumulative understanding* of the respondent – gestures, silence, hesitation or other signs – are of great importance to note while in the interview situation³⁶.

In line with this, it is also important to mention that all kinds of ethnographic research always focus on people's personal experiences and opinions, it is not least of great importance to note the context that the researcher is operating in³⁷. This means, the thesis must also provide a wider understanding of the context, historical aspects and in this thesis; a specific focus on women's rights framework and gender roles within the Indian and Keralan context. All people, regardless of which country or society that is being examined, rely on structures and social discourses. All connected to the specific history, politics, economics, identity and gender expectations that are present in the society studied. This has been important to bear in mind as a researcher throughout the process.

As mentioned in the introduction, gender theories exist in various forms explained by different scholars. In this thesis, I will mainly draw on Judith Butler's definition of gender throughout the study, in combination with Nirmal Puwar's discussion on bodies and gendered spaces. Butler is well known within the post-structuralist and gender theory field, and one of the most prominent and influential scholars regarding gender knowledge. In her book *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, a short definition of gender is given;

In this sense, gender is no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body, and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self³⁸

³⁶ Lars-Åke Larsson (2010) "Intervjuer" Kommunikationsvetenskapliga metoder, Studentlitteratur, Lund, p 68

³⁷ Karen O'Reilly (2012) "Ethnographic methods: 2nd edition" Oxon: Routledge, p 6

³⁸ Butler Judith (1988) "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" Source: Theatre Journal, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 519-531. Found as pdf, 2016-09-30, p 519
<http://facweb.northseattle.edu/mjacobson/SPECIAL%20TOPICS%20IN%20PSYCHOLOGY/Subjectivity/PerformativeActs.pdf>

Hence, gender can be explained as shaped by time, political discourse and perceptions of men and women which must be understood as nothing consistent, rather in a constant flux of change. Gender is not a fixed truth since it is shaped by the society and the people within, setting the agenda of what men and women are supposed to act like and the interaction between the sexes. One could say that Butler argues that gender is an act that forces a constant repeating and acceptance by people to uphold the relations between them³⁹. Butler further describes the *gendered body* as an historical idea, referring to Merleau-Pontys 'The Body in its Sexual Being' and Simone de Beauvoir, bearing cultural meanings and being able to do certain things, based on pre-assumed possibilities that are connected to the certain body as such. Butler explains it further by stating that 'one does one's body'⁴⁰. Cultural and historical interpretations of what gender, and the female body is and becomes through embodiment, is crucial in her discussion of *doing gender*⁴¹.

Important in her discussion is also the question of punitive consequences, for those who fail or challenge to do their gender right⁴². Understanding gender as a *performative act*, where you get punished if you don't follow the patterns you have been given with your gender, provides us with a deeper understanding of how different strategies can be created in order to survive in a society built upon gender roles and gender acts, where it is crucial to play your role correct. As Butler points out, 'gender is a project which has cultural survival at its end'⁴³. The question of strategies and patterns is therefore crucial when understanding female journalists coping with operating and working in a male-oriented field where patriarchal structures still shape the area and when further discussing the reality for Indian women in journalism.

2.2 Gendered spaces

Female participation in the public sphere comes with many obstacles. As patriarchal structures naturally form the understanding of the public spheres as well as who has the permission to enter certain spaces, bodies who are not historically a part of the major groups face challenges. This is discussed by the American-Indian scholar Nirmal Puwar, who has focused her studies

³⁹ Judith Butler (1988) "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" Source: Theatre Journal, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 519-531. Found as pdf, 2016-09-30, p 520

<http://facweb.northseattle.edu/mjacobson/SPECIAL%20TOPICS%20IN%20PSYCHOLOGY/Subjectivity/PerformativeActs.pdf>

⁴⁰ Ibid p 521

⁴¹ Ibid p 521

⁴² Ibid p 521

⁴³ Ibid p 521ff

on racial minorities and women with a focus on bodies and space⁴⁴. In her book *Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies out of Place*, Puwar analyzes the distinction between the female and male body and how the neutral body always seems to be a male body. She explains it in detail: 'The neutered neutral body is found wanting as a masculine no(body) which by no means includes every(body)'⁴⁵. Since the female body historically has been connected and defined through femininity and the private sphere - being a mother and a wife and thus excluded from the public - a female body can therefore be seen as an interrupter in the male field - a space invader. Puwar's book seeks to find answers on what happens 'when those bodies not expected to occupy certain places do so'⁴⁶. In the chapter 'Ill-fitting suits', Puwar discusses how the body plays a crucial role when understanding how women entering fields where they have not been allowed to enter before, are struggling with their identity and body. Puwar mentions that the relationship between women's bodies and their intellect in many ways has been highly problematic, since perceptions exist that 'there is not a 'natural' congruence between women's bodies and intellectual technical competence (Burriss 1996)'⁴⁷. She also highlights that focusing strongly on women's bodies rather than intellect and capacity can be a 'strategy used to silence women'⁴⁸. By giving examples from the British Chamber and Labor Party in Britain in her research, she found that the subjects given to the party members were highly gendered, as well as symbolic attacks and discrimination on women's bodies when they wanted to discuss specific issues such as abortion or pornography⁴⁹. Even though women struggled hard with being seen as serious competent politicians, they often got the 'soft' subjects and not the typically male 'hard' subjects such as economics or foreign policy matters. Since women are not expected to have specific and equal capacities as men, since they do not, on a symbolic level 'embody' historically relevant abilities and competencies, the female respondents in Puwar's research expressed a general feeling of doubt if they would do the job well and afraid of making mistakes⁵⁰. In line with the theories of Butler and Puwar, the general focus on the female body is also brought up by Laura Mulvey, professor in film and mediastudies at the Birkbeck University in London. In her book *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, she coined the term 'the male gaze' which became a well discussed theory within feminist theory. The theory

⁴⁴ Nirmal Puwar, "*Space Invaders – Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*", Berg, Oxford, New York, 2004 p 10

⁴⁵ Ibid p 15

⁴⁶ Ibid p 1

⁴⁷ Ibid p 89

⁴⁸ Ibid p 89

⁴⁹ Ibid p 89

⁵⁰ Ibid p 89

stresses that the so called *male gaze* denies women human identity, since the heterosexual male view on women degrades them to objects and only a form of physical appearance⁵¹. In this tradition, women are being looked at, while men never bears the 'burden of sexual objectification'⁵². Thus, women are the contradiction to men, while men are active, women are passive and being objects for the dominating *male gaze*. The theory of the male gaze can be applied in almost all different spheres of society, and it is especially suitable in media studies where the representation of women and men and how they are being viewed can give us insights in how structures are affecting our behaviours and mindset. Applying this understanding on the newsroom culture described by the interviewees, will serve the research with a wider understanding of *how* deeply rooted the status of the female body and concepts of a woman's body is. As well as how this can be reproduced in the critics against women in a traditionally male dominated area like the journalistic newsroom, making it difficult for women to work on the same conditions as their male colleagues. This thesis seeks to further add on these theories, but by putting the female body in focus, and how the female body is constantly being placed in 'wrong' and 'right' places and circumstances, this research will hopefully contribute to a wider perspective of how women and their profession always tend to be closely linked to the body.

3. Methodology

3.1 Qualitative personal interviews

My material is based on qualitative personal interviews with a total of six interviewees: female journalists in Kerala currently working in both digital and visual newsrooms, focusing mainly on personal interviews one to one. As stated by Lars-Åke Larsson, personal interviews can have different forms and can be held both personal and in groups together⁵³. Interviews aiming to reach qualified knowledge is nothing new, especially within the field of humaniora and social science. Personal interviews and participant observations are particularly suitable for interviews with journalists according to Larsson⁵⁴. Being able to discover certain

⁵¹ Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism*: Introductory Readings. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 833-44, p 62

⁵² Ibid p 63

⁵³ Larsson, Lars-Åke (2010) "Intervjuer" *Kommunikationsvetenskapliga metoder*, Studentlitteratur, Lund, p 53

⁵⁴ Ibid p 54

behaviours or lack of inclusiveness, or exclusiveness, within an interaction, is of great importance for social research.

A study that aims to gain insights in people's personal experiences of everyday life, and in this case, the atmosphere in different newsrooms, highly benefits from this method. Larsson also points out that *interview studies* are often combined with data sampling and interviews in order to understand the context from both a personal and fact-based ground⁵⁵. An historical background and a context-based understanding of the Indian and Keralan history regarding women in media has therefore been presented. Thus, this study is a combination of interviews and historical facts regarding the role of the female body in journalism, where the main focus has been put at the personal experiences expressed by the interviewees. My working methodology has been inspired by The Danish lecturer in Journalism, Janne Møller Hartley, who has carried out her academic thesis '*Radikalisering af kampzonen. En analyse af netjournalistisk praksis og selvforståelse i spaendingsfeltet mellem idealer og publikum*' combining semi-structured interviews as well as participant observations using mainly primary data, focusing on three different Danish newsrooms⁵⁶. Her study is built upon an empirical focus based on three elements: an historical perspective, a local focus on current social contexts and lastly on the process itself⁵⁷. She is also using the term *microperspective* in order to be able to focus on small and important details that construct the production of news.

The micro- and macroperspective is a method suitable when focusing on greater fields, such as newsrooms areas, where small changes can be of great importance for the understanding of a specific social phenomena. In my research, an important part of the research process has applied this perspective when visiting newsrooms, as well as in the personal interviews. The things or signs that are perhaps more difficult to notice must also be taken into consideration, such as underlying meanings and body language.

Research design

The interviews have all been conducted one-to-one. In three of the cases, I have visited the workplaces of the interviewees. We have also met in small cafés outside the workplaces and

⁵⁵ Larsson, Lars-Åke (2010) "*Intervjuer*" Kommunikationsvetenskapliga metoder, Studentlitteratur, Lund, p 57

⁵⁶ J Møller Hartley (2011) "*Radikalisering af kampzonen. En analyse af netjournalistisk praksis og selvforståelse i spaendingsfeltet mellem idealer og publikum*" Roskilde: Roskilde universitet, p 20

⁵⁷ Ibid p 21

even outside the city where they usually work, since two of the interviewees are working as freelance reporters and do not have a regular office to go to on a daily basis. Not all of the interviews have been recorded, thus every interview have been well noted and the opportunity for the informants to doublecheck their answers have been given. In some cases, a few follow-up questions were done over e-mail correspondence.

3.2 Selfreflections – doing interviews in a Keralan context

This thesis will be imbued by a social constructivist ontological approach. According to Bryman, a social constructivist approach means that social interaction affects social phenomena and the way people are reacting and answering in a research or interview situation⁵⁸. Understanding Bryman means that one is aware of her or his role as a researcher and that conditions and societies are in a constant time of change and not fixed. The definition of social constructivism can be explained like the deeper understanding of how subjective views affected by social circumstances affect both the researcher and the respondents. That implies, in another situation/another time or place or with other respondents, the answers and the outcome may have been totally different. Being aware of this as a researcher, serves the researcher with a humility and insight for the process and the outcome of a thesis⁵⁹.

Considering Brymans theories about social constructivist approach to qualitative research, it is crucial for me as a social researcher to clarify and understand my own role and impact on the research. Operating within an Indian context, it is highly important to be aware of my own perceptions about my topic and respondents, as well as the informants view of me. My background and education have naturally shaped my perception of equality and gender - perceptions that I might not share with the interviewees I meet. Using qualitative method as a researcher one should be aware of, throughout the whole process, how these views and underlying perceptions are forming the research result as well as the outline of the interviews conducted.

⁵⁸ Alan Bryman (2012) *"Social Research Methods"* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 33

⁵⁹ Ibid p 33ff

4. Analysis

4.1 Introduction of the interviewees

The names used in this thesis have been anonymized. Since the study regards sensitive topics about power and gender in workplaces, the decision to only mention age, workplace and family situation has been decided. In this section, a brief presentation of the interviewees and their background is being outlined. Since the family status and marriage is still very important in Kerala, this is mentioned in each presentation, while it has been important to understand the interviewees situation and their answers, since family have a big influence on women's life and working possibilities.

Sooraya, 30, working as a freelance journalist focusing on politics, socio-economic issues. Grew up in Kerala, Kollam, and now lives in a village outside Trivandrum. Married and has one child. Master in Communication and Journalism.

Vathy, 34, News anchor at TV-channel (one of the largest media institutions in Trivandrum) and has also been working as editor. She has been working with TV and visual media for ten years at her current workplace. Master in Communication and journalism. Married and has one child.

Jyothi, 32, Sub-editor, newspaper, focusing on infrastructure and city issues. Married and has one child. Master in Communication and Journalism, has been working in the newsroom for 3,5 years.

Saram, 25, Sub-editor, newspaper, focusing on transport and infrastructure, also as correspondent and copy editor. Has been working in the current workplace since January 2015. Lives in Trivandrum, not married. Master in Communication and journalism.

Nenu, 24, Freelance journalist, focusing on tourism and lifestyle. Grew up in Kerala. Interested in all forms of cooking, lifestyle projects and tourism issues in Kerala. Not married. Bachelor in Journalism and news writing.

Chiara, 35, Journalist/principal correspondent at a daily newspaper, focusing on politics and reporting on local news in Trivandrum. Married and has two children. Master in Social science with focus on journalism.

4.2 Findings

In this chapter, the data from the interviews in Kerala is being presented. The results have been divided into different themes, inspired by Hans Dahlgren's text regarding "tematiska fält". The emphasis has been put on certain *fields* that was found out as results of the interviews, such as specific issues that were highlighted by several of the interviewees. Emphasis has thus been put on finding themes and underlying meaning in the stories and thoughts being expressed by the interviewees. This means, according to Dahlgren, that one tries to find what is 'below the surface of the story'⁶⁰. After listening to the interviews and reading the notes again and again, certain categories emerged and a deeper form of analysis and understanding of the answers in the interviews was to be seen.

4.3 Is this the right place for you, girl?

Just a few weeks after starting my university studies, I was being told by both male and female people around me that I would face a lot of obstacles as a female journalist. I don't think they wanted to scare me from the profession, but on the other hand, it made me think twice. It is obviously clear that some of them were right and just being honest, but I had the feeling that it was not as bad as they said⁶¹

What was common in all the interviews, was the general awareness of gender, gender roles and the interviewees own awareness of their role as women in journalism. Throughout all of the six interviews, it was clear that all of the female journalists had thought about their future in journalism as women: for instance when first of all choosing to go to university and study journalism, throughout their studies and also when entering the labor market as fully educated journalists.

Their common experience in being told different 'truths' about women in journalism, by teachers, classmates or family and relatives, was something consistent across all interviews. The fact that all of the stories, or 'warnings', somehow stressed subtle fears about their future,

⁶⁰ https://kurs.ht.lu.se/uploads/media/Tematiska_fa_lit_Dahlgren.pdf p 94

⁶¹ Interview Nenu

it is easy to see that Nirmal Puwars discussion on gendered spaces and women's subordinate role is consolidating the image of the man as the norm, and the woman as an outsider, also in the journalism field.

When asking about if they had ever heard their male student friends or male colleagues getting these similar 'warnings' when choosing to become journalists, the interviewees were all quite sure that it was an apprehension primarily focused on women. Those so called 'warnings', according to one of the interviewees, were not seldom expressed with both thoughtfulness and care – simply that people were being realistic about obstacles for women journalists and wanted to make her aware of that. But, as Nenu highlights, she also became skeptical about the underlying purposes in telling her about eventual obstacles that she could face in her profession.

I don't know, but when some said it would be really bad for me, I got a feeling that they wanted me to do something else and not journalism. Why? That I don't know! Actually, I am very forward, tough and not afraid to talk high or ask people things.⁶²

As Puwar points out 'there is a connection between bodies and space, which is built, repeated and contested over time'⁶³. Women, in this sense, are traditionally not the 'natural occupants' of this the journalism field. Their presence and entry is therefore a challenge for the field and structures within it. This becomes clear in Nenu's experience, since she would probably not have got the same 'advice' if she was a man.

When Nenu explains her thoughts about people expressing doubts regarding her choice of profession, something interesting also emerges in the conversation. In Leonie Huddy's and Nayda Terkildsen's text *Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates*, gender-traits - which can be explained as gender-linked personality traits - is being discussed⁶⁴. In their text, they state that there are 'remarkably uniform differences in the

⁶² Interview Nenu

⁶³ Nirmal Puwar, *"Space Invaders – Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place"*, Berg, Oxford, New York, 2004 p 8

⁶⁴ Leonie Huddy, Nayda Terkildsen, *"Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidate"*s Article in American Journal of Political Science · February 1993, p 119, pdf: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Leonie_Huddy/publication/267155069_Gender_Stereotypes_and_the_Perception_of_Male_and_Female_Candidates/links/5446b18f0cf2f14fb8111a7b.pdf Last visit 2017-01-06

personality traits ascribed to men and women'⁶⁵. Whereas males are being portrayed as tough and aggressive, the typical female is kind and gentle⁶⁶.

In Nenu's way of describing herself, one can easily see that she is aware of these typically male and female characteristics and how they also influence the journalism field, and unconsciously want to present herself as a woman fitting in this area, because she is not the 'typical woman' since she is 'tough and forward'. It is therefore interesting to ask the question why she feels a need to highlight herself in this light? If she would describe herself with typically female 'gender-traits', would that affect the perception of her capacity or competence as journalist in a negative way? In the interview with Jyothi, she expresses a similar view on being told about obstacles for female journalists:

Some said to me I would only get to cover soft beats, typically soft news about fashion or family stuff, while men would be given all the tough and hard ones. That was told to me more than once. When I started my first job I realized that it could be so, but it was up to me. If you perform well, as a woman, you will be given good jobs⁶⁷

According to the account of both Nenu and Jyothi, it becomes clear that they both consider their performance and characteristics as very important in journalism – perform well, being forward and you will be given good jobs. Thus, you somehow have to earn, or deserve, these benefits – 'good jobs' - in order to meet certain criteria based on your appearance and behaviour. These criteria is of course based on performing well, be on time, and do your job well, but it doesn't seem to be fully enough. Apart from that, one can also interpret these criteria as having certain characteristics that are traditionally seen as typically male, since journalism is a male dominated area historically. Sooraya is on a similar track in her discussion:

I think many wants to push female journalists, like we should trust ourselves and be forward, and that's good. It's a lot of what we should be like, and as a journalist, you cannot be shy, you have to sometimes ask tough questions and not be too gentle⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Leonie Huddy, Nayda Terkildsen, "Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidate"s **Article** in *American Journal of Political Science* · February 1993, p 121

⁶⁶ Ibid p 122

⁶⁷ Interview Jyothi

⁶⁸ Interview Sooraya

When entering an area that traditionally haven't been opened for everyone, as the newsroom, certain traditions and patterns become clear to the 'occupants' - the space invaders⁶⁹ of the area, in this case female journalists. How are they relating to this? Both Nenu and Sooraya expressed in between the lines that a female journalist has to be forward, a characteristic that is not traditionally linked to be typically female. Further, they all stated that it is of great importance for females to show that they actually have the capacity that is required, to be a good journalist and get interesting jobs. Here we can see how gender stereotypes is emerging in their discussion, and their way to handle it.

The Political scientist scholars Terkildsen and Huddy are talking about how one can 'overcome the possibly negative consequences of gender stereotypes that result in female candidates being viewed as less competent at handling typically male issues such as defense and military'⁷⁰. Their study is focusing mainly on female and male political candidates, a group that also have many similarities when it comes to journalists – covering several issues in society. They suggest that females have two options: either they can downplay their 'female' linked traits, such as kindness and softness, in order to favor more masculine traits, as the ones mentioned above⁷¹. Since the masculine traits in their study were seen as being more beneficial than female traits being a candidate, female candidates faced great struggle in order to find an identity that was accepted in their area⁷². This strategy has also been used in the case of the interviewees.

The other option is to emphasize more typically male issues – in the field of journalism it could be to cover politics and economics rather than childcare or healthcare issues⁷³. In the case with the interviewees, it seemed that they were all aware of this 'pretermind template' of *what* a journalist must be like, inevitably affected by the patriarchal structures and history.

Thus, it was not always seen in a negative light by all of the interviewees – rather expressed like 'it is the way it is'. This is though problematized in Sooraya's story. When she entered her first job as a reporter at a local newspaper, her aim was to work mainly with political

⁶⁹ Nirmal Puwar, *"Space Invaders – Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place"*, Berg, Oxford, New York, 2004 p 8

⁷⁰ Leonie Huddy, Nayda Terkildsen, *"Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidate"*s Article in American Journal of Political Science · February 1993, p 125, pdf: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Leonie_Huddy/publication/267155069_Gender_Stereotypes_and_the_Perception_of_Male_and_Female_Candidates/links/5446b18f0cf2f14fb8111a7b.pdf Last visit 2017-01-06

⁷¹ Ibid p 125

⁷² Ibid p 142

⁷³ Ibid p 125

issues. Being clear to her colleagues and boss that this was her profession and interest, she faced a great male dominance in this section and found it difficult to get through what she called a 'impenetrable wall' in the newsroom. She describes it further:

It was, well I would say, like being invited to something but still being put outside. I was there but I could not do much. If I were lucky, I could write something easy about a politician visiting some place, but I never went to the place in real, I just got told from my male colleagues about what to write. Once, one of the men said it was a "shirtjob" to cover politics and that females would affect the serious interviews in a bad way. I didn't like that at all. That is why I quit.⁷⁴

Her story about being told that covering politics was a typical 'shirtjob' – a male profession – can be understood through Butler's theory on gendered bodies being *materialized possibilities*⁷⁵. When she states that bodies come with historical and cultural possibilities and that the body is a materiality that bears meaning, it is clear in the case with Sooraya that her gender performance at the male dominated political section did not fit with possibilities historically linked to her gender.

Therefore, as Butler puts it, *gender performance* also comes with punitive consequences⁷⁶. Being left out in the cold, excluded, and on top of that being told that politics is a 'shirtjob' discloses a clear gender division in the perception of what a female and male journalist can, or can not, do in the newsroom. Such a punitive consequence as Butler highlights, resulted in Sooraya quitting her job, since she couldn't stand the unfair exclusion from an area that was also her's. She, as Butler puts it, somehow failed to do her gender, and therefore she was punished⁷⁷.

'Ill-fitting suits'

After quitting her job at the newspaper, Sooraya describes it being a difficult situation to find a new job because of her fear facing the same atmosphere at the new workplace. Since she was clear about that she didn't want to change her interest of covering politics, she decided to

⁷⁴ Interview Sooraya

⁷⁵ Judith Butler (1988) "*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*" Source: Theatre Journal, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 519-531. Found as pdf, 2016-09-30, p 521
<http://facweb.northseattle.edu/mjacobson/SPECIAL%20TOPICS%20IN%20PSYCHOLOGY/Subjectivity/PerformativeActs.pdf>

⁷⁶ Ibid p 522

⁷⁷ Ibid p 522

work as a freelance reporter. After having her first child, she got the opportunity to work part-time at a small online-magazine as a freelance reporter, still focusing on political news.

I was afraid of the newsroom atmosphere because of bad experiences. My husband told me I might find it easier to work on my own. Actually, it was both negative and positive in the beginning. Now, after some years, I know this is right for me. I can cover what I want and wearing things without getting commented. Of course, men that I interview can say things, but when the interview is done and published, I can just erase those things and it doesn't affect me. I have female friends working in newsrooms who have never got any bad comments, maybe I just had bad luck. But for me now, it is freedom working like this.⁷⁸

Only Sooraya actually faced the reality that both Nenu and Jyothi were told could be common, before entering the working market as journalists. None of the two expressed any experiences of being excluded from the sections they wanted to work in, as long as they worked hard and performed well. Instead, they stressed that it was up to them to take extra effort and showing their capacity, in order to get the 'beats' they wanted.

As discussed earlier, the interviewees not seldom stressed the fact that it was up to them to perform well in order to be given beats. Even though none of the interviewees discussed masculinity or even mentioned the term, the concept of masculinity is still present in what they actually are saying. In the Social Professor Raewyn Connell's theory on masculinities, she claims that so called 'categorical theory treats women and men as pre-formed categories',⁷⁹ where differences in social behaviour are being highlighted, mainly explained by biology (men are strong, women are weak etc). In the interviews, this categorisation is unconsciously being touched. A journalist shall have specific characteristics, according to the interviewees, whereas terms such as 'forward', 'tough' and 'not being afraid of talk high and outloud' as well as being thick-skinned, were all characteristics that were mentioned as important during the interviews. On the question of eventual differences in work tasks between female and male journalists in the newsroom, Jyothi explains:

⁷⁸ Interview Sooraya

⁷⁹ Raewyn Connell, *"The Men and The Boys"*, University of California Press, 2000, p 18

Maybe some women are too much in the back. Then they will not get what they want, maybe some people – often men but it can also be other women – take it instead. It is only up to you⁸⁰

By analyzing their response and answers through the lense of Butler, Puwar nad Connell, it is clear that all of these characteristics are traditonally runned from a male journalist ideal, that is not being fully questioned. This is an interesting observation, since one can really ask the question whether these characteristics are supposed to be more important than others in journalism?

One could just as well have higlighted human qualities such as being responsive and empathetic, psychologically clever and to be smooth in difficult situations that journalists often face – for instance meeting people under tough circumstances in life, bearing anger, sadness or frustration. In the case of journalism, traditionally 'female' characteristics would therefore also be of great importance, since journalism is largely a question about human touch and getting people's trust. Though, these were not brought up as particularly important during the interviews.

Chiara, who works as a full time employee at a daily newspaper and also covering politics, shares a slightly different view on the question regarding 'male' and 'female' topics. Her reasoning emphasizes that women might are excluded from some topics because their participation in politics or economics have been very small throughout the history in India.

Women lack in participation in politics in history. We haven't been a real part of that and it is still developing. I don't say that women dont have the same capacity as men, but my point is that we have to make up for lost knowledge and maybe listen to men who have worked with this longer. In hundred years it will change but now, I can understand why it is sometimes separated. And that is bad, of course. Even though that is not my personal experience.⁸¹

Like Nirmal Puwar discusses, it here becomes clear that women, as space invaders in the journalism room, automatically disturb the existing rules and patterns that have been in the workplace for decades. And it seems to be both time consuming and sometimes difficult to break those patterns. In her chapter on *Organisational Terror*,

⁸⁰ Interview Jyothi

⁸¹ Interview Chiara

Puwar highlights changed dynamics in a male space where female presence becomes greater, and how this affects the male dominance⁸².

She uses terms such as war and battles to show how such increase of female presence has been viewed by males – something she chooses to label as 'organisational territorial block'⁸³. As stated in the interview with Chiara, her reasoning shows that female entrance in the journalism field *do* cause disorientation and confusion among both males and females. Her experience was to not seldom be given the comment 'I expected a male reporter' from men when she went out in the field to do interviews about infrastructure or other 'typical male' issues. On the other hand, Chiara does not seem to be sure on how this will change without women being excluded from certain rooms and issues, at least for a while. In the interview with Saram, which touched on the similar problem, her solution to the 'problem' is explained to be mainly about time:

It will change to the better, I am totally sure, since I can see it already happened in my workplace. I am not just lucky, people are aware of this. The more women who become journalists, the less will the problem be. It's a question of time and education⁸⁴

In the material above, examples of women being 'space invaders' causing disorientation have been shown, although the fact that the majority of the interviewees didn't associate their role with being treated in a negative way, although different in many situations, which was even more clear in terms of motherhood and family situation. Among the interviewees, only Sooraya had experiences with being treated badly and excluded regarding the topics she wanted to cover, which became so bad that she decided to quit her job. Although Chiara, Saram and Jyothi were more about claiming that women must be more 'forward' in order to get jobs – that is to say, women bear a great responsibility for their own success and opportunities, according to the interviewees.

This can be translated and understood through Terkildsen's and Huddy's discussion on female strategies in male dominated workplaces, as well as Melin's theory on symbolic

⁸² Nirmal Puwar, *"Space Invaders – Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place"*, Berg, Oxford, New York, 2004 p 53

⁸³ Ibid p 53

⁸⁴ Interview Saram

violence. By adopting male linked traits, a women can easier survive in a male dominated area. But it also means, that some women maybe need to change their way of being, in order to fit in. Lastly, the interviewees generally expressed a common humility towards people who told them about eventual obstacles, since they stressed that many of the advices they were given, also were given by kindness and encouragement.

4.4 Mother and journalist; people raising eyebrows

Men can work in the evening, women who have family...then it is more difficult⁸⁵

As being stated earlier, family plays a crucial role in the Keralan, and Indian, society, especially for women. While many workplaces are equal in terms of division of labor, families and the care of children is still a woman's job. According to the Gender scholars Alison M Jaggar's and Susan Bordo's reasoning in *Gender, body, knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, the female body is a symbol of existing ideological constructions of what a female body is, and where it should be in the daily life⁸⁶. Thus, the female body is in many ways an object for social control – women are linked to reproduction, motherhood and beauty as well as the private instead of the public sphere, and to exist in certain rooms of society, others not. The female body, as well as the male, have a symbolic meaning and political meaning⁸⁷. This is clear in Jyothi's description of women's possibilities in working in the evenings. This can be explained as the female body being accepted at work at a certain timeframe, but a female body appearing in the newsroom after his timeframe, is strange and questioned by others.

This automatically affects the flexibilities and possibilities to work for women – but it seemed to be quite unquestioned among a majority of the interviewees. All of the interviewees, apart from Vathy who is working as a news-anchor in Television, had clear timeframes in the daily working hours, especially those who had children and were married. Although, Saram and Nenu, who did not yet had a family and children, stretched these

⁸⁵ Interview Jyothi

⁸⁶ Susan Bordo, Alison M Jaggar, "Gender/body/knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing", New Brunswick N.J, Rutgers University Press, 1989, p 14

⁸⁷ Ibid p 15

'implied' conditions, but not without meeting critics. Also Chiara, who sometimes stayed longer than six in the evening, faced experiences of being questioned in a negative sense.

I used to work until eight in the evening until I had my child. Then, people started to say 'oh are you staying so late?', raising eyebrows. Men are more relaxed, but women have to go to their house at six. In the evening, it is the most 'happening time' in journalism so we miss a lot. To people who raise their eyebrows, I just don't say goodbye anymore when I leave⁸⁸

Using this kind of rhetoric towards women can be seen as a strategy to somehow 'label' women who are working late as bad mothers, reproducing stereotypes of what a woman should be like and by using motherhood as a tool to make women getting bad conscience for their family. Nirmal Puwar's discussion on space invaders is highly applicable on these kind of situations where it becomes clear that the woman, the mother, is in a 'wrong' place invading the male area. She is, by being a mother, relegated to the private sphere and when she turns up in the public – especially at a time when she should be home – it is a clear indication of that she 'is wrong'. In Chiara's case, by working late in the evenings despite that she had become a mother, is to be seen as what Butler describes as *failing to do gender* and therefore punitive consequences appear – in this case by Chiara being commented in a negative way appealing on her role as a mother and wife⁸⁹. If she, according to Butler, would have done her gender right and avoiding punitive consequences – not failing – she should not have been working late in the evening, nor focusing on typically male subjects.

In this reality being expressed by Chiara and the other interviewees, one could easily understand that it is both difficult and time consuming to challenge these predetermined rules, especially as a female, on a daily basis at your work. Getting negative 'gaze', negative comments and no appreciation when doing your profession but in the wrong time and in the wrong field, is a complex problem that relies on many complicated issues that are co-working and very difficult to break. Especially since a lot of the critics targeted against women is a

⁸⁸ Interview Chiara

⁸⁹ Judith Butler (1988) "*Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*" Source: Theatre Journal, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 519-531. Found as pdf, 2016-09-30, p 521 <http://facweb.northseattle.edu/mjacobson/SPECIAL%20TOPICS%20IN%20PSYCHOLOGY/Subjectivity/PerformativeActs.pdf>

about what their body is *symbolizing*. According to Chiara, she came to a point when she stopped caring about this:

Sometimes I just get too tired, why can I not do as I like without other people caring? I used to think that earlier, when I still cared about what people said. Thick skin, it is a good thing. Just close you ears, right? You don't have to listen, listen to yourself is enough⁹⁰

4.5 Don't underestimate the power of a gender-sensitive boss

Although several of the interviewees had experiences in being commented when they showed up later than expected in the evening, a clear difference between digital and visual media has emerged during the interviews. Vathy, who is both a mother and news-anchor at one of the tv-channels in Kerala, is aware of the complex roles of being both a full-time working journalist and also a mother.

In Kerala, in my workplace, its more women than men. Males are less, more women are coming to the field. But the irony is that many women are leaving their jobs after marriage, to find a comfortable job. As you know, visual media means 24/7 work, nightshifts and morningshifts. With a family, it's a little bit hard to take together both these roles. I see it so often. Girls are coming to my workplace, around 21-22 years old, and at 25, they marry. Then they are gone⁹¹

Despite this reality, Vathy did not see any problems for herself managing to handle both the role as a mother and wife and she is clear about what the most important reason is: a great support from family and relatives. She points out that family structures, especially in Kerala, are very 'rigid' and to have a supporting husband is therefore highly valuable⁹². If you want to work in visual media, the conditions are clear: you have to be able to work both night and days.

Compared to digital media, where women are being more restricted in working night shifts, Saram states that it is a combination of both traditional gender roles but also formal

⁹⁰ Interview Chiara

⁹¹ Interview Vathy

⁹² Interview Vathy

restrictions for women that makes it difficult for women to work late night shifts at a newspaper. As a news anchor, you mostly stay inside the tv-station, and when you visit other places, you have a whole team with you, and seldom work on your own, compared to working with digital media.

It can be dangerous as a woman journalist to work in the night, alone, and to be sent out on your own is never the case. Then you have to have someone, a man, with you, that's a rule, while a man can easily go on his own⁹³

According to the Kerala High Court, women employees can not be asked to work after 10pm, according to a new law decided in 2016⁹⁴. The main reason is because of safety for women, especially regarding transportation back to their homes after finishing work. This is the responsibility of the employer to follow.

4.6 The body, the profession and the male gaze

A majority of the interviewees all had experiences of being seen as women on the first hand, and secondly as journalists, although this was not always outspoken directly or even explained in a negative way. As mentioned earlier, women in this study are the ones who are given 'good advice' or being told on forehand of what kind of obstacles they will face, their working hours are being restricted because of social family norms and when a woman breaks one of these patterns, she is met by skepticism and sometimes judgemental, raised eyebrows. Why? Based on both Butler and Puwar's theories on gender, women have to adapt to the social gender norms that are set up in Kerala, and in the journalism field, in several ways. Because she is a female journalist, and not a male journalist, and because of society norms where male appearance is still the norm and female representation is on the rise, but still has to operate under other more restricted premises than male colleagues.

Considering this aspect, women *have to* find strategies – conscious or not – to meet this reality that is sometimes more or less present. The British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey, mentioned earlier, coined the term 'The male gaze' in 1975 in her text *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, a term that can also be explained as the male eye

⁹³ Interview Saram

⁹⁴ <https://www.saddahaq.com/kerala-hc-no-women-should-be-asked-to-work-beyond-10pm>) Last visit 2017-01-06

objectifying women while they themselves are seen as the subject. When digging deeper into the role of women in journalism, the interviewee's picture of themselves also reflected how they were somehow seen by men. How is this expressed throughout the interviews in this study?

According to Mulvey, the male gaze is not comparable with the female gaze, since the male gaze is highly dependant on male superiority and the subordination of women. In this subordinate role, women are being looked at, judged and their appearance is coded on different levels. Mainly, a female appearance is shaped by men's phantasies and a female body is styled according to this phantasy⁹⁵. Thus the male gaze can also be explained as a gaze that place women in different categories, but always as objects in various ways. As being stated by Szymanski, objectification of women is a way of controlling their position. To be looked at as a symbol of motherhood and as a wife, bears a set of expectations of what you are and what you should be, as well as being seen as a sexual object, married or unmarried. Not least, *where* you should be⁹⁶. Stating this, one can conclude that only the appearance of a women leads to you being put in a specific category and place in society, since the traditional female is not dominating the public sphere. If you then 'break' the set of 'rules' that comes with this category, *the performative act* as Butler states, you will meet punitive consequences⁹⁷. In the case of this study, we have seen examples of women facing raised eyebrows and underlying critics about them being mothers combining their motherhood with also working as journalist, as well as one of the interviewees quitting her job since she felt excluded from the 'male coded' topics she wanted to cover.

By fitting into these categories – Mulvey mentions one of the most present ones as the 'erotic object', you have to style yourself according to this⁹⁸. In short, it has to be understood as an implicit 'requirement' or reality that one has to react and relate to. One can interpret the following quote from Vathy, who is working in visual media, as being highly aware of the male gaze and how this gaze shapes the appearance of women in media.

⁹⁵ Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism*: Introductory Readings. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 833-44, p 62

⁹⁶ Dawn M Szymanski, Lauren B Moffitt, Erika R Carr (2011), "Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to theory and research", *The Counseling Psychologist*. Found as pdf 2016-09-30: <https://www.apa.org/education/ce/sexual-objectification.pdf>

⁹⁷ Judith Butler (1988) "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" Source: *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 519-531. Found as pdf, 2016-09-30, p 521 <http://facweb.northseattle.edu/mjacobson/SPECIAL%20TOPICS%20IN%20PSYCHOLOGY/Subjectivity/PerformativeActs.pdf>

⁹⁸ Laura Mulvey. 1999, p 62

Of course I am aware of how I dress, I must be. It is not only because I work in visual media. Some clothes may take the attention away from what you want to say, maybe disrespect others, or appear inappropriate, but you also want to look good in TV which is a part of the job. Yes you can get comments on your body, maybe like 'you look good in that dress' or so⁹⁹

Vathy was not the only one who expressed thoughts about the choice of clothes. In terms of clothing, a majority of the interviewees expressed that a stricter clothing, 'not too feminine' was sometimes better than choosing to wear more feminine, colorful clothes – especially when doing interviews with men. This is in line with the earlier discussion on how 'male personality' traits, compared to 'female personality' traits, also play a crucial role in clothing. Nirmal Puwar states '*The neutered neutral body is found wanting as a masculine no(body) which by no means includes every(body).*'¹⁰⁰.

One can on the other hand ask, how can this be changed and challenged if a majority still feel that they need to adopt male characteristics and male clothing within journalism, in order to be seen as more competent?

Understanding this through the interviewee's view on clothing, a male 'costume' in both characteristics and way of looking is seen as neutral compared to a traditionally female clothing, and therefore something that women can adapt in order to become more accepted and seen as competent. Journalists in the first hand, women in the second, whereas males are seen as only journalists. It is also a clear indication of the history of the journalism profession – *being a male*, and what comes with this picture of the profession from a female perspective.

5. Summary/Discussion

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate how women journalists in Kerala, India, experience the newsroom culture from a perspective of gender, power and embodiment, and how their female gender is seen as an interrupter in the male dominated journalistic field. As being highlighted, the female body and appearance comes with a set of symbolic meaning as well as characteristics, that traditionally have been put outside the journalism field and put into the private.

⁹⁹ Interview Vathy

¹⁰⁰ Puwar, 2004, p 15

During the interviews conducted, several interesting issues have been discussed and put into light. Although the majority of the women interviewees expressed positive experiences in working in media newsrooms and feelings of being treated in the same way as their male colleagues in many ways, differences although occurred in varying degrees – mainly in terms of flexibility in working hours, family, clothing and treatment both in the newsroom but also in the field, as well as the form of 'discrimination' targeted against the female body and look. This was not always seen as a problem, although it was mentioned.

Interesting to see was also how the appearance of the female body was in focus in so many different situations. Thus, what we can see is that the female body constantly comes with a set of expectations and pre-assumed characteristics, apart from the male body as the 'neutrum' and norm. This was not least shown in the answers by some of the interviewees who were being told that journalism is a 'shirt-job' and not suitable for women. As being highlighted, *the male gaze* still plays a crucial role in society and media, shaping women and making them aware of their look and body in a very different way compared to men. The great challenge in all societies, not least in India and Kerala, is thus to change the existing gender roles and the symbols and values they are built upon. A journalist can wear both costume and dress, being both forward and having empathy as well as being present mothers and fathers in the private sphere as well as in the public as professional workers. Changing of people's mindset, trying to challenge deep rooted notions of women and men is the first step towards such change, that will gain both men and women in the long run. Many parallels can also be drawn to Sweden in this regard, where women still are being constantly judged by their look in media, but also existing male stereotypes in journalism that are still present.

Personal characteristics highlighted as important and desirable for journalists, proved to be traditionally male, like being forward, tough and ongoing. This can also be seen as a contradiction, since one can also stress that traditionally 'female' characteristics such as good listening, empathy and socially smooth personality traits are also of great importance when working as a journalist and meeting people in different fields. So why is still the typical 'male' characteristics often viewed as the 'right' ones?

The conflict here is mainly that women are restricted, both by law but also strong family norms, to be mothers and wives *first*. And when breaking such norms, the first critics is always rtargeted against *motherhood* and *the female body*. But also that the notion of men and women, biologically different in ways of being, is still present and seen as highly important in the Kerala society. Since it is is not yet totally socially accepted to work full-time as a mother for many women – although several of the interviewees did that without any problems - or by

law working beyond 10pm, it is also difficult to break those patterns as a woman since you might already be seen as an 'outsider' in some ways. Important to mention is though that the implications of this thesis is based on six interviews and a limited material and should therefore not be seen as fact, rather as an indication or hint of how women can experience their role as female journalists in Kerala, based on a gender perspective.

The tendency that women somehow have to find strategies to adapt to male norms – to become more 'neutral' (which can also be explained by becoming more 'male-like' in some ways), one can say reproduces female subordination in journalism. A positive notion in this thesis is though that a majority of the interviewees were highly supported by their bosses and experienced a great support in their role as journalists and mothers – for example by being given permission to work from home in the night and a great support from their husband and relatives. And also the notion that many women actually challenged the existing norms simply by not caring about them too much and instead encourage younger girls to become journalists - which has led to an increasing number of young women choosing the profession.

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Appendix

Interview guideline

Full name?

Age?

Family (married, children)?

Educational background?

Present position at your workplace?

How long have you been working at your current workplace?

Describe, in short, your working hours/tasks on a regular day?

1 Why did you become a journalist?

2. What's the distribution of men/women at your workplace?

3 What are your experiences/thoughts about working as a (female) journalist?

4 Have you at any time experienced any differences based on gender in the newsroom area?

F.i: gender division in tasks, topics or similar. If so, describe.

5 Have you ever experienced any obstacles/exclusion targeted mainly against your gender, when working, both in the public and in the newsroom? If so, describe.

6 If you would ever experience discrimination, bad comments or harassment in your workplace or outside when working; would you feel comfortable informing your colleagues and workplace/boss about this?

7 Did, or does, your family or relatives had any thoughts about you working as a journalist?

8 What is your definition of gender, and gender equality, in workplace and home?

9 How would you describe Kerala (society) from a gender perspective? Are there any particular issues that you think affects women's working possibilities/work life as journalists?

10 Do you think women leave newsrooms because of too big obstacles/difficulties working in a male area; for instance being mothers and having family, getting negative comments, commenting on body/look/femininity?

11 How would you describe the combination of work and family (if you have children/not children/married)?

12 Other thoughts/inputs that you would like to share on this topic?

Note: Apart from the guideline, informal conversations and added questions/follow up questions differed a bit from each interview.