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Becoming a modern man: the role of imagination in identity construction and performance in a tourism resort in south India.

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Abstract

Set in a beach resort in the south Indian state of Kerala, this thesis examines how the presence of international tourism is reflected in the identity construction of young Indian men. Using both their local, patriarchal setting and the new, global context provided by tourists, men make sense of their world between their own notions of tradition and modernity. Applying Arjun Appadurai's concept of imagination, I argue that the tension that young men perceive between different scripts of life becomes most clearly manifested in their collective imagination of 'modern' Western women, who are compared in dichotomy against 'traditional' Indian women. Based on ethnographic research focusing particularly on the young men that pursue sexual relationships with female tourists, I interpret identity as a performance, visible through behaviour and dialogues, suited to the different social settings young men must traverse in their everyday life. Drawing on their imagination, young Indian men try to seduce Western women, both to achieve, and by emulating, a modern identity. But in reality, this identity is fragmented, torn between the different scripts of life produced by the traditional Indian life and the enclave of modernity generated by international tourism.

Key words: tourism, imagination, identity, performance, sexuality, modernity

Introduction

The tourism resort of Kovalam Beach is a place of contrasts. Similar to many other tourist destinations in the developing world, the disparity between the local population and tourists is clearly visible. White, wealthy Westerners laze around on beach beds, while the local Indian population toils in low-paid labour around them. The differing roles of Indian and Western women in public space at the beach form a visible contrast. The presence of Western women in Kovalam Beach has sparked a trend of many young local men seeking to engage in sexual relationships with them. In this thesis, I use the phenomenon of these relationships to interpretatively enquire into the identity of these young men. I question how the imagination of the global impacts life trajectories, as visible through performance in social interactions with female tourists.

Understanding identity construction in Kovalam Beach requires situating the tourist resort within the broader context of Kerala, the south Indian state where Kovalam is located. Kerala has been examined fairly extensively academically, particularly in terms of its perceived modernity. Having achieved a level of social development by the late 20th century that was considered to be on par with the developed world in terms of demographics, education and health, the population of Kerala enjoys a comparatively high quality of life respective to other states in India, with longer life expectancy, higher quality health care and better education opportunities (Shah 2010, Véron 2001, Williams 2009). This social development was achieved on a very low economic capital base, compelling Kerala to be widely recognised as an exemplary model of modern development for other poor regions in the world (Alexandra 1998; Lukose 2009:24; Moolakkattu 2007). Kerala is arguably an excellent site to locate ethnographic studies of globalisation and youth, precisely because of its centrality in theories of development, but also because the reality of the process of development is complicated and strongly influenced by the local setting (Thapan 2012:220).

However, the positioning of Kerala on a pedestal fails to capture all of the realities of development at a local level and specifically with regards to gender. The supposed merits of social development without a strong economic base hide the economic troubles of the population, many of whom have insufficient financial support for their livelihoods. Unemployment rates in Kerala were around 12% in 2007, some of the highest in the country (Shah 2010:19). Over the decades, the lack of employment opportunities in Kerala resulted in

a trend of workers to seek occupation elsewhere; male migration particularly to the Gulf States is a highly recognised occurrence in Kerala (Zachariah et al. 2001). Remittances from overseas employment compose 20% of the state's income (Shah 2010:27). Furthermore, development records show that women are well-educated (Véron 2001:605), with literacy captured statistically at above 90% for both genders in Kerala (Shah 2010:5; Williams 2009:100). But these statistics fail to tell us about the role of women in everyday life. Despite conscious attempts to elevate their participation and inclusion in society, Indian women in Kerala have recently been recognised academically as one of the most marginalised groups in Keralan society (for case studies see Devika and Sukumar 2006; Moolakkattu 2007, Osella and Osella 2006, Thomas et al. 2010). Being held up as a model has generated both popular and scholarly discourses of Kerala's "progressive march from 'tradition' to 'modernity'" (Lukose 2009:24), a linear trajectory which conceals the complex dynamics of the state.

Embedded within this model for development are notions of a "decidedly modern patriarchy" which inform gender roles (Lukose 2009:34), an important component of identity construction. Lukose argues that popular discourses in Kerala about tradition and modernity come from a modern perspective (2009:33) in the sense that they are reflexive discussions concerned about the place of tradition in the modern world. The ideal of the patrilineal monogamous family, in which men are the head of the household, leads women to be imagined primarily by their maternal domesticity (Devika 2009:25–29). A 'good' woman is protected by her man, and is loyal and submissive in return (Devika 2009:40). The modern Keralan man aspires towards ideas of being a financially accomplished and urban consumer (Lukose 2009; Osella and Osella 2006). Osella and Osella (2000) argue that the period of migration that so many young men in Kerala embark on has become an integral milestone for many Keralan men moving towards their adult status as mature, married men. Accordingly, the financial capital that accompanies migration has thus become incorporated into signs of masculine power and agency in Kerala (Osella and Osella 2000:118–119). This articulation of masculinity and wealth is reflected in young men's ambitions for their own lives, ambitions which however are not easily attainable in the current economic situation.

Kovalam Beach involves a complex intersection of otherwise parallel modernities, between the global scripts of life enacted by international tourists, and the Keralan setting, what is deemed as traditional culture in India. I argue that Indian men living in Kovalam Beach form a collective imagination of Western women which is informed both by the patriarchal culture in which they are raised and global flows of media, people and information. This imagination serves to inform men with different possible scripts of life. For some young Indian men, relationships with female tourists become an instrumental part of a larger process of identity construction.

Relationships between female tourists and local men in tourist destinations in the developing world have only recently become the subject of academic scrutiny. To date, research on this phenomenon has been carried out in Indonesia (Dahles and Bras 1999) and extensively in the Caribbean (Frohlick 2007; Herold et al. 2001; Pruitt and LaFont 1995; Sanchez Taylor 2001, 2006). Articles written on this topic have examined in depth the debate over "sex class hierarchy" (Jeffreys 2003), probing the different ways to conceptualise the inequalities inherent in these cross-cultural relationships. Some authors regard them as a form of female sex tourism, following the same paradigms of the more customary use of the term, where Western men travel to tourist destinations in order to purchase sex from local women (Kempadoo 1999; Sanchez Taylor 2001, 2006). Female tourists are thus argued to perpetuate the "same global economic and social inequalities that underpin the phenomenon of male sex tourism" (Sanchez Taylor 2006:43–44) by exploiting their class status to obtain sex. Critics to this approach highlight the differences between male sex tourism and female tourists having

relationships with local men. Categorising women as sex tourists, they argue, conceals the different sex-class positions of men and women, ignoring gender power and thus the different meanings, context and outcomes of these relationships (Jeffreys 2003; Pruitt and LaFont 1995). Sanchez Taylor (2001) critiques this perspective as concerned too much with the "subjective meanings that participants attach to their sexual behaviour and relationships" (2001:758).

In comparison to these studies, I focus primarily on the Indian men involved in relationships with female tourists. Dahles and Bras (1999) have conducted a similar study of the tactics of young men in Indonesia with regards to their prospects to engage in relationships with female tourists. Terming their quest "romantic entrepreneurship", Dahles and Bras examine the perfunctory reasons that men profess for engaging sexually with female tourists, mainly in relation to their other economic opportunities. While the reasons of sex, money and escape in pursuing relationships with Western tourists in Indonesia coincide with similar reasons in Kovalam Beach, the motivations behind these reasons are not explored by Dahles and Bras. I fit similar reasons proffered by Indian men to their Indonesian counterparts into the larger contextual framework of Kovalam Beach to understand how imagination informs identity and thus behaviour and dialogues. Firstly, I examine the perceived experience of the tourist area of Kovalam Beach as an enclave of Western modernity and the contrast this forms with the local traditional setting in which young men are raised. Secondly, I describe how this contrast is manifested through the imagination of both Indian and Western women. Finally, I argue that this imagination becomes embodied through the performance of modern identity by these young men who seek relationships with Western women.

Constructing Identity in Theory

The concepts of identity, imagination and performance will be used to analyse and interpret the dialogues and behaviour of young Indian men in Kovalam Beach. I provide firstly a brief overview of globalisation and modernity, two central concepts which provide important context for this thesis.

A Framework for Contemporary Experience

Globalisation

Globalisation has been described as a network of interconnected and multi-directional processes, in which resources, ideologies, people, media and capital flow across the world (Appadurai 1996; Giddens 2003; Inda and Rosaldo 2008). Although these flows have been occurring for centuries, academics consider the globalised era to be distinct, because of the rapidly intensifying pace at which these flows take place. Appadurai (1996:29) attributes this acceleration to the culmination of a "technological explosion" during the last century, especially in the domains of transportation and information. Most importantly, the manifestation of this new era is a fundamental reordering and reimagining of how people experience the world, especially through their perceptions of time and space (Appadurai 1996; Harvey 1990; Inda and Rosaldo 2008:6). Harvey (1990) argues that time-space compression is linked to contemporary capitalism, and reflected in cultural change (Kearney 1995:552). Yet this acceleration is not experienced identically everywhere, because globalisation is a highly uneven process contingent on many factors (Giddens 2003:15; Inda and Rosaldo 2008:5). Although our lives are all shaped by political, economic and cultural factors, not everyone has the same power to participate in and influence these factors within the global network (Appadurai 1996).

In the anthropology of tourism, globalisation is a pivotal consideration. International tourism is both in itself a form of globalisation and also the product of globalisation,

facilitated by both transportation and information (Kearney 1995). Newly acquired knowledge of the global inspires people to cross national borders, manifesting the global and local in one place. Globalisation is an important concept throughout this ethnography, forming an implicit framework to understand how the local population in Kovalam is brought into contact with both tourists and media. By paying attention to the meaning structures of Kovalam Beach, a better understanding can be gained of how locals perceive tourists, as representations of the global (Crick 1989:330), and thus how people experience globalisation.

Modernity

While globalisation is a concept which increasingly permeates both academic and popular accounts of the world today, *modernity* seems to be ultimately a much more problematic description of contemporary times. In basic terms, modernity represents a new era in society – sometimes envisioned as "the break between tradition and modernity" (Appadurai 1996:3) – in which life has become based around institutions, and, unlike before where people lived in the past, life is now oriented to the future (Giddens 1991). Some theorists, such as Giddens, see globalisation as a part of modernity (Sassen 1998:1413), while others, such as Albrow, argue that it is "inappropriate to assimilate [globalisation] to the modern" (1996:4). Modernity is interesting as it presents an era of new possibilities, yet at the same time denying any other possibility but itself (Albrow 1996; Sassen 1998:1412). Thus, those who are unsatisfied with the concept of modernity have tried to re-theorise the current era, but remained generally locked into juxtaposing it against itself (Albrow 1996), resulting in terms such as 'post', 'high' or 'late' modernity.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is irrelevant to go into the details of modernity. I will use modernity in two senses: firstly, to reflect on the modern process of identity-making – a topic which I will discuss next – and secondly, in an emic sense, as a notion to be juxtaposed against tradition. By using modernity in the local sense of the term, it is possible to examine how modernity is experienced *locally* and thus how it is used to construct identity (Osella and Osella 2006:570) in this ethnography in the context of Kovalam Beach. This avoids the tendency of constructing the non-Western self in opposition to the Western self, a trend too often taken in anthropology (Sökefeld 1999:418), and furthermore allows for an ambivalence in the trajectory of modernity rather than glorifying the end state of modernisation (Lukose 2009:218), which arguably does not exist in the first place.

Interpreting Dialogues and Behaviour

Identity

Giddens (1991) argues that identity formation is fundamentally different in the age of (what he terms 'late') modernity. Traditionally, identity was predefined for individuals by external authority such as custom, religion or family, whereas modern identity is formed through a reflexive process (Giddens 1991). Primordial arguments over identity have linked group characteristics with collective identity, so that personal identity became equated with family lines, geographical areas or common languages (Appadurai 1996:140). The nation-state was argued to be largely significant in identity construction, thus interweaving people to the fate of the state (Albrow 1996:74, 76). However, the nature of the globalised world today means that people are no longer bounded to territory (Appadurai 1996:141) and identity is now thought of as a more fluid construction, based on the individual embracing, adapting or refusing certain contributing aspects. Ethnicity and gender continue to play a role, but are negotiable (Albrow 1996:153; Appadurai 1996:48). Furthermore, identities are thought of increasingly as fragmented, and fractured, constantly in a state of flux, in particular because of the processes of globalisation (Albrow 1996:151; Hall 1996:4). Cohen terms these fragmented identities

"complex selves", allowing us to juggle the seemingly incompatible demands of different social groups (1994:9), and between public and private spaces (1994:2).

Identity construction becomes the way by which we wish to be known to others (Cohen 1998:22), and is in itself "plastic, variable and complex" (Cohen 1994:2). In the contemporary world, identity is constructed reflexively (Giddens 1991), through "experiential modality" (Leve 2011:513), allowing a person to both know themselves and to be recognised in social settings. We each ask ourselves on a daily basis questions such as "What to do? How to act? Who to be?" (Giddens 1991:70), and we answer these questions based on our own experience of social interactions and membership within particular groups (Albrow 1996:151).

The concept of identity is often semantically intertwined with ideas of self, selfhood, individual, person and self-identity, distinctions which can sometimes be arbitrary (Cohen 1994). Sökefeld (1999), for example, argues that without a self, there is no self-identity. He believes that three components compose identity: agency, reflexivity and self simultaneously working together to determine the best course of action which protects both the individual self (*egocentrism*) and the self within the web of social relations in which it is embedded (*sociocentrism*) (Sökefeld 1999:430). The self then is not composed of simply one identity, but a variety of multifaceted personas which are presented depending on the social situation. However, overreliance on the perception of modern identity as an "on-going choice, […] an internally maintained and self-referential enterprise existing in more or less autonomy from others" (Gluck 1993:216), can lead to an understanding of identity construction as solely based on self-determination. Gluck (1993) calls for greater awareness of the multiple fragmented identities each person is capable of.

I use identity as Giddens does, as a "trajectory" which helps us to answer everyday questions about how we shall live amongst the different institutions of modernity (1991:14). Identity becomes visible through the everyday behaviour and in life-narratives of ordinary people (Giddens 1991; Osella and Osella 2006). In this ethnography, I base my questioning of local identity on the dialogues and observed behaviours of young Indian men. Picard (2007:183) has argued for the importance of studying how tourism plays a role in local population's identity construction, as opposed to presenting tourism as a challenge to static, pre-existing, local identity. I understand their identity as reflexive construction, informed by the collective imagination, as described next.

Imagination

Appadurai sees the "modern moment" not as a simultaneous break between tradition and modernity, but as the beginning of the "work of imagination" (Appadurai 1996:3). Whatever we might call this new order, he argues, imagination has become the "key component" (Appadurai 1996:31). Rather than being a privilege for the elite, imagination has become now a part of ordinary, everyday life for people (Appadurai 1996:5). It is intimately linked to action and possible projects (Appadurai 1996:7). Not only does imagination operate on an individual level, but is also a public and social practice, which enables energy to be focused and can mobilise action at community level (1996:5–8). Imagination has thus become "a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility" (Appadurai 1996:31). Albrow (1996) similarly argues that one of the aspects of the new global age is reflexivity, "where people and groups of all kinds refer to the globe as the frame for their beliefs" (Albrow 1996:4). In other words, the use of imagination in the social sphere allows people to imagine beyond their own reality and thus consider different possibilities for their life trajectory, or "scripts of possible lives" (Appadurai 1996).

Two key flows of the global world, argues Appadurai, have constituted this culmination of imagination. Firstly, the ubiquitous presence of mass media across the world has transformed "pre-existing worlds of communication and conduct", providing resources for the imagination of the self at a global scale (Appadurai 1996:3). Secondly, mass migration has led to the disembedding of social systems as increasing numbers of people become deterritorialised (Appadurai 1996:4). The emphasis on this second point mainly seems to be on migrants' imagination – I suggest that migrants, in the form of tourists, also play a role in the imagination of locals.

I consider Appadurai's concept of imagination specifically in the context of tourism. Tourism can be considered as a form of migration (Crick 1989:327). Disembedded from their own culture, leisure tourists are often considered as poor "culture carriers" (Lengyel 1975, cited in Crick 1989:328). This is put down to their nature, as "free of more important cultural obligations" (Nash and Smith 1991:14), and their behaviour ultimately exhibits notions of self-gratification rather than cultural understanding (Crick 1989:332). The concept of imagination has been applied extensively to theories of tourism, but specific conceptualisation of the local imagination in tourist resorts is not common. Rather than making a moral judgment on the impact of behaviour, which might not after all always be negative (Nash and Smith 1991:15), this thesis examines how the local imagination of (specifically female) tourists is incorporated into local identity construction.

Performance

How people constitute their reality leads to certain behaviour. Bruner (1986:6) links reality, experience and expression. Reality is experienced by the consciousness of an individual, and that experience is then framed and articulated to become an expression, what Bruner argues to be "representations, performances, objectifications, or texts" (1986:5). Similarly to the notion of collective imagination, Bruner (1986:5) maintains that "experience comes to us not just verbally but also in images and impressions". Thus, expression becomes located within a specific social context, inspired by the particularity of people, culture and historical settings (Bruner 1986:7).

Bruner's notions draw on Goffman's (1959) earlier dramaturgical metaphor of "front and back stage". Goffman provided a framework to understand the dynamics of all social interactions as a *performance,* in which only a certain perspective of a person is revealed front stage while the rest is hidden back stage. Palmer and Jankowiak (1996) propose that performance is subject to the "collective construction of imagery through expression and experience" (1996:240), linking behaviour to how people both experience and interpret the world. Actors create a performance for a certain audience, selecting carefully images to present to others, thus involving both – at an individual level – experience and – collectively – modes of communication (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996:243).

MacCannell (1973) later elaborated on Goffman's idea of back stage specifically with regards to tourism. Tourists desire increasingly authentic experiences of culture, but as they discover what they perceive as ever more revealing aspects, they are ultimately experiencing an infinite regression of staged authenticities which are controlled by local populations (MacCannell 1973). Locals have agency, albeit consciously or sub-consciously, to reveal to tourists only the impression they choose to about their own culture (MacCannell 1973).

I interpret performance in a similar vein to Palmer and Jankowiak (1996), as a social act which can occur at any moment and along a spectrum from ritual to mundane. By recognising the social interactions that result from collective imagination, it becomes possible to analyse how young Indian men include their perceptions of tradition and modernity in their identity construction and thus their performance of identity. By framing social interactions as

a performance, I situate myself, with my own status as a young, Western woman, as one of the intended audience for these young men in performances of identity.

Research Methodology

This study is based on four months of ethnographic fieldwork, living and participating in the resort life in Kovalam Beach. I spent my days oscillating between shops and restaurants where my informants were working, and out of their working hours socialising casually on the beach parade or occasionally at small parties. Observational sites generally were based around the tourist areas, where the most interactions between locals and tourists occurred. Although I spoke with many people, both tourists and locals, young Indian men living at the beach were my main informants throughout my fieldwork. They ranged in age from early twenties to late thirties, and came from diverse regions in India; some were born and had lived their entire lives in the setting of the tourist resort, while others came from Kashmir, Karnataka and Rajasthan, representing the main economic immigrants that were semi-permanent residents in Kovalam Beach. During this four month period I conducted 20 semi-structured recorded interviews with informants, along with countless other informal conversations which were invaluable especially for forming the context of Kovalam Beach. Names have been changed in this ethnography to protect informants' privacy.

As Anthony Cohen acknowledges, "the inevitable starting point for [any] interpretation of another's selfhood is my own self" (1994:3). Much of my focus during these conversations has been based on conversations about intimate relations and sex. My own identity, as a white, Western female not immediately distinguishable from a tourist, certainly played a role in my ethnographic findings. I reflect on my own ability to elicit such conversations in social settings particularly in the final section of the ethnography analysing performance, thus using narratives presented to me interpretatively rather than arguing for the actual factual nature of the information. Again, following along Cohen's (1994:5) lines of reasoning, I present my own identity as an important resource and virtue to this study, allowing access to men's performance directed at Western women, rather than considering it as a methodological burden.

In this thesis, I use the concepts of identity, as informed by imagination and manifested in social performance to analyse the discourse and practices of Indian men in Kovalam Beach. I seek to understand what performance can explain about their identity in relation to emic notions of tradition and modernity, collective imagination of people and places, and globally defined fields of possibility. I do not argue that all those Indian men in my focus group share the same identity; rather I seek to explore their differences to understand the pluralities which set them apart from others (Sökefeld 1999:419).

Ethnographic Analysis

> It's 11pm in Kovalam and I'm seated in the only restaurant still open, a coconut hut nestled in the grove just behind the beach. The owner, 37-year-old Vijay, has bribed the police to exempt his premises from the business curfew. The DJs turn up the volume, certain that any complaints by neighbours to the police about the noise will be ignored. Ishmael pulls me aside and asks if we can speak outside, explaining that he doesn't want all the other Indian men at the party to see us talking. This makes sense to me once we begin to speak, as he wants to give me a lecture on the supposed problems I'm causing for myself by being seen with multiple young single men around the beach. I explain my precarious situation as an ethnographer and agree to be a little more cautious, and Ishmael responds with empathy, explaining to me that he understands more than others because he also

has been to university. Kindly, Ishmael walks me back to my hotel since it is dark. We part, and I step a few feet towards my room, when suddenly I hear someone "psssst, pssssssst" from the hotel gate. Thinking it is Ishmael, I turn around and smile, but to my surprise, it's a young boy I've never seen before. He must have followed us from the party. He beckons towards me and calls out "I like", extending his hand across the gate so I can take it if I please.

Although this scene was just one of many typical nights during my fieldwork, it illustrates the main themes I will sketch in this ethnography: how the presence of tourism has shaped Kovalam Beach, by forming an enclave of Western modernity which is experienced by local men in contrast to the traditional local culture in which they grew up; the emergence of a tension between these experiences which becomes most visibly manifested in young men's imagination of women; and finally, how this imagination underpins the construction of their identity, which is expressed as a performance in the social interactions with female tourists.

Life's a Beach: The Tourism Resort of Kovalam Beach

Tourists have been coming to Kovalam Beach for many decades, but the mass tourism scene has become especially well-established since the mid–1990s, when direct charter flights from Europe began to arrive at the local airport. At this time large-scale construction began in Kovalam Beach, to meet the growing demands of the tourism industry. Traditional tropes of coconut huts along the beach shifted towards a more permanent architecture of concrete structures, built to house shops, hotels and restaurants. Today, the beach front is faced with a concrete parade that serves as a kind of stage to everyday encounters at the beach. The entire beach area has become oriented towards tourism, with more than 5,000 hotel beds available in the direct area, as well as hundreds of restaurants and shops catering mainly for tourists' needs. The peak tourism season in Kovalam falls between the months of December and March, after the monsoon but before the weather gets too hot. As the annual tourism season draws near, the beach resort undergoes a remarkable transformation. Although some establishments remain open all year round, raking in every rupee they can from the trickle of tourists in low season, most are aligned to maximise their profits during the high season. Dilapidated hotels, weary from the monsoon rains, are quickly refurbished; boarded-up shops are opened and restocked with new goods, and additional staff are taken on to service the tourist resort. The stage is set: the last ingredient needed for this idyllic tourist destination is added only when the tourists finally arrive in their droves.

The ease to get to the beach resort, the nature of the highly developed tourism infrastructure and also the friendliness of locals enables an easy holiday in Kovalam Beach by Indian standards. Many tourists that come are repeat returnees, having enjoyed the atmosphere of the place, and thus some maintain friendships with locals that can span across many years. Ayurvedic centres[1] have been springing up recently, attracting a crowd more interested in health than partying. Due to these characteristics, the tourist destination tends to draw older tourists or family groups – mainly from Western Europe, especially from Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, Denmark and also Russia – rather than young backpacking groups. Suresh, a 24-year-old man originally from the state of Karnataka, had lived in Kovalam for most of his life. He described the transition: "Before used to be many young people, now only bit old ages, mostly come for Ayurvedic [treatment]. Before coming for parties". This does not mean to say that younger tourists do not come to Kovalam – it remains a popular destination on the backpacking route. Kovalam Beach is listed in the Lonely Planet (Singh et al. 2009:9) as one of the highlights of India, "exotic and peaceful, yet vibrant enough to keep you way longer than you've ever intended". However, quite a few younger tourists who come seem disappointed by Kovalam's night life.

The rise of Kovalam Beach as one of the most important tourist destinations in Kerala has gone hand-in-hand with increased regulation by the Keralan government. Protective measures are taken to ensure that tourists enjoy the destination in a leisurely and safe manner, minimising any bad publicity. Lifeguards stand watch over the often dangerous waters and police presence is clearly visible, with a small police centre located in the middle of the beach parade. Alcohol sales are strictly limited to licenced restaurants of which there is only a handful, and premises selling alcohol illegally are subject to regular police raids. Additionally, there is a curfew enforced by the police in order to reduce disturbances and crime after dark. Vijay's restaurant, the setting for the beginning excerpt, was one of the few places that managed to bypass this curfew – as I understood, with considerable bribes. Most locals consequently view Kovalam Beach as having lost some of its charm, claiming its current state is "boring" for tourists in comparison to bygone times. Having worked for eight years as a waiter in Kovalam Beach, Kumar now 28 years old, recounted his impression of the beach life now: "Very, very bad – people have no more fun here. After night time, after 12 o'clock, police are calling 'go back [to] your room'. People don't like that, no freedom. Before, people here, fire dance, [until] 1 or 2 o'clock, now nothing!" Most locals lamented the tourism industry in Kovalam Beach becoming more formal for two reas   ons: firstly, they perceived it as reducing the tourists' enjoyment of the resort, and secondly, because there were less informal opportunities to meet and interact with tourists.

The increase in tourist numbers in Kovalam has had significant impacts on the Indian population at the beach over the last few decades. Many locals originating from the direct area around Kovalam Beach have turned towards the tourism industry in the hope of gaining financially, as the profits from traditional fishing livelihoods pale in comparison. Consequently, Kovalam locals compose the majority of employees at the resort, working in hotel and restaurant establishments, providing auxiliary services to these major businesses in the form of construction labour, provision of goods and waste removal, or on the beach, touting goods such as fruits and textiles or renting out sunbeds and surfboards. The existence of the tourism industry in Kovalam Beach has additionally drawn a large number of Indian traders originally from outside of Kerala, altering the composition of the local population. Kashmiri traders sell jewellery and textiles, and small shops rented by people from Karnataka or Rajasthan are overflowing with clothing, textiles, jewellery and other trappings. Immigrants come either as a family unit, or in groups of young, single men, and many remain through the year as semi-permanent residents.

The heterogeneous nature of the local population does not exist without a socio-political impact, as immigrants are often treated with hostility by the Keralan population. They are what McNaughton (2006), in her study of immigrants in another tourism resort in Kerala, terms "uninvited guests"[2]. Suresh, while discussing his relations with locals, told me

> I don't talk much to them, you know. I just say "Hi, hello". Difficult thing you know, because I'm from the country [Karnataka]. I can't do anything. Do anything right or wrong, they will tell me wrong. "You did wrong".

Kovalam can be a difficult and hostile place for all locals on the whole; there is intense competition, and troubles arise from accusations of financial cheating between regional groups. As a reaction to this strain, locals judge and disparage one another frequently, and this gossip serves as a deterrent to outlandish behaviour. Regional groups do not tend to interact above perfunctory socialising. Young men told me they often prefer to socialise with tourists, where interactions come for the most part without these political concerns[3].

The interchange which takes place between tourists and locals provides the local population in Kovalam Beach with new images from tourists which they use as resources to make sense of the world. Appadurai's (1996) concept of imagination suggests here that

tourists, disembedded from, but representative for their own social system, offer new globally defined fields of possibility which inform locals' imagination. I turn now to this argument with a particular focus on young Indian men living at Kovalam Beach.

Global Resources for the Imagination

The people living in the geographical region of what today is known as Kerala[4] have long been exposed to different images of the world. Romans, Chinese, Arabs, Portuguese, French, Dutch and British have come to trade or to establish colonies in the region over a vast period of more than two thousand years (Gopalan 1959:11). In Kovalam Beach today, global flows of international tourists and media provide new resources for the imagination of young Indian men, influencing their perception of the world and their own place within it. This is visible in their dialogues about dreams and plans, which reflect on their own experience of globalisation.

Young men often gain experiences with tourists through their livelihoods at the beach. Suresh works every day for eleven months each year maintaining his clothing shop. Over the years, he has managed to build up his business, relocating three times to situate the shop for optimal visibility on the busy beach parade. As we sat on his shop steps watching the crowds pass on the parade, he explained how he perceived tourists' on holiday: "people like to come for some days you know, some weeks, they like to spend, they want to enjoy". I asked Suresh about his interactions with tourists: "if we are friendly they will be friendly". As Crick (1989) notes, "tourists […] are poor 'culture-carriers', being stripped of most customary roles, […] for most people tourism involves more hedonism and conspicuous consumption than learning or understanding" (1989:328). Of course, for tourists much of the appeal of coming to a beach resort such as Kovalam is the highly favourable exchange rate, which gives them the opportunity to enjoy a standard of living which would not be possible at home. This can cause a biased representation of Westerners, which is reflected in the way young men speak about tourists. As a waiter who earned 200 rupees ($4) a day, Kumar's livelihood was "depending always on the tips" of tourists, he told me. "Young and old, young people have the money, little money, but, old people come, a lot of money spend [in] Kovalam". Kumar was aware that differences existed in wealth across the tourist population, although in comparison to his own meagre income, he perceived all tourists as having access to money and therefore as affluent.

The relative wealth of tourists gives them the appearance of freedom and mobility, which inspires young men in their own long-term life plans. I asked Suresh what his dream was – "I think to make a small house, get my own shop, own house". Dreams amongst my informants ranged from the small scale, such as independence from landlords through ownership of their premises, to much larger aspirations. Yaj told me "my dream is that one day I'm going to be a very rich man – [so] I can get everything!" Yaj had been working in the tourism industry since his mid-teens, firstly in his home state of Rajasthan, then in the far north, and now at the southern tip of India in Kovalam Beach. He expanded on his hopes: "I want a car, a popular car". I asked which kind, to which he responded "Volkswagen". Yaj imagines a prosperous life of his own, but one which is informed largely by Western ideas of luxury. However, his own hopes were to stay in India. "In Europe, you have to do "this" in the morning. When I don't feel like waking up here, I don't wake up. And you can't talk with each other [in Europe]. Always working!" Kumar, the waiter, had his own ideas of being a tourist himself, and had already managed to fulfil some his dreams. "I travelled to Delhi, and Manali […] I went to Agra, I never see, that's the reason why I went there. My favourite, place, Kovalam, otherwise, London, too much! I want. Maybe I'm going". The existence of the heterogeneous local population may be reflected in young men's acknowledgement of desirable tourist destinations within India, but this could also be due to foreign tourists

relating their own experiences of travelling in India to locals. The hope to travel abroad and see Western destinations was, for Kumar, a realistic possibility as he observed the mobility of international tourists. Mobility and money went for many informants hand-in-hand. Ravi, the young rickshaw driver who grew up in Kovalam Beach, related his long-term dream to me: "Happy, enjoy, money, travelling. Then happy life, really happy life". The existence of tourism in Kovalam Beach inspires young men with new possibilities by prompting an imagination of the West. This is reflected in their hopes for ownership and experience, and the mode by which they desire these hopes, as autonomous people coupled with disposable income which allows them the ability of choice on a global scale.

While future plans may lie on the horizon, young men also make the most of enjoying the atmosphere of the resort. Although the night life in Kovalam Beach is relatively limited, establishments seize upon the range of nationalities present to celebrate both Indian festivals, such as Onam[5], and popular Western festivals like Christmas and New Year's Eve. Vijay's coconut hut was a perfect place for this; I attended several parties there where a large proportion of the people present were young Indian men, many of them my informants. Suresh explained his motivations for attending: "I go just for myself. I wanna get myself enjoy". During these festivities, tourists and local men intermingle and enjoy the atmosphere. It is uncommon to see Indian women attend these parties, and usually young men dance and drink in large groups.

Spending a significant amount of time with European tourists influenced the way young men perceived their own lives, in that they felt that they too adopted a Western style of thinking and living. Some of them termed this change in lifestyle as becoming "Europeanised". This follows Kearney's (1995) argument, in which tourists[6] are recognised for their ability to create transnational spaces which have the "potential to liberate nationals within them" from their national borders (1995:553). Anand, at an age of 27, had gained many European friends through his work as a yoga teacher. Tourists were drawn to him for his charisma, compassion and particularly his spirituality. Comparing his friendships with Indians and Europeans, Anand told me the following

> friendship with Europeans, now I like that, because we can talk something
> that, for me actually, I'm talking about me… because I can talk to Europeans,
> they can understand me, like talking about something deeper, like spiritual
> way or whatever it is. You can talk deeper stuff with my friends from Europe.

Conversations with Europeans were for Anand a way to express his feelings at a more intellectual level. He contrasted this with the conversations he had with his own Indian friends. "We cannot talk this kind of stuff", rather he described their conversations as more simple, based on topics about "material life, and some normal [topics] like what I did yesterday, what I'm going to do today, what I'm doing now". I asked Anand if turning to Europeans for his main friendships had made him feel better, on which he was ambivalent. "In some ways I feel better, in some ways not. The other way was more free, more happy, and not thinking about too much". In this way, interaction with Europeans not only shapes locals' life view; their identities become detached from local places as a result of globalisation (Kearney 1995:553), by shaping the way they perceive themselves as Indians of a "European Mind".

India's status as a rapidly developing nation has also significantly impacted the local population in Kovalam Beach, in terms of new media and the increasing variety of goods available on the market. In 1991, the government of India began to implement sweeping neo-liberal reforms, which have "heralded the present phase of globalisation" (Kothari 1997:90) in India. Dwyer (2010) asserts that this economic liberalisation "has precipitated the most rapid social change in the nation's history, a change which has been gathering what seems to be an unstoppable momentum in the last five years as India emerges as one of the world's largest

economies and home to one of its biggest populations" (2010:381–382). Economic development is visible in everyday life at Kovalam Beach, where most locals own at least one mobile phone, some having phones which enable them with internet access. Additionally, televisions are common appliances in many households and sometimes also in shops, receiving a mixture of channels originating from Indian and foreign broadcasters. One supermarket[7] exists behind the beach, offering a range of food stuffs for both Western and Indian cuisine, exposing locals to a diverse range of products not commonly found in smaller general stores. Although it is difficult to truly gauge the impacts of liberalisation on Indian society (Dwyer 2010) and also beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse these effects in Kovalam Beach, some of the consequences are clearly visible simply through participation in everyday life in Kovalam Beach. I recall sitting one afternoon with my friend, Prianti, a young mother from Karnataka. She had been gifted a *Vogue* by a young English traveller who had finished reading the magazine. Prianti's husband and children huddled around intrigued at the fashion advertisements. Reacting to one revealing shot of a model, Prianti asked me incredulously "Is she really naked?" The presence of new consumer goods and mass media has exploded in Kerala, in particular the presence of electronic media since the 1990s (Lukose 2009:44–45), when India's market was opened to global trade.

The exposure of the local population in Kovalam Beach to new global images creates new resources for the imagination of the global and allows the imagining of possible new scripts for Indian lives. Young Indian men reflect on the modern identity they envision for themselves, as autonomous and free to enjoy life as they please – hopes which exist both for the immediate now and for the future. In this way, the presence of tourism and media sets new benchmarks against which locals compare and plan their own short- and long-term life trajectories.

Reflections on Indian Life

The existence of a Western style of modernity in Kovalam Beach is not accepted at face value by young Indian men – it must be negotiated within their local circumstances and everyday life. Similar to the findings of Lukose (2009) in her ethnography of youth and globalisation in Kerala, young men reflect on traditional social roles in Indian culture from a modern, reflexive perspective, one which juxtaposes tradition with modernity. Their social interactions with other Indians on the beach, and their role as a member of a family based on patriarchal paradigms are also important ways by which men make sense of their world.

The pursuit of wealth is one of the key motivators for the majority of the local population. Locals believe that prosperity not only eases burdens, but also impacts social status. Vijay described this: "if you have money, they [local people] get jealous about you; if you have no money, they think about you like a dog". Discussions about money, who has it and who does not, featured daily in casual conversations. Money and lack of business is a worry to most and inflates competition between one another, especially during the low season when the flow of tourists is minimal. These troubles arise both within their own regional groups and between groups. Ravi commented on his own experiences when he first started operating a rickshaw: "when I'm coming [first to the business], all people jealous with me, [asking me] "[Where are] you from? Which place?" Actually I'm from here! Now is [a] lot of rickshaw drivers, [it makes business] very, very, difficult". Despite having grown up in Kovalam, local men in the transport industry singled Ravi out when he began his business. Social pressures are compounded by the competition caused as local people try to gain economically from tourists.

Many people's desire for financial elevation comes at the cost of others' economic livelihoods, an act commonly known as "cheating". Running a business thus has political as

well as economic concerns attached. Owners exercise care to hire staff that will not sabotage their reputation or steal from them. One tailor explained that gossip helps to deter people from cheating one another. Rumours about cheating travel fast in the local community, and people are punished with losses in business. Stereotyped characterisations of people's nature were expressed in gossip. A good person is one who works hard, stays calm, sticks to themselves, and is conscientious. Bad people talked too much about others and "cheated". Men who drank or smoked too much were similarly classified as "no good". Pratul, 30 years old and managing an upmarket hotel, remarked that, because "so many people here are cheating" he simply doesn't want to be friends with some people – they are "bad people".

Marriage is one of the most important and largely inevitable milestones occurring in life in India. It is also a phenomenon which is characterised by strong cultural norms and pressures. Marriages are traditionally arranged; partners are selected through marriage brokers and newspapers along criteria such as caste, class, education and astrological compatibility. The couple to be paired are generally not acquainted with one another (Mody 2007:331), although kinship preference for extended family members such as first cousins is exercised in some states, including Kerala. Parents have the final say in the selection of marriage partners, and thus there is pressure on young people to be submissive, passive and cooperative towards their elders (Medora et al. 2002). Traditional dialogues in India draw on notions of "filial duty, obedience to elders, trust in parents' judgement of their children [and] acceptance of destiny" (Sharangpani 2010:255). This comes at the cost of individual autonomy.

Extended families are the preferred family form (Medora et al. 2002). Hinduism especially emphasises the importance of the family, its proximity and degree of togetherness (Medora et al. 2002:157). The responsibility of arranging marriages for all daughters in a family falls on the entire immediate family. Since women's families always try to marry their daughter into families with higher social status (Sharangpani 2010:252), this means that the whole family must work towards guaranteeing their financial security in order to provide a sufficient dowry to marry the daughter. Brothers will postpone their own plans in order to provide financial assistance for their sisters. For example, Chandran moved to Saudi Arabia, where he could earn more money as a tailor in order to assist his parents with the marriage of his three sisters. As soon as his youngest sister married, he returned to Kerala in order to marry himself. Similarly, Kumar has delayed his own marriage until his sister is able to marry "I have one sister, first sister marriage, after for me [marriage]". Kumar's filial obligations require him to put the honour of his family before his own desires to get married. He was resigned to this decision: "My culture huh. I just have to wait for my sister".

Arranged marriages are generally seen academically as a system that fosters inequality by serving to maintain caste purity, class privileges and a gender hierarchy (Sharangpani 2010). Those in positions of power can, through arranged marriage, negotiate the improvement of their lives, in terms of professional aspirations, migrating to desirable areas, and by improving the lives of other family members (Sharangpani 2010:272). Men are thus able to maintain power over women, upper castes over lower, and the rich over the poor (Sharangpani 2010:270–271). The existence of dowry, the payment from the bride's family to the groom's, further fosters such inequalities. In Kerala, the price of dowry has risen significantly as the state has developed; at least 100 grams of gold is part of the exchange, an expensive gift for any family. This can lead to difficulties for families with many daughters; with no way to meet the large burden of dowry for their children, it is quite common for parents to commit suicide. Anand believed dowry to be an evil in India, a system largely designed to benefit "rich people", a legitimised form of gaining wealth from other families, and despite its illegality, it continues to be a pervasive practice in arranged marriages.

Family life in Kerala generally follows patriarchal social rules, as in larger India (Devika 2009), and these norms continue to have a strong presence in social interactions between Indians on Kovalam Beach. The restricted role of women in the public space circumscribes only limited contact with men from outside of their immediate family, shaping a particular social dynamic in India. Anand told me that it's very common for boys and girls to be separated from an early age, particularly with respect to physical interaction, and this separation continues throughout life. I asked Anand about his own experience with this segregation: "maybe after 12 [years of age], then I was not allowed touching any girls. Only in emergency. Even my friends who have grown up, I can't touch them anymore. They will stay away from us [men]". Should a woman be 'spoilt' by the undesired touch of a man, her reputation could be marred. Lukose (2009:98) argues that in situations of rape, sexual harassment and sexual violence, women come to be understood as specifically gendered subjects, which leads society to question their virtue, morality and victimhood. A daughter with a marred reputation could be detrimental to the whole family if they later struggle to find her a suitable marriage partner.

Young Indian men base their understanding of Indian culture on social interactions and familial obligations in Kovalam Beach. The resulting perception was somewhat ambiguous; although many of my informants approached claims about Indian cultural norms in a somewhat negative light, there was a general feeling of this being the traditional way. Kumar asked rhetorically, "my Indian culture is very different huh?" signifying that he could understand different life paths, but was accepting of his own. However, for many young men, the possibilities presented by global images led to desires that their own life would be led with greater autonomy.

The Imagination of Women

> I want to leave India. I want to marry a white girl, and leave India. I think they
> have more freedom, more privacy. They can travel everywhere! – Pratul

The Western-style of modernity in Kovalam Beach stands in contrast to young men's perceptions of the traditional circumstances which define their everyday interactions, resulting in a tension between the different visible scripts of life. One of the clearest manifestations of this tension is a very particular collective imagination of women. In this section, I firstly analyse dialogues, like Pratul's above, demonstrating how men construct Western women in dichotomy to Indian women in their imagination. Secondly, I examine life-narratives as a manifestation of identity (Giddens 1991) to question how men negotiate this tension by choosing a variety of life trajectories.

Imagining Indian Women

Young Indian men living in Kovalam Beach tend to view arranged marriage and correspondingly the Indian women associated with this institution as traditional. Their imagination is informed by both generic ideas of women in Indian society and their own personal experience in private and public space.

Despite Kerala's status as a model for development, Indian women are recognised both in academic literature and popular perceptions as having little agency over their lives (Lukose 2009:100, 106), grounded in the patriarchal social rules set out for them in Keralan society and the subsequent right that men have to control the movements and behaviour of women in their family (Rogers 2008:89). Anand perceived women's role in the domestic sphere as a form of slavery. "Indian housewife means a kind of servant". He acknowledged that they received "love" and were "somehow happy" at home, but he claimed that ideas of "free" women represented in images from movies and European tourists had led Indian

housewives to imagine a new life, asking "why are we not [free]?" Anand saw Indian women's lives at an impasse: they know more about emancipation and women's rights than ever before, but are not able to practice these ideas themselves because of the gender hierarchy in Keralan society.

Women's role in the domestic sphere is transposed to their involvement and status in public space in Kovalam Beach. Although Kerala is much more liberal than other areas in India in terms of women holding permanent jobs, there is still a gendered segregation, and most women at the time of marriage become housewives. Those that were working in paid labour were still not perceived as autonomous. Anand told me rather, "they are kind of dolls, they are working for their husbands. I can see they are not happy". Gender identity plays a visible role in the public space in Kovalam. Women's movement in space is restricted, often leading to lives that alternate only between their homes and the family's business premises. Hiring women in businesses independent from family means more hassle, as one English woman running a restaurant in Kovalam explained – employers may need to allow female staff to go home in daylight hours, or provide an escort to get the woman home safely after dark.

Popular discourse in India constructs arranged marriage as a "companionate and practical love", and "as a more legitimate form of affection and bonding between spouses" as opposed to other forms of relationships (Medora et al. 2002). Anand evoked this discourse when I asked him about the relationship between husbands and wives in India.

> That is the good thing in India and arranged marriage: after they are married they [couples] adjust themselves. I know you cannot imagine you go for a man and next month you are together. It works! They get slowly together, they have problems in their life, but they continue.

Anand perceived couples in arranged marriages as resilient because they are forced to weather out the tough times together. Yet at the same time, he dismissed having a relationship with an Indian girl himself. "No, no no... I will never find an Indian girl, who will ... be my type of girl". I asked him why. "The way I'm thinking. Never. I met many Indians, for me to have an Indian girl it is no fun, because you cannot talk to Indian girls. I met some Indian 'spiritual' girls in the ashram, but they are not spiritual, they are ego". Although he claims to recognise the subjugation of women in everyday life, he himself reproduces patriarchal ideas by denying Indian women the ability to understand and be involved in topics such as spirituality themselves. He thus stresses his lack of connection with them, something which he saw as important

> Life really can be good, if you find the right partner, the way we think, and the feelings should not be completely the same but some similarity, otherwise, the feelings, not the mind feelings, but the heart. If it's similar to the other person, once you live with the other person, you slowly come to understand that, the same thing. I think it would be nice.

The importance Anand places on an emotional connection in a relationship conveys his desire to have freedom to choose a partner, which he believes will lead him to have both a good relationship and a good life. His understanding of Indian women as unable to understand spirituality also connects with his earlier comments on his social relationship with European tourists as "deeper".

Arranged marriage appears to young men as impinging on their modern identity because they are not able to exercise autonomy, through the agency that comes with choosing the person who they will spend their life with. Finding a connection becomes an important way of exhibiting authenticity as love emerges as a central theme in relationships (Lukose

2009:101). Yaj, a young man recently turned husband through an arranged marriage, illustrated this. He claimed that his parents had forced him into the marriage. "They [his parents] told me, after [marriage] you can be in love with her. I say, I can't". He acted out how he spoke with his wife, "if you push [pressure] me, I [will] never come to you". Yaj doesn't believe that he can ever find love with his wife, because he wasn't given a choice in marrying his wife, and "because in arranged marriage people don't know about the nature of each other". Both Anand and Yaj perceive Indian wives synonymously with arranged marriage, thus equating them with being traditional and conservative rather than modern and independent because they are willing to participate in the formal institution of marriage in India. Therefore they believe it is impossible to find an emotional connection with an Indian woman, viewing themselves modern in character and an arranged wife as traditional.

The restrictive nature of arranged marriages was perceived as another aspect which detracted from men's right to autonomy. Anand decisively rejected the notion of himself entering into an arranged marriage. "[My parents] were really pushing me, so I decided not to marry, not to take an Indian wife. I need freedom". The patriarchal nature of Indian society requires the protection of women, thus defining a particular mode of life for the husband in which he must focus on safeguarding his wife's vulnerability. Suresh had been married several years earlier in an arranged marriage to a woman from Karnataka. He told me, "I miss freedom; I don't always like to hear [from my wife] 'Don't go to here, don't go to there, don't do this, no friends, no family'. My wife doesn't like if I go out here. She doesn't like my friends". For Suresh, a tension was created in his identity, between his role as an Indian husband with the responsibility of protecting and providing for his wife, and as a young man hoping for some freedom in his life.

Suresh had previously told me about his wife's everyday life, which he described as alternating only between the family home and shop. One way to read his wife's actions of restricting his socialising would be to suggest her own loneliness and thus jealousy at her husband's social life in the public arena of Kovalam Beach. Yaj, with his own negative ideas of arranged wives, supported this view. "Most Indian girls I see in my experience, they become jealous if you talk with woman, ask you many questions, after 9 you don't get to go out at all". He told me that if his friends stayed away from their home until late in the evening, their wives would invariably call them to tell them to come home. Alternatively, it could also be perceived as women trying to achieve agency over their husbands in the private sphere to compensate for the lack of agency their husbands grant them in public. This understanding is similar to a study on the domestic relations between husband and wife in a fishing village in Kerala (Busby 1999), where women try to control their husbands' drinking habits by restricting their money supply. Either reading highlights the restraints and responsibilities that are associated with Indian wives. By becoming a "gatekeeper" to his wife's physical and moral well-being (Rogers 2008:89), a husband loses his own freedom.

Men's imagination of Indian women as equated largely with domestic responsibilities, as a marriage prospect assessed in terms of their sexual modesty (Rogers 2008:89) and subsequently as a housewife, limits their appeal to young Indian men at the beach. Kerma and Mahendra (2004:71) argue that the division of gender roles which are applied during adolescence in India, allow boys to enjoy privileges such as autonomy, mobility and opportunity, while girls are curtailed, restricted and closely monitored. This understanding helps to explain why women become shackled within the traditional identity of Indian culture, whereas men are able to transcend traditional social norms without defying the patriarchal structure of their society. The presence of female tourists in Kovalam Beach exhibit alternative scripts of life for women, which results in young Indian men having a particular imagination of the Western woman.

Ravi proclaimed that he was actively seeking a partner, a woman that he could marry. I asked him what kind of girl he was interested in meeting, to which he responded "anyone. Maybe some white girl is better, not Indian girl, not the black girl. Then [a woman from] any country - no problem". This assertion – that any woman would make an appropriate partner as long as they were of non-Indian nationality and white – characterises Western women with generic qualities which are constructed in dichotomy to Indian women.

Locals construct an imagination of tourists based mainly on their own experiences (Maoz 2006). The freedom which female tourists have in Kovalam Beach as they enjoy their holiday destination gives a general impression to young Indian men of the emancipation of the Western female. Western women spend their time in Kovalam Beach largely pursuing enjoyment: drinking, smoking and eating in restaurants, shopping, partying (when opportunity arises) and lazing around on beach beds[8]. These activities are largely prohibited to Indian women, and even upper class Indian female tourists are not seen drinking, smoking, or in a bikini. The exotic perception of Western women is best illustrated by the phenomena of voyeurism observable on the beach. Hordes of Indian men wander idly up and down the beach covertly using their phone to take photographs of Western women relaxing on the beach in bikinis and other revealing attire[9]. The visible contrast between Western women and Indian women draws attention to Western women. Female modesty in Kerala is apparent through respectable dress (Lukose 2009:75–76), so the large amount of skin is perceived as a flagrant display of promiscuity. The white body becomes valued over local women's bodies (Sanchez Taylor 2006). Different social rules apply in Indian understanding of Western women – while Indian women are judged in terms of their sexual modesty, Western women are valued for their perceived promiscuity, and thus their potential for becoming a sexual partner.

Nimesh told me one night at a party in the coconut hut that, as a general rule, it took four months to get just one kiss from an Indian girl, whereas with a Western girl you could be sleeping with her within four hours of the first meeting. The relative ease of having sex with a Western woman was something which I repeatedly heard throughout my time in Kovalam Beach. Ravi explained that "Western girl is very easy. Western girl is 'I like you, you like me, like fucking with you!'". Ravi infers that sex is initiated with a Western woman as long there is an attraction between them. Both this perception of Western women and the continuous reinforcement of this stereotype through dialogue serve to emphasize the idea generally that it is easy to have a sexual relationship with female tourists. Ishmael explained that all the local boys are looking for single, white females. "Most of them have no experience with sex, they can be as old as 25 and still be virgins, and since they think that white girls just come here for fucking, then they believe it is the ideal situation for them to learn and gain experience". However, as will be discussed in the following section, once men engage in a relationship with a female tourist, a tension emerges between this promiscuous reputation and her movements around the beach.

The perceived difficulties of having a sexual relationship with an Indian woman play a role in creating this repeated stereotype about Western women. Speaking with Anand about the prohibition of physical intimacy between Indian men and women, he told me: "We are not so open here. I'm only allowed to touch my mother, or my wife. We don't have girlfriends here. So touching a girl's body is something nice". Informants described relationships with Indian girls outside of marriage as "not easy"; Ravi told me that if he asked for a relationship, or sex, not only would he bet met with anger, but also potentially a "complaint [to] police, mother, father, [generally a] problem!" Yaj, who had experience with an Indian girl when he was younger, compared his relationships: "[It was] 2-3 weeks before I can hold her hand. After seven months I sleep with her". I asked about Western girls comparatively. "Maybe one

day, one hour. Maybe sometimes even just one beer! You drink one beer and you also sleep [together]. [With] Austrian girl I need two days. She is beautiful". Drawing normative dichotomies between Indian women and Western women serve to reproduce the young Western woman as a certain archetype for the global white female identity, disregarding identity markers such as nationality.

Some of the men who had previous sexual experience with female tourists discussed the nature of this sexual relationship, describing Western women as "sexy", allowing men to share a greater degree of intimacy and connection with their lovers in comparison to sexual relationships with Indian women. Ravi related:

> Giving [sex] to wife, wife not like. I have wife, "ok, I like [to have sex]". No anything. She want sex – only (exhibits the actions of missionary position), finished. No... you know. But giving to Western girls, oh slowly, looking, sexy. Sexy, very feeling. This is many ways, many hours, slowly, my heart, somebody heart, is growing, connection, but very slowly.

Ravi's description is interesting because he had never had a sexual experience with an Indian woman. Nonetheless, he still was able to compare and analyse why he was not interested in Indian women through his perceived notions of them, characterising sex with Indian women as uninspiring and as an act of duty to their husbands. The perception of the sexual liberation of Western women demonstrates the central location of sex in relationships for these men. The emphasis that men place on pleasure and agency reflect larger understandings of Western leisure visible in tourism at Kovalam Beach.

Not only do young Indian men conceive Western women based on their everyday encounters with them (Maoz 2006), their imagination is also influenced by ideas brought about by the reach of global flows of media (Appadurai 1996). The availability of pornographic material featuring mainly white women contributes to sexualised notions of white female tourists in Kovalam Beach. The introduction of such material into everyday life has been facilitated by the presence of internet on phones. With little chance to develop and explore their sexual nature, many young Indian people turn to pornography to satisfy their curiosity. Manjeet, an older fisherman, himself offended by the general treatment of female tourists in Kovalam, recounted to me how he believed the internet had affected Indian men.

> First, they watch the internet, and then they get bad thoughts. Then, they see Western girls on the beach, and the first day they are smiling at them, and say hi. The next day, they are smiling, and they ask if they need some help with something. The next day, they are trying something on with them. Internet changes the Indian man's mind to bad.

Manjeet believes that pornography induces Indian men to perceive Western women as sexual objects who are easy to obtain sex from. Pornography was cited multiple times as a reason that Indian men get the impression that European women are nymphomaniacs, or as one man put it, "sex machines".

Since Indian men are primarily those responsible for providing services within the tourism industry at Kovalam, there is a high frequency of contact between local men and female tourists. This means that many of the young Indian men have the opportunity to meet women through their occupations as waiters, rickshaw drivers, hotel staff or beach touts. Such jobs provide a pretext for legitimate interaction, and often facilitate the initiation of a relationship that could lead to a sexual encounter (or more) with a tourist woman. Studies of tourism have generally observed the way that tourists view locals; fewer studies have focused on the way that locals view tourists, but more are emerging as academic attention turns to the power and agency that locals possess (Maoz 2006:235). The construction of the imagination

of Western women, in contrast to Indian women, construes them with modernity. Young men evaluate these different scripts of life between their reflexive understandings of tradition and modernity.

Making a Choice…

The collective imagination of Indian and Western women becomes a resource by which young Indian men examine their possibilities for their own life script. As Giddens argues, "life plans are the substantial content of the reflexively organised trajectory of self" (1991:85). In Kovalam Beach, the tension which exists between different scripts of life is negotiated through a variety of life trajectories. Young men consider reflexively their own position in society, and seek the path which they perceive as placing them in the best position for their life.

> For some men, the social pressure to enter into an arranged marriage was strong. Sarup, at the age of 29, felt the weight of still being single. "If I don't get married soon, people are gonna think I'm a criminal or something!" Financial difficulties meant that his room for negotiation in an arranged marriage contract were slim; but the longer he worked on attaining financial security, the more his chances diminished of finding a wife at all. Such a dilemma is found similarly by Jeffrey (2010) in Uttar Pradesh, where ability to marriage is undermined by the failure to find a secure income, since the "parents of young women typically wanted to marry their daughters to young men with stable jobs" (Jeffrey 2010:472).
>
> In a compromise between traditional and modern perceptions of marriage, relationships with Indian women could be imbued with ideas about connection, while still not breaking community norms (Lukose 2009:97). While Yaj did not exclude a relationship with a tourist, he explained this would be his own ideal marriage scenario "I [would] prefer to marry with Indian girl, but I need to be in love". He would be happy to marry someone from within the traditional marriage requirements, but first he felt the need to have an emotional connection with her, and then decide to marry. There remains an uneasy match between love and marriage in India; love marriages are generally seen as "unholy", challenging the natural hierarchy of caste and class in India (Mody 2007:331–332). Parents are unlikely to approve of the relationship, especially if they cross community norms (Lukose 2009:121). Love is thus understood as an emotion that should not precede marriage, but is not occluded by the relationship that develops as a result of an arranged marriage (Mody 2007:333). However, love relationships still occur between youth in contemporary India (Abraham 2002). Hassan offered an example of this in his own story, having had a girlfriend for seven years. They spoke regularly on the phone and were allowed to meet for ice-cream once a month. He was waiting for his sister to be married, so that he could ask his girlfriend to marry him. Although it took some convincing, they were together able to persuade her parents to allow them to marry, and thus exhibited active agency in the choice of their relationship.
>
> Others chose to postpone marriage until a later stage in life, giving them a chance to 'make the most of now'. Many remain bachelors into their thirties. Vijay was a prime example of this, reasoning that if he married now he would lose the opportunities he has currently with female tourists. Hence he preferred to enjoy life now, and marry later, although an arranged marriage was not the preferred option for him. I asked him if his parents would arrange a wife for him, to which he retorted "what can I do with someone I don't know", claiming to need a woman with whom he had a connection. Suresh wished that he had delayed his own marriage. "After I got married, I think I would have waited a bit more time … I think good time is 26 or 28 [years old]". Lukose (2009:123) argues that the prospect of arranged marriage on the horizon impinges on the hopes, desires and pleasures imagined in romantic love. By rejecting

the system of arranged marriage, these young men hoped for more autonomy as they made decisions by themselves for their own future.

It was common to find young Indian men who outright rejected not only the idea of arranged marriage, but any kind of relationship at all with an Indian woman. This dialogue represents a declaration of their own modernity, as someone with agency over their lives. Although bachelorhood represents a failure to attain the norms of adult masculinity (Jeffrey 2010), as Sarup feared, the opportunities to have a relationship with a foreign woman can act as a counterbalance to this. Pratul, despite never having had any experience with a woman either Indian or foreign in his 30 years of life, was adamant on this point: "I want to marry a white girl". Despite parental urging, and the potential loss of honour that could be associated with a family that does not marry all their sons, having a relationship with a white girl increases social status in ways which will be discussed in the next section, and thus provides a valid alternative option.

Informants had each experienced different scenarios when it came to meeting female tourist. Anand, on one side of the spectrum, had not been interested in women at all after he rejected the idea of marrying an Indian woman, preferring simply to stay single. "I really don't like this 'girls', 'sex' – no woman, no cry". However, one German girl took an active interest in him and pursued him with phone calls. "I did not like her in the beginning, she started to call, call, call, all the time. I put the phone on loudspeaker so my friends could hear". Anand responded to her approaches with ridicule. "But it changed, in the beginning I was not in love at all. [We were] talking every day, every day. Then I fell in love, it happened. She stopped calling for a while, then I realised I was really missing her". Anand went on to have a long-term, long distance relationship with this woman; they are currently still in touch, but no longer together. In contrast, some men actively pursued women through their involvement in tourism activities, or in their spare time. I draw a contrast with Sanchez Taylor (2006), by highlighting the different scenarios by which men can choose to enter into relationships with Western women. Examining their decisions in context allows for nuances to emerge, that do not bundle sexual relationships with Western women simply into a form of Western exploitation.

Young Indian men recognised that tourist women were just passing through, and acknowledged that relationships in this case were for short-term enjoyment. However, in the dialogues of many men was the background hope that a Westerner might fall in love with them and together they could come to some arrangement despite the distances that separate them. In the following section, I elaborate further on the motivations men have specifically for both short and long term relationships with Western women.

Performing a Different Man

> As a social group of gendered, sexualized, racialized, national subjects mobile
> on a global scale, women tourists affect local practices of sex, sexuality and
> gender through embodied relations. (Frohlick 2007:141)

Identity is manifested, not only as a trajectory of life visible in life-narratives (Giddens 1991) but also through everyday behaviour (Osella and Osella 2006). I use the concept of performance to frame everyday social interactions, as an act "constituted in imagination, enactment, and symbolic expression […] including both inner experience and outwardly directed communication" (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996:240). Processes of imagination that inform performance hinge on both the minds of the performer and the audience (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996:240), but in this instance, I focus primarily on Indian men who hope for a sexual relationship with a Western woman. This does not serve to exclude female tourists,

however, and the number of female tourists who are also open to sexual relationships with young men should not be dismissed[10].

Performances of modern identity undertaken by young men operate at two levels: firstly, as a reflection of their own imagination of Western women, and what they imagine can be achieved through a sexual relationship with a tourist; and secondly as a performance to gain this relationship, in the hope to attract a woman. Yet, as we shall see, the tensions that exist between tradition and modernity in men's imagination sometimes result in an ambiguous performance.

Western Women: The Key to Masculinity and Mobility

The collective imagination of Western women, as described in the previous section, serves to further inform Indian men about the benefits that can be gained from having a relationship with a female tourist. Young people in contemporary India increasingly seek to define themselves outside of the caste-based occupations that previously defined their ancestors' lives (Rogers 2008:82). Sex, money and access to new spaces must be examined in context to understand how imagination of tradition and modernity comes to inform young men's motivations.

Gaining sexual experiences is the most obvious and the initial motivator for most Indian men to pursue relationships with Western women. Masculinity is exhibited through sexual prowess, something that can be attained by having multiple sexual partners (Kerma and Mahendra 2004:71). The fleeting nature of female tourists' stay in Kovalam means that young men can accumulate sexual experience and are thus perceived more masculine. Ravi portrayed himself as a ladies-man. He told me

> many people jealous with [of] me. Because some people [say] "you have girls, you have girls" […] All people want girls, looking for sexy girls. You know I'm lucky! Lucky, I have girls. [He says to other men] "No jealous – because don't worry, wait, maybe you have coming girls".

Through his aptitude with women, Ravi gained masculinity, allowing him to transcend social hierarchies by gaining status and causing jealousy amongst his peers. Additionally, sexual experience comes without the perceived responsibility associated with a sexual relationship with an Indian woman. There is no marriage contract attached, and moreover it does not restrict a later change to the traditional trajectory of a man's life. For example, Nimesh used to "get three foreign girls a week, easy!" Although he explained that he misses his "good life", where he spent more time partying, he later fell in love with a woman from Karnataka, and they were married.

In the short-term, a sexual relationship with a female tourist is understood as not only a possible boost to masculinity, but also allowing greater mobility in the space at Kovalam Beach. The relative freedom Western women are seen to possess means that not only does an Indian man not need to protect a Western girlfriend, but furthermore can gain access to new spaces. Western women's wealth and status on Kovalam Beach is in this way transposed temporarily onto their Indian partners, disrupting established hierarchies to make status more fluid and contested. One of the first times I saw Ravi at the beach, he was being wined-and-dined in one of the trendiest restaurants by an attractive woman in her mid-forties, whom he later told me was from Hawaii and was "looking for fuck here". Through his relationship, he was permitted firstly into the restaurant (otherwise off-limits to him), and ate a meal which cost around several times his daily takings. This reasoning draws parallels with the findings of Herold et al. (2001) in the Caribbean, where beach boys were very adept at manipulating foreign tourists for economic gain. Parties are often advertised as 'for couples only" in

Kovalam Beach. One flyer for a party at an upmarket hotel emphasised "Stags not allowed" in red letters. A girlfriend can serve to overcome the restrictive barriers placed on bachelors and more generally, the social restrictions placed on Indians at Kovalam Beach.

If a sexual relationship with a tourist evolves into a permanent partnership, young men also hope for long-term benefits from this union. A Western woman can provide access to much larger mobility, through providing financial resources for the man and his family, or access to the global world. Raja, 35 years old, himself divorced from an Australian anthropologist who passed through Kovalam years ago, told me that "most people marry European people so that they can run away from their lives here". Some young men hope to escape Kovalam, for other destinations where they believe they will be free of what they perceive as the limiting and restrictive environment in Kovalam. Obtaining a passport and travel visa is notoriously hard for young Indian bachelors, especially those with no qualifications or in low-paid labour. I heard rumours of men who spent up to 40,000 rupees ($750) to arrange travel documents, only to be denied in the end and lose their money. Anand recounted how his German girlfriend helped him to arrange documents

> I had no bank balance, no real proper job, not even passport – hard work to get a passport. It is the most impossible thing to get a visa. For people like us, it's almost impossible to get a visa. She really pushed to get it […] She went to Berlin, to the embassy, she was really pushing them and after a scandal, they gave me the visa! To give a person with nothing – my background, living [livelihood], money – [a passport and visa]… It's not hard, it's impossible!

As a general rule, once married, an Indian man can obtain a living permit for a foreign country through a marriage visa. Anand was lucky to obtain the required documents without being married. Even some who are married are still rejected. Raja was unlucky in this respect. Despite being married to an Australian woman, he was twice declined. He claimed that his wife's status as a student did not give her enough clout to get him through the embassy. A local man Dilip, on the other hand, had more luck. In the midst of saving his money to move to Japan to be with his girlfriend, he told me about his travels: "I have been only in Russia before, 2 or 3 months. It's easy to get a visa for Russia. Before I have the Japanese girl, I had a Russian girlfriend. Right now, I'm 33 or 34. Finally I found my real love. Only have one heart. I want to sing a song for her. It's nice to love..."

The collective imagination of young men serves to sketch Western women as a means to gain masculinity and mobility. Blom Hansen (2001:170) comments on the trend of migration to the Gulf States, which he argues enables young men with good earnings, honour to the family, and as a consequence to this, a better chance at obtaining a beautiful bride. A relationship with a Western woman in effect allows men to circumscribe this work, achieving rather instantaneously the positive spinoffs from the relationship. Palmer and Jankowiak (1996) argue that the subject of performance is the "collective construction of imagery through expression and experience". Thus, interactions become based on both imagination and past interactions with tourists, building a repertoire of resources to draw on in present interactions. Pratul's dream "to marry a white girl" demonstrates the social influence of the collective imagination, since Pratul had never personally experienced being in a relationship himself. His performance is informed by and hinges on other's experience. Vijay commented on the inspiration that came from past relationships at Kovalam Beach: "before, the younger generation, they married very old women, they take to their places, then after they help some money, they make a house". Tensions can arise between the different imagined life styles. Yaj's perception of the West was reflected in how he imagined a potential relationship with a Western woman would be organised.

> I want to live in India. I feel like, in the future, maybe I can fall in love with someone – I will stay here though. I don't want to leave here, maybe I go vacation. She has to stay with me. If she wants to go, 2 or 3 months for work, maybe I can come there. Because I love my India. Everything I can do. Relax, business, fun, lots of freedom.

Yaj's own desires take priority over a potential girlfriend's own hopes and dreams, indicating a certain degree of control that he feels he would possess as the head of their household.

> The combined result of this imagination manifests in particular social interactions between female tourists and Indian men in general[11]. One evening over a casual dinner, Sue, a young Canadian traveller, recalled some encounters with men in India. Although travelling with a male partner, Sue recalled that when he was not present at her side, she would often be approached by a stranger. She termed the ensuing conversation the "elevator pitch", in which a man attempts to woo her by convincing her of the benefits of a relationship with him. Personally, I experienced the elevator pitch with one young man, who I had hoped could be my informant. After obtaining my phone number after a few casual conversations, Sunil began to call me repeatedly. Upon finally answering the phone, Sunil asked if I loved him, explaining that if I did, he would "give me everything". A parallel in this behaviour could be drawn between studies of sexual harassment on school campuses in India (Lukose 2009:116; Rogers 2008), where it has been observed that young Indian women bear the brunt of men's competition for status and privilege. The presence of female tourists in Kovalam Beach, in collaboration with the collective imagination of Western women, seems to shift attention from Indian women to Western women. In order for their advances not to be construed with sexual harassment, young Indian men in Kovalam Beach seek to emulate a modern, masculine identity.

Unlocking Modernity through Performance

The performance of modern identity is deployed as a strategy to appear attractive to Western women by a number of young men in Kovalam Beach. Of course, no one person has simply one identity, rather identity must be thought of as fractured (Hall 1996). Performances of identity are based on both an egocentric and sociocentric reading of social situations, as Sökefeld (1999) argues to position identity in a way which protects both the individual and the surrounding social web. Men's performance of identity in Kovalam Beach seeks not only to attract Western tourists, but also to assert and maintain their own status amongst their peers.

> The first step in a young man's performance involves gaining the attention of female tourists. Dahles and Bras (1999:268) term this "tactic talk", light conversation which is implicitly sexual in nature. Madhu was a classic model for this, relaxing on the parade, smiling at tourists, and occasionally calling out his witty one liner "Hey baby, are you looking for me?" Physical appearance is perceived as playing an important role in this initial attraction. Kumar commented on his own appeal: "Lots of girls coming here, because I am black man! The white girls really like that", while Yaj pinned his failure with women also on his appearance: "All quiet on the girl front. Girls hate me this year. It's the moustache". Accordingly, men adjusted their clothing styles, many wearing Western clothing in place of a lungi[12].

> Young men of Keralan descent could draw on their naturally larger frame[13] to cultivate a muscular look. Some of my informants regularly worked out at the local gym. Ishmael told me he went to the gym to "look in shape". Ravi, the ladies-man, wore tight-fitting shirts to showcase his powerful frame – something which he told me his Hawaiian lover noticed, commenting "you very good man, very strong". The use of physical attributes to attract women has been considered by Kerma and Mahendra (2004) to emphasise men's sexual

prowess and prove that they can satisfy a woman sexually. Sanchez Taylor (2006:49) argues that men emphasise what they perceive as the Western ideal of the hyper-masculinised black men. Muscular build can also be considered as a way of asserting power and position amongst peers (Kerma and Mahendra 2004:73). Vijay, the owner of the coconut party hut, certainly asserted his own status amongst other men. Well-known in Kovalam Beach for his reputation – "before, everyone knows me, I'm a bit of a bad person" – Vijay had spent a lot of his younger years causing trouble, something which he consciously decided to end after a fight with police landed him in jail. However, he continued to dominate his social scene through his ability to command his group of employees. Vijay's face could change in an instant, from cheerful and smiling, to stern, his sharp tongue lashing out in Malayalam to his subordinates. His power drew attraction from females as a display of masculinity, while also asserting his authoritative role as boss amongst the men around him.

Confiding in women and showing their compassionate side demonstrates another approach towards a performance of modern identity. Ishmael, for example, felt that he could understand more people, and especially women, after the experience of studying in Bangalore where he had the opportunity to interact with people his age from a range of backgrounds. During his lecture on trust with which I began this ethnography, Ishmael told me "trust for a white girl is a hard thing". In correlation with comments on the sexual nature of most men's interest in women, he progressed to advise me about whom I should or should not be seen with around the beach. As our friendship evolved, Ishmael claimed to recognise my role as a researcher and lack of romantic potential, telling me he had "stopped trying anything on with me anymore". In early reflections in my field notes, I commented on some of the young men who had told they were of European mind. I felt a vast difference in the communication methods, with these young men taking a much more active and empathetic interest in my life experience than others.

Another method of portraying the modern identity demonstrates reflexivity in life and personal development. This strategy was deployed particularly in regards to sexuality. Young men talked about their sexual development and their transition into masculinity and thus manhood by gaining sexual experience. Ravi told me that his first experience was a failure, with the woman telling him "Ravi, you don't know anything, that is the problem". At the age of 19, Ravi did not have the necessary knowledge to act confidently when he first experienced intimacy with a tourist. Young people are often not given adequate education about sex (Abraham 2002), especially with regards to sexual protection against unwanted pregnancies or transmittable diseases (Kerma and Mahendra 2004). Furthermore, they obtain "fragmented and distorted" information about sex from sources such as their peers and media (Kerma and Mahendra 2004:76). The issue is that, having no formalised avenue of discussion, young people often obtain only partial impressions about their sexual identity (Kerma and Mahendra 2004:74). Running out of ways to learn, Ravi turned to a friend for advice. "Then I am happy, he is telling [me about sex], [I am] studying, then I'm waiting for anybody girl, girl, girl, girl, and coming, next girl". Once his friend provided some context for him, Ravi regained his confidence sexually and began to pursue sexual interactions again. Sexual knowledge thus becomes an indicator of masculinity, whereas ignorance is perceived as a failure to reach this elevated status.

Young men exhibited agency in their decisions over relationships with women. As opposed to Sanchez Taylor (2001), who argues that the inequalities between local men and tourist women leaves little agency for men, many of my informants declared they were quite willing to refuse relationships if the woman did not appeal. Madhu expressed his preference, declaring that "sometimes I am looking at the younger girls, but the older ones I never look". Having a relationship with a female tourist who was considered *too* old reversed the elevation

in status and resulted in a negative stigma being attached to the man. One young man had a history of relationships with older women; Vijay, as his boss, recounted this story to me.

> He likes old women […] I gave him one more chance [after some troubles with an earlier relationship]. Then again, the same thing with that old English woman, I say "Okay, no more – I don't want to see you anymore". Her skin is like scratched, coming blood. You know, she was 72! When they make some old woman, they have money, but they lose energy, they [the older women] rob it from them.

Vijay places emphasis particularly on how age affects physical appearance, demonstrating the importance placed on beauty. Although money plays a significant role in these relationships, gossip and status amongst peers can deter men from seeking relationships with women who are not perceived as attractive.

> By possessing control over what are perceived as "bad" habits, men also claim agency over their lives and show reflexivity in their choices. Perceived bad habits include drinking, using drugs, cheating financially or aggressive behaviour. Ravi was the only informant who spoke explicitly about how avoiding these habits differentiated him from the rest, using several of these examples as the basis for his claims.

> Other people is smoking grass, but yes [not me], because I am very different […]

> Because I don't think so, same other boy is possible in Kovalam, maybe other place not possible like me same. My mind is very different. Special, very different. I don't like cheating you know.

Others used more implicit reasoning to make their attentiveness to being a "good" man apparent. Kumar claimed a change as he grew older: "first I only think 'make the money', and before I am too much drinking, dancing, fighting – money gone! Bad boy, ok, but I have a good heart; I don't take [from] other people". Especially in this approach, men often adjusted their performance depending on the audience to whom it was directed. These dialogues were presented to me during interviews, but did not align with behaviour I witnessed. Vijay commented on this one day when we were relaxing with a few friends in the reception of his premises. We were discussing the topic of wife-beating in Kerala, when a local man walked by with his white girlfriend. Vijay laughed and said this man was probably also aggressive towards women, but around his Western girlfriend is caring and protective. I discredited this, vouching that not all men were necessarily deceptive like that. Vijay replied, "No, not all, some. Around the tourist areas it can be worse". Performance becomes based on staging a certain authenticity, revealing to the tourists only a certain impression they wish of their own culture. Authenticity, argues Olsen (2002), is often based on Western liberal modes of thinking. In this sense, men curtail their bad habits around Western women to appear to align with the ideal of a modern man, but as it will be shown in the next section, this performance sometimes falters.

Tensions in the Performance of Modern Identity

One night, seated in a small bar and having a few drinks with some expat friends, I was approached by Raja. We had only ever been acquainted casually. A few times I had chatted with him while he attended his business of renting beach beds and we greeted each other in passing most days. But that night, Raja was drunk and determined to make a scene. It started slowly, with him hanging around and trying to engage in conversation. I rebuffed him, irritated by both his disturbance and inebriation. This rejection quickly escalated the scene, with Raja exclaiming,

> I like you, but I hate you! I don't like your character at all. Always rounding[14]
> with the boys, all the time after they are telling me how you were in their bed.
> I don't like this. But I have something for you before you leave. It's a kiss, and
> a hug, and more if you want it.

I didn't stick around much longer to see how this scenario would play out. But Raja's performance is poignant for a number of reasons.

Once even a casual acquaintance had been formed, young men tended to become possessive about women's activities. Compassionate Ishmael explained this behaviour to me during his lecture outside the coconut hut. He told me that, as soon as a female tourist begins to spend time with an Indian man, she is perceived by him in similar terms as a wife. The following assumption is that she should restrict her socialising, not talking to other men. In this performance, there are tensions between modern identity and patriarchal structures which inform young men. The right that men have to control the movements and behaviour of women in their family (Rogers 2008:89) overlaps into the social interaction with Western women. Raja's behaviour can be seen as an outburst of aggression targeting my perceived transgression of the rules of patriarchal social interactions. This leads to an understanding of masculinity in terms of both modern and patriarchal paradigms. Masculinity in modernity is linked with being a good man, whereas in patriarchy it can lead to hyper-masculinity and the obscuring of the rights of women. Rogers (2008) argues hyper-masculinity to be a "masquerade […] to recover a loss of self-esteem, while conversely concealing weakness and social dependency" (Rogers 2008:80).

Ownership of Western women is also visible in disputes which erupt between young men. These altercations can be based on regional, religious or status differences between men. Suresh told me that he would never be seen on the beach with a girl[15], since he was not from Kovalam originally, and the "Kerala boys don't like". In that case, he said they would "try and make argument". Men who originate from Kovalam Beach believe they have more right to the access of Western women, because they stake a claim to the territory of the beach.

Although men seek to both emulate and achieve a modern identity through relationships with Western women, tensions evolve because of the disparity in perception of tradition and modernity as sources for the imagination. Giddens (1991:56) argues that individuals are required in social interactions to maintain control over the body, and to be recognised as doing so. "A competent agent is one routinely seen to be so by other agents. He or she must avoid lapses of bodily control, or signal to others by gestures or exclamations that there is nothing 'wrong' if such events should occur" (Giddens 1991:56). The day after the incident with Raja occurred, he made a concerted effort to locate me and apologise for his actions. He explained that it simply came down to him being drunk. The display of performance associated with traditional identity markers in the presence of Western women indicates a loss of control, and thus must be compensated for with a particular signal to reaffirm their modern identity.

Conclusion

Set in the south Indian state of Kerala, this thesis has examined the interaction between tourists and the local population in the tourist resort of Kovalam Beach. I questioned how the presence of female tourists is reflected in the imagination and identity construction of young men as they negotiate and form their own script of life. By analysing the dialogues and practices of my informants, I have argued that Western women become a part of a larger process of modern identity construction by these young men, allowing them to attain masculinity and upward class mobility in the contemporary, global world.

Using Appadurai's (1996) concept of imagination, I firstly explored the role tourism and media play in the construction of young Indian men's imagination of life. Yet the influences of Western modernity are not accepted at face value, but tempered by their familial obligations and social interactions with Indians. The local context of the patriarchal society is highlighted as an important influence in their imagination and identity construction, creating a tension between different scripts of traditional and modern life that visible in Kovalam Beach. Secondly, I presented a visible manifestation of this tension, the collective imagination of women. Using both patriarchal notions and global images, young Indian men juxtapose Western women against Indian women, resulting in a negotiation between traditional and modern life paths as men seek the best future for themselves. Finally, I embedded commonly stated reasons for relationships with tourists – sex, money and access to new spaces – within the local context to demonstrate how relationships with Western women become an opportunity for young men to determine a new life trajectory. Young Indian men use multiple strategies to exhibit their modern identity in the hope to attract a female tourist. Yet, the tension that exists between tradition and modernity in men's imagination resulted in an ambiguous performance.

The presence of the tourism industry in Kovalam Beach was thus found to not only have shaped the local population demographically and economically, but also in terms of the dialogues and practices of young Indian men. Ambivalent perceptions of the normative institution of marriages shaped emergent ideas on love, romance and relationships, allowing young men to renegotiate their hopes for their own relationships and desires. The opportunity presented by female tourists who were open and willing to engage in relationships with these men thus allowed them to gain sexual experience without the perceived restrictive consequences of sex in Indian culture, escalating their masculine status. Furthermore, these sexual relationships gave them new access to wealth and new spaces, allowing them to imagine a life with greater mobility in the global sphere.

Yet, the reproduction of the patriarchal paradigms of traditional Keralan society in men's behaviour and the normative dichotomies drawn between Western and Indian women resulted in stereotypes which served to objectify the white, Western body. This was visible in the everyday relations with female tourists, which were imbued with racialised and sexualised behaviour, making the Western woman's femininity something to be gazed upon and her mobility something to be exploited. Importantly, these findings emphasise the agency local men have in entering relationships with female tourists. In fact, by subjugating the female body through patriarchal forms of gender power, men believe they enhance their own economic and racial status. This finding contributes further to the current debate on relationships between female tourists and local men, indicating that the men do not view these relationships as a form of exploitation but rather as an opportunity to overcome their own marginalisation. Finally, it demonstrates how imagination and identity construction in a complex setting becomes a negotiation between traditional and modern tropes of living, where young people must learn to navigate ambiguous and changing terrain in a variety of ways to survive.

Following the course set by Dahles and Bras in 1999, this thesis contributes towards an understanding of men's motivations for entering into sexual relationships with female tourists. By sketching the role of imagination and performance in their identity construction, I hope to have given young Indian men a voice by exhibiting their agency as they negotiate their own life trajectories by the best means available to them in their local context. I contest accounts which label relationships between local men and female tourists simply as a form of Western exploitation. As tourism permeates further into developing countries, it becomes increasingly important to understand how tourists affect local populations. This thesis raises

further questions about the unregulated nature of tourism in the contemporary world by demonstrating the ability tourists have to manipulate, albeit sometimes unconsciously, the imagination and thus life paths of local people.

Notes

End Notes
1. A traditional system of medicine native to India.
2. McNaughton (2006) points out the problem with using terminology such as Smith's (1989) famous host-guest concept. While I recognise the variation in the Indian population, for ease I refer to all Indians living in Kovalam Beach as 'locals' throughout this thesis, but specify regional differences where relevant.
3. As long as the interaction was not overtly visible.
4. In 1956, Kerala became one state, composed of the formerly independent units of Malabar, Travancore, and Cochin (See Woodcock 1967: 250–257).
5. The principal festival in Kerala, celebrating fertility and an adaptation of a Hindu story about Vishnu (Woodcock 1967:13).
6. As a form of transnational immigrants.
7. Supermarkets tend to exist only in bigger cities in India. In rural areas similar to Kovalam Beach, it is more common to find smaller general stores which may sell only a few Western items.
8. As Maoz (2006) recognises, leisure tourists tend to disregard local customs and laws, instead choosing to perceive their leisure time as relatively free from social constraints and thus engaging in behaviour which appears socially free and permissive. The Third world tourist destination becomes their playground (Crick 1989; Maoz 2006:223).
9. In contrast to Maoz (2006:229), who argues that tourists are not aware of the local gaze upon them, Western women spoke about their dislike for strange men watching them on the beach. However, many dismissed the gaze and continued to bathe in bikinis in any case.
10. See for example Sanchez Taylor 2001 for an account of similar behaviour in the Caribbean from women's perspectives.
11. Here I do not discuss my informants directly.
12. Traditional garment, like a sarong, worn around the waist by men in Kerala.
13. In comparison to other regional groups, such as Karnatakan or Kashmiri men who tended – in general – to be smaller framed.
14. A term for being seen in different places – "here and there".
15. Before Suresh was married.

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Summary

This thesis examines the interaction between international tourists and the local population at a beach resort in the south Indian state of Kerala. The presence of female tourists in Kovalam Beach has sparked a trend where many young local men seek to enter into relationships with them. Research on relationships between female tourists and locals in developing countries to date has primarily centred on the power dynamics of these relationships. In comparison to these studies, I focus particularly on the young men who seek such relationships, to question the underlying motivations for their actions.

Sex, money and escape compose the perfunctory reasons given by Indian men to pursue relationships with Western women. By analysing the behaviour and conversations of young men, I argue that these motivations fall into a larger process where men seek what they perceive as a modern identity. Linking identity with the anthropological concepts of imagination and performance, I sought to understand how men experience life and how this becomes reflected in their behaviour and thus identity.

I examine firstly how young men experience Kovalam Beach, as an enclave of Western modes of living, in contrast to the context of the patriarchal society in which they grew up. Both Western images and Indian patriarchal society inform young men about life, but a tension emerges between these two modes of living. This is most visibly manifested in the way young men perceive both Western women as modern and Indian women as traditional.

I argue that Indian men desire relationships with Western women as part of a quest to become what they perceive as modern, both masculine and mobile, to live with autonomy and freedom. To make themselves attractive to Western women, men exude this modern identity through a performance of stylised approaches which cultivate a certain appearance, for example as physically strong, compassionate, reflective about their own position in life, willing to take responsibility in their choices or by demonstrating control over "bad" habits. However, this performance sometimes falters, due to the tension which evolves in their imagination between their perceptions of tradition and modernity.