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Transgender Perspectives On Dis/Organising (En)counters With Cisgendered Hegemony

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CONTENTS

List of Tables	4
List of Figures	4
List of Appendices	4
List of Acronyms	5
Dedication	6
Abstract	8
CHAPTER 1: The Gender in Transgender	9
1.1 Key Concepts and Terms.	9
1.2 Unearthing Experiences	11
1.3 Research Question	16
1.4 Blueprint of the RP	16
Chapter 2: Investigating Cisgendered Hegemony	17
2.1 Transcendental Potential in Transgender	17
2.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Muses	18
CHAPTER 3: Evolving Methodological Approach	21
3.1 Exploratory Conversations	21
3.2 Inviting Research Participants	23
3.3 Methods	26
3.3 Analysis	28
Chapter 4: Finding truths	29
4.1 Navigation in the Netherlands	29
4.2 Navigation From Mexico to Netherlands	32
4.3 Navigation in Kerala	36
CHAPTER 5: Learnings	46
5.1 Manifestations of Cisgendered Hegemony	46
5.2 Navigations Dismantling Cisgendered Hegemony	47
Chapter 6: An Outlook on the Project and my Positionality	48
Appendices	51
References	58

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Spaces of Participatory Observations

Table 2: Research Participants

Table 3: Paradigmatic analysis

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. oppression matrix showing the complexity of violence (Stage Left Productions, 2017)

Figure 2: Theoretical Framework by modifying Soest and Bryant's levels of Violence (1994, pp. 551)

Figure 3: Speaker at Protesting Pride Parade(Personal Archive)

Figure 4: Protesting Pride Parade at Vondel Park (Personal Archive)

Figure 5: Panel on Trans Healthcare – Trans Pride 2022 (Personal Archive)

Figure 6: Panel on Trans Sex Work Empowerment – Trans Pride 2022 (Personal Archive)

Figures 7 & 8: Onam with Sahayatrika (Instagram, 2022)

Figure 9: Thiruvathirakali at Thrissur

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Appendix 2 – Pictures of Participants

Appendix 3 – Conceptual Photos that helped me during the RP

LIST OF ACRONYMS

TGs – transgender individuals in Kerala, India.

Cishegemony – Cisgendered Hegemony

GNC - Gender Non-conforming

KMRL - Kochi's Metro Rail Project

BIPOC – Black Indigenous and People of Colour.

AMAB – Assigned male at birth

AFAB – Assigned female at birth

SW – Sex Workers

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

SRS – Sexual Reassignment Surgery

DEDICATION

“I want my voice to be harsh, I don’t want it to be beautiful, I don’t want it to be pure, I don’t want it to have all dimensions.
I want it to be torn through and through, I don’t want it to be enticing, for I am speaking of man and his refusal, of the day-to-day rottenness of man, of his dreadful failure.
I want you to tell.”

Excerpt from – Letter to a Frenchman by Frantz Fanon (1964)
(Ureña, 2019, pp. 1647)

Just like it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a vibrant, resilient, creative, and strong community to help you write a project close to your heart.

This research project is an apology and promise to all those who had to swallow their truth to make life easier for those who didn’t stand to gain from the revelation and possibilities their truth presented to the world. I dedicate this work to preserve and record experiences that show the violence enacted by the gender binary on all of us and especially our trans siblings. I want to thank Alejandra, Sabrina, Prithvi, Arjun, Siddharth and Sheethal for trusting me and answering my questions. I want to also extend my gratitude to The Hangout and Sahayatrika for help with my research and creating safe environments for queer and trans humans to live their truth. I want to thank Ranga Renjini and Riyaz for patiently answering my exploratory pre-research questions which enabled me to continue my journey into researching more responsibly. I will never forget the support I received from queer community online, in looking for participants from Kochi, thank you Geethanjali and Uthara. Thank you Shilpa for helping me in my journey to conduct research responsibly.

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I hope this project makes you rethink life and its possibilities like it has made me. I hope the joy and pain hold in your mind, a space that will make you question why living beings in all their multiplicities must fit into boxes that limit their potential.

ABSTRACT

The study seeks to reflect on the stories of the participants to understand the navigation of cis-gendered reality and its effects on six transgender humans. In narratives gathered via semi-structured interviews and participant observation of five events I use the analytic frame of transition to under the processes of navigation using the lenses of Virtù's (2020) trans-dis/organising processes of displacing gender binaries. Transgendered realities are examined through language (to describe experiences), embodiment (performance of gender identity on the body and behaviour) and knowledge sharing (non-hierarchical and collectively created resources)(Virtù, 2020). I conclude with insights on how current (mis)understandings of gender are disrupted through the responses of a transgender person to cisgendered reality in different spaces. These insights are contextualised to give glimpses of a multiplicity of humans - their joys, pains and everything in between starting from Kerala in India to Guadalajara in Mexico, Texas in the U.S, Catalonia in Spain and Amsterdam in Netherlands.

Relevance to Development Studies

We live in a world shaped by systems of oppressions. As a development practitioner working within the system, the dichotomy of working against oppression, being oppressed, and un/consciously participating in oppression was unavoidable. Confronted by forms of policing working invisibly and visibly on trans, queer, female, and differently abled bodies, I was disillusioned with development work. This study is an attempt to capture transgressive reality that gives hope and builds common frames of understanding, knowledge, and disruption. This is essential to understand the mechanisms of power that transgender individuals continue to encounter across contexts. The critical focus on cisgendered hegemony is potentially liberatory due to the othering it imposes on people across gender and sexual identities. The experiences of my participants demonstrate the potential of processes that dis/organise and recover dormant knowledge that can enlighten current practices and knowledge of inclusion in policy and governance.

Keywords

Transgender, Queer, Cisgendered Hegemony, Virtù's Trans Dis/Organising Processes, Feminist Epistemology

CHAPTER 1: THE GENDER IN TRANSGENDER

1.1 KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS.

Through the process of research I have understood the danger of defining terms and concepts while evolving my stigmatized understandings of them. There is violent rigidity to defining terms that can cause harm via erasure of different experiences. But for the purpose of awareness I will lay out my current understandings of the key concepts and terms that are important to the study.

Gender

Maria Lugones's defines gender as "a system of relations with light and dark sides. The light side of the colonial/modern gender system is the one most often referred to in mainstream feminist theorizing and activism: it is based on the ideas of biological dimorphism and heterosexuality between men and women, opposing an ideal of the weak, passive, domestically bound, and sexually pure woman to that of a strong, active, self-governing, and sexually aggressive man. The light side is hegemonic in that it establishes the modern meanings of "woman" and "man," and thus of "human"—those who are civilized and evolved enough to warrant the labels "woman" and "man." By contrast, the dark side of the colonial/modern gender system does not organize gender in these terms; colonized/nonwhite females were "understood as animals in the deep sense of 'without gender,' sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity" (HGS 202–3). This construal of colonized and nonwhite peoples is "thoroughly violent" (206) as it works to justify the hier-archies constitutive of Eurocentered capitalism—the labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, abuse, reduction to animality, and denigration of cosmologies and knowledges of those on the dark side." (P. Dipietro, Mcweeny and Roshanravan, 2019, pp. 15) This dark side is morphed with local forms of domination. In India, gender is morphed with caste oppression and euro-centred capitalism. While this rings true for those living in Mexico and the Netherlands. In India, gender is organised around strict familial & class lines which is enforced through denigration of those who are born into lower castes and tribal communities and imposing ideals of upper caste femininity and masculinity on the light side of gender, i.e, Brahminic.¹ Thus, gender shapes who is human in these systems of relations and dictates the manner of interaction.

¹ It refers to behaviors and knowledges that represent the uppermost caste in India, the Brahmins. They usually were associated with teaching and shaping the ruling caste in India.

Cisgendered Hegemony

These constructed understandings have created a hegemony of gender that is essentialized by cisgendered people, i.e, people who identify with the sex of male or female assigned at birth based on the reproductive organ visible. Cisgendered Hegemony refers to any process in a social setting, structural arrangement, and interaction where people intentionally or unintentionally can only accept in their imagination the possibility of the existence of cisgender people – those who identify with the gender category they were assigned into – male or female. (Jones, 2020) This hegemony is maintained by culture and systems of family, state and religion that encourages heteronormative behaviour that stereotypes roles and relations only between people assigned female and male at birth, men or women.

Transgender and Transitions.

Transgender in my current understanding refers to people who don't fit into the gender assigned to them at birth. They may or may not undergo medical procedures to alter their physical bodies. They are assigned male or female sex at birth, but their gender identity never conforms to either category. They practice gender non-conformity through expressing alternative gender identities that deviate from heteronormative expectations in how one dresses and behaves socially with others. This non-conformity is part of the transitioning that transgender people undergo. By transition I don't mean to focus exclusively on bodily changes that my participants have gone through but to use Snorton's (2011) notion of transitions which seeks to – “obliterate the category of gender one was assigned at birth, and in doing so to deploy a variety of strategies that radically de-couple sex from gender and gender from gender roles. And I want to be very careful here to say, that the space of transition does not mean the conventional medical narrative of gender transformation, but includes a number of modes of anti-gender essentialist self-fashioning that occur in the everyday.” (Snorton, 2011 cited, Jones 2020, pp. 8-9).

Transgender is also a political term that describes a variety of non-normative gender and sexual behaviours – “transsexuals, transvestites, cross-dressers, men or women of transgender or transsexual experience, drag queens, drag kings, female or male impersonators, genderqueers, intersexuals, hermaphrodites, fem queens, girls, boys, trannies, feminine gay men, butch lesbians, male-to-female, female-to-male, female embodied masculine persons, and even, simply, men or women.”(Valentine, 2007, pp. 33) In India, it has grown into a term that is used to describe people from historically marginalised/colonised third gender groups and people who may or may not undergo procedures but choose to live a gender reality different than the one assigned to them at

birth. They were erased and systematically impoverished by British colonialists who were uncomfortable with their fluidity and acceptance (Oldenburg, 1990) In Mexico, the term has also began to encompass the group of people who are called travestis, they are assigned male gender at birth but have a gender reality that is feminine with/without medical procedures (Ortiz, 2022). Thus, different categories under the umbrella of transgender form boundaries that are according to Meyerowitz, not hermetically sealed and permeable. (Valentine, 2007, pp.37) Therefore, it shows possibilities of including a multiplicity of experiences of people who do not conform to the gender categories – male and female.

1.2 UNEARTHING EXPERIENCES

Dealing with Dissonances of Progress and Patriarchy: Kochi, Kerala

Kerala is one of the most developed states in Modern India. It has the highest share of literate citizens. The indicators of development are “favorable” towards women. We outnumber the men (the sex ratio is below 1 in most states of India). Run under a Communist Government, Kerala has healthy indicators in education, welfare, and health. But I have the lived experience of Kerala being a conservative state when it comes to female and queer bodies. Fellow batchmates were constantly stared at, harassed in public transport, catcalled. Speaking out against these harassers or even our professors were often met with severe consequences. We were treated like “temptresses” who needed to be domesticated. (Motta, 2018, pp. 6) In the safe space surrounded by each other we would gender bend and dress up as men for plays, dances, and wear male clothing as uniforms for college festivals. We playfully embodied energies that oppressed our lives and redefined femininity and masculinity to nurture our sense of self. This was the first in many collaborative spaces where I experienced gender binaries being displaced.

Tracing Transgenders in Kerala

In 2018, TG women were attending classes in our college and often were invited as judges of fashion shows arranged by our design department. Trans visibility had gone up due to the efforts of the Kerala State Government. They now have jobs through Kochi’s Metro Rail Project (KMRL), access to education programs, medical clinics, and pension schemes. TG (transgender) women were being integrated into Keralite society in all “visible” forms. But there are missing elements in this integration. TG students in our college often attended classes in a group with each other. There was no provision of toilet facilities for them. There was no attempt at interaction on either side. We were surviving the institution at that point. Disconnected from each other, assimilation into cisgendered power structures through denial of our pain were the only viable

choices in our imaginary. (Motta, 2018, pp. 13). I was confronted with one of many dichotomies of governance. Using frame of individual rights and entitlements, Kerala was implementing inclusive legislation that wasn't enough for this community to sustain themselves. TGs got the jobs in the state's metro project, but as Kurian and Manoj (2021) show through their study, the approach of the state is incomplete and serves to improve the state's progressive image rather than help the community. TGs were happy to receive this recognition but there are mixed reactions due to low wages via the metro project and contradictory bureaucratic red tape in the form of identification to access these schemes. (Kurian & Manoj, 2021 pp. 17-19) The discrimination that TGs face in society and schools led to early dropouts, limiting their opportunities in the informal market. They received wages lower than the minimum wage. There are frequent cases of job dismissal on revealing gender identity. (Kurian and Manoj, 2021).

Even before the policy was instituted Krishnan (2013) premonitorily states – “The general outlook of the Kerala society premises on false pride embedded on pseudo morality. Though inclusive legislations for transgenders can bring changes, modifying the general outlook of society on transgenders would be a herculean task. Such perceptions force these persons to hide their sexual identities and expressions, suppress sexual desires, live a life in the dark as alien creatures of a conservative society.” (pp. 21). From a legal and governance perspective in Kerala, despite the initiation of various schemes there is still a lot to be done according to Satish And Kataria (2022)-

1. Improving the infrastructure and workforce of the transgender justice board
2. Targeted allocation of money to projects to prevent waste of resources
3. Improvement of redressal mechanisms to deal with bullying in educational spaces and police stations
4. Raising legal awareness amongst transgenders,
5. Better housing plan and employment opportunities.

Satish and Kataria, (2022) further suggest that the national Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 needs to have further amendments regarding inclusion of diverse gender identities, repairing the clauses which force SRS (particularly to normalise intersex bodies) and the powers awarded to district magistrates to decide which transgender persons are eligible for their certificates, include more structures to enforce the law and deal more effectively with violence like rape. One example Satish and Kataria (2022) give – “Sexually violating or physically harming a cisgender would attract a minimum of 3 years to a life imprisonment, whereas under this Act a person doing the same to a TG would be punished for a maximum of 2 years. This indicates the disparity between TGs and cisgenders.” (pp. 1964)

Historical Trans Erasure in Kochi

“India has a big culture in trans community. With the Hijras, Kothis, Kinnars, Aravanis, Jogappa, Shivshakthi, Manthalamukhi and Magalali)². Lot of status in culture and lots of the community are together and Hindu culture and Muslim culture also.” (Shyam, 2022, Interview)

Like many of us (cisgendered people in India), my understanding of trans individuals was limited to documentaries on the Hijra community conducted by National Geographic or transphobic and misogynistic portrayals of gender non-conformity by male comedians dressing up feminine on National Television Shows. Four months into the pandemic in 2019, I remember seeing transgender people on the main streets of Kochi being approached by cars. My mind went into an overdrive of curiosity. In my stigmatized understanding I thought, didn't the government provide enough schemes to prevent them supplementing their income with sex work. How had an entire community's existence been so erased, that their inequity shocked me? My previous understanding thus reflected, cisgender erasure of trans identities in society. Further in the Keralite imaginary there is barely any trace of transmen. “there is a media attention towards femininity. Those who are transwomen have media attention. I think that's a negative because they are looked at as symbols. Now if the government has a program - a transgender shelter home for projects like this they mostly hire transwomen. Now also they only think of transwomen when they say transgender. When we look at the history of transmen, there is barely much there. Transmen during pride march even when they participate, they are there for the record of transmen. If it's not recorded specifically, you wouldn't even know transmen were there. Most of the time people think transmen are a phenomenon that just started happening.” (Geetha, 2022, Interview) In the State Planning Board Internship Report by Shifa Sadiq, (2018) the policy of 2015 had no specialised understanding of transmen and their needs.

“In Kerala there isn't a big culture. But, they are uplifting and inclusive. But many things even during my childhood when I went to perform in my arts and social spaces but people didn't understand me. At that time I was very confused.”(Shyam, 2022, Interview)

The closest cultural reference I could find was the Chamayavilakku festival in the of Kottankulangara Devi Temple at Chavara, Kollam in Kerala India. Men and boys dress up as women to carry lamps to pray to the goddess residing within the temple who is said to grant their desires. Every year, a growing amount of trans people participate in the Chamayavillakku festival.

² These are historically marginalized third gender groups located in different regions of India. They each have their own religious and social history distinct from each other.

(H., 2021) As I continued my search, I learnt about the birth of Ayyappa, a revered ascetic deity whose parents Shiva and Vishnu shifted forms between divine feminine and masculine to give birth to him (Vanita, 2000). Even though, they abandon him due to the manner of his birth. Ayyappa grew to be a powerful deity who transcended lines created by caste, religion and embodied divine feminine energy necessary to kill demons. He remained a celibate ascetic. Asceticism was the only available alternative to escape pressures of heteronormativity at that time. Devotees get a similar escape while practicing asceticism when they go for pilgrimage to his temple (Vanita, 2000). But these practices are gatekept by men through restrictions where menstruating women are not allowed on the temple premises. Such histories of trans and queer people in literature and myths are framed to encourage cisgendered heteronormativity. (Nandakumar, 2000) As a cisgendered woman living in Kerala this was also an opportunity to contest western imaginaries of non-western transgender groups, who are often exoticized as third gender groups. Thus, despite all the progress and hard work there were many procedural, structural and cultural barriers reinforced by the makings of cisgendered hegemony in Kerala.

Resonance of similar Dichotomies in the Netherlands

In my initial literature review for Netherlands, I discovered that the dichotomy that sparked my curiosity existed here in different forms. The LGBT Monitor published by the Netherland's Institute for Social Research (Van Beusekom and Kuyper, 2018, pp. 4), paint a grim picture of the state of Transgenders in the Netherlands – “People who have changed their registered gender in the Personal Records Database have a significantly worse socio-economic position than the general population. They are more likely to be living on a lower income, have less capital available and larger debts, and they are less likely to be homeowners. Their position on the labour market position is also worse; they are less likely to be in fixed employment and more likely to be claiming benefits. Young transgender people are more likely to be bullied than their cisgender (non-transgender) counterparts of the same age, are more likely to experience emotional neglect or mistreatment at home, have lower self-esteem and more psychological problems.”

Riyaz (2022, pre-research interview) shared that trans healthcare is very binary. I agreed and shared my observation that most transition and care protocols were developed by cis-white men. They elaborated saying that it's problematic the way gender affirming care is centralized and commercialized in Amsterdam. Access to hormones should be and can be localized. This leads one to see how the Dutch view gender, when it came to transgender individuals. The norms regarding gender affirming needs and protocols of care were developed by medical professionals

who were influenced by Christian medical virtues which sought to locate the dissonance created by cisgendered reality in the bodies of Trans individuals. Thus, the gender reassignment surgeries became standardized to correct gender non-conformity by developing binary protocols and care procedures. (Soto-Lafontaine; Verloo and Van der Vleuten, 2020) The effect of this was extreme control of the state on the definition and the ability for trans bodies to define themselves.

Verbeek *et al.* (2020) highlight experiences of enacted stigma in public and spaces of work against trans people due to the discomfort their embodied experience presents to cisgendered people who occupy these spaces. Geijtenbeek and Plug, (2015) also finds that there is a wage penalty for transsexual workers. It also has contradicting results of effect of transition on earnings of trans men and women – “When we turn to possible mechanisms that can explain a substantial earnings penalty for becoming a woman and a modest premium for becoming a man, we show that the transsexual earnings patterns in our data are consistent with a (discriminating) labor market in which transsexual workers are paid less as disclosed transsexual as well as being a registered female.”(pp. 17)

Alternative Answers and Tensions in the Hague, Netherlands

As a student in the Netherlands, my initial interest in answering questions of sex work evolved into an interest in displacing gender binaries. Two events prompted this.

On King’s Night, an organization called The Hangout organized a drag playground as an alternative to celebrating the monarch of the Netherlands like most of the Dutch. My friends and I found a lot of people like us doing drag makeup for the first time in their lives. It was daunting but empowering and wasn’t devoid of power dynamics. That day I stuck to feminine energy as I didn’t feel safe in a place with primarily white LGBT people gender bending. It wasn’t as playful as gender bending in college. I especially noticed a gaze on Nabilla my sweet hijab wearing friend. The communal space where we played with expectations of gender and reveled in freedom from them, while the rest of Netherlands was celebrating a cis white monarch. This was important in my understanding of how the gender binary along with other forms of oppressions could be displaced and countered.

The very next day my friend and I were verbally harassed by a group of black and white teenagers who thought we were lesbians. We were shocked that this happened to us, and the violent nature of their words got worse when my friend said we were together because she mistakenly thought our relationship would be respected. The shock was reflective of a wound. A wound of existence imposed on those who didn’t fit into normalized categories of gender expectations. These tensions

are hard to confront, due to the ignorance of racial, gender and ethnic biases built into the Dutch psyche we couldn't even address it – “Projection, denial and disavowal with regard to race are main mechanisms driving that psyche” (Wekker, 2014, pp. 173-174). Ethnic and Homophobic tensions within Netherlands continue to exist and motivate me to learn more about how interlocked oppressions and complicities work in the context of displacing binaries.

Dispersed locations

My focus thus, shifted the project into building a space of connection between Netherlands and Kochi (two locations well-known for trans rights) to identify cishegemony manifesting in poorly implemented policies, with added consequences the farther transgender people's identity and bodily experiences are located from dominant norms. By reimagining the terrain of how one studies oppression by uncovering insight on the process of navigation in these locations, I want to look at how this hegemony could be dismantled. Thus developing, an approach that reflects multiple realities.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

How do transgender individuals (en)counter cisgendered hegemony in different spheres of their life?

1.4 BLUEPRINT OF THE RP

In this chapter I introduce the main experiences and concepts that are central to my question and analysis. Chapter 2 will elaborate my theoretical framework. Chapter 3 reveals the methodological approach in conducting research. Chapter 4 will describe the findings gathered and themes standing out in the analysis. Chapter 5 will be a space for final learnings and conclusions. Chapter 6 will be a reflections chapter which will focus on the mistakes and misconceptions I had and where I can talk about alternative ways research on trans issues could be done.

CHAPTER 2: INVESTIGATING CISGENDERED HEGEMONY

2.1 TRANSCENDENTAL POTENTIAL IN TRANSGENDER

When we are born with a certain gender assigned to us at birth, we begin to engage in the grandest information processing exercise known to humans. The illusory truth known as the gender binary. According to Wang *et al.*, (2016) the illusory truth is determined by our brain's – perirhinal cortex (PRC) which processes information based on how many times its repeated to us and how easy it is for our brain's to process. It's harder for us to process newer information, but when the information is repeated it's easier for us to process it at “*both sensory (i.e., perceptual) and semantic (i.e., conceptual) levels*” (Wang et al., 2016, pp. 1). This is especially true in the case for information that appears coherent and congruent. Binary systems certainly do appear to be that way. Due to the power of the information that seems fluent it also affects our inferential decisions on who seems more familiar, famous and appreciated. (Wang et. al., 2016, pp.2) When cis-gendered and heteronormative reality further reinforces this binary due to the power dynamics of our cultural, social and capital spaces, alternative realities and truths are violently erased due to the seeming threat they bring to the coherence and congruence of our illusory understandings of gender.

To understand the knowledges of the dark side of the gender system which is exploited and de-emphasised in the system of gender, I explore and reflect on the active subjectivity (P. Dipietro, Mcweeny and Roshanravan, 2019, pp. 10) practiced by six of my participants and the spaces I observed in the course of my fieldwork. By active subjectivity, I mean to go beyond a person's agency which is grounded in notions of the individualism that enable systems of exploitation that privilege a cis/white/rich/upper caste/able person's version of the world. First I seek to trace the different levels of violence imposed by cisgendered hegemony through Soest and Bryant's(1994) conceptualisation of violence. Secondly, I want to throw insight into the responses of these spaces and individuals via the 3Rs conceptualized by Katz (2004) – Resilience, Reworking and Resistance and Virtù's (2020) Trans Dis/Organising processes; language (to describe experiences and knowledge), embodiment (performance of gender identity through the body and behaviour) and knowledge sharing (non-hierarchical and collectively created resources). This frame of active subjectivity helps one gain insight into how my participants and the spaces I observe dismantle cisgendered hegemony.

The enquiry focuses on using the analytic frame of transitions to focus on the overt as well as covert experiences of a trans person's life. According to Jones (2020) - “Adopting spaces of transition as an analytical frame has much promise for gender scholars. First, it calls for placing

trans and nonbinary people at the center of analysis (Sumerau and Mathers 2019). Also, scholars can apply this framework to a wide range of institutional contexts.” (pp.27) Trans people are uniquely equipped through the discovery of difference located within themselves and peers in the cisgendered landscape (Katz, 2004). This forces them to recover and reconnect to knowledge on language, embodiment and knowledge sharing practices that can bring about a new political imagination.

Inspired by the trans-decolonial movement, (Chávez and Vázquez, 2017) the project uncovers a form of personification that is relational and breaks way from recognition within the framework of male and female. I hope to uncover a form of personification that is fluid not only in terms of gender but also in a non-individualized position. In choosing to trace this transgressive subjectivity of the participants experiences and the observations from the spaces in the fieldwork I seek to create a space within literature to recover our capacity for compassion that has been taken from us through the modern/colonial heteronormative forms of subjectification and individuation. Thus, encouraging healing established in the process of this interaction to create deep coalitions that are a “a form of healing grounded on the possibility to fight oblivion, to recover the memory of what has been erased.”(Chávez and Vázquez, 2017, pp. 42)

2.2 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL MUSES

Manifestations of Cisgendered Hegemony

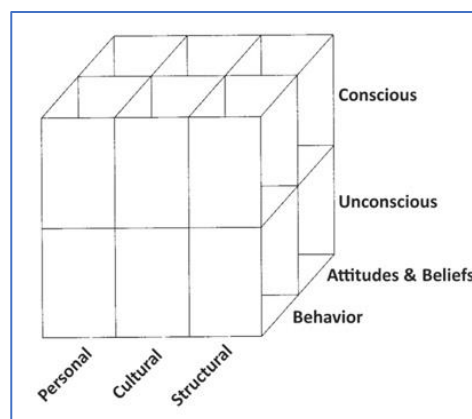
The inherent nature of the dominant system of cisgendered reality punished anyone who doesn't conform to its roles and expectations -“only cisgender people are recognized within language, structures, or stories about “the way this world is or once was”. . . cisgendering reality involves erasing, othering, and punishing non-cisgender existence and experience throughout mainstream social institutions, interactional patterns, and structural arrangements in ways that allow people to accept a world without non-cisgender people.”(Jones, 2020, pp. 2) To uncover this cisgendering of reality, firstly we identify different forms of violence transgender individuals face at multiple levels. Firstly, Soest and Bryant's (1995) conceptualisations of violence which delineates three types of violence-

1. Individual Level – The type of violence that is most visible and condemned by people where the perpetrator motivations and the victim's injuries are visible. It's short term.

2. Institutional Level – This is harder to identify as it is carried out via social institutions through various organisational units. It is often produced by bureaucratic procedures and social policies. It's long term.
3. Structural and Cultural Level – This involves norms and ideas that form the basis on which violence is carried out on an institutional and individual level.

All these levels are interdependent and reinforce each other. In this cycle, due to structural and cultural beliefs knowledge and understanding is dictated by norms that are determined by dominant and privileged groups, this naturalises institutional violence. This normalization via culture and structures is reinforced by institutions only punishing individual perpetrator's visible acts of violence. The institutions continue to function, but the violence continues without transforming the underlying causes of violence. Thus, the mechanism of violence working through cisgendered hegemony manifests and contributes to experiences which trans individuals navigate at different levels in different forms and often they (en)counter this all at the same time. This only gets worse the farther their identity is from non-dominant groups. The oppression matrix showcases the complexity of the violence they have to navigate constantly.

Figure 1. oppression matrix showing the complexity of violence (Stage Left Productions, 2017)



Responses and Processes that dis/organise Cisgendered Hegemony

As the violence of cisgendered reality is uncovered, the responses of trans individuals to cisgendered hegemony is identified and analysed using a combination of –

A) Katz's 3Rs (2004)

1. Resilience – refers to the daily actions that foster the possibility of going beyond recuperating but can't fully eliminate the ongoing general trajectory of events that sustain

the hegemonic system. These actions allow one to recover and reconnect with dormant knowledge that is an alternative to the hegemonic system.

2. Reworking – refers to actions or projects that unfold within the given system and work to explicitly recognise the problems and undermine mechanism that work within the system to reduce inequities.
3. Resistance – refers to actions that produce a critical consciousness that alters or changes historical forms of oppression.

B) Virtù's (2020) processes of trans dis/organising around sexuality. The processes displace gender binaries by mobilising resources to first make cishegemony visible as a system of power and oppression and then reorienting to alternatives that centre trans and non-binary perspectives. There are three ways trans-dis/organising processes displace gender binaries –

1. Dis/organising language around binary categories by mentioning multiple non-normative and political identities geared toward self-reflexivity and self-determination
2. Dis/organising embodiment around binary categories by acknowledging different trans embodied materialities pushing for an alternative image
3. Dis/organising knowledge sharing by collective sharing focusing on an affective methodology. (pp.328)

To avoid the trap of reifying experiences and identities which according to Aboim (2020) block the entitlement of an individual's self-determined gender identity, I want to utilise the Virtù's processes of trans dis/organising around sexuality, on experiences of participants in navigating cisgendered hegemony.

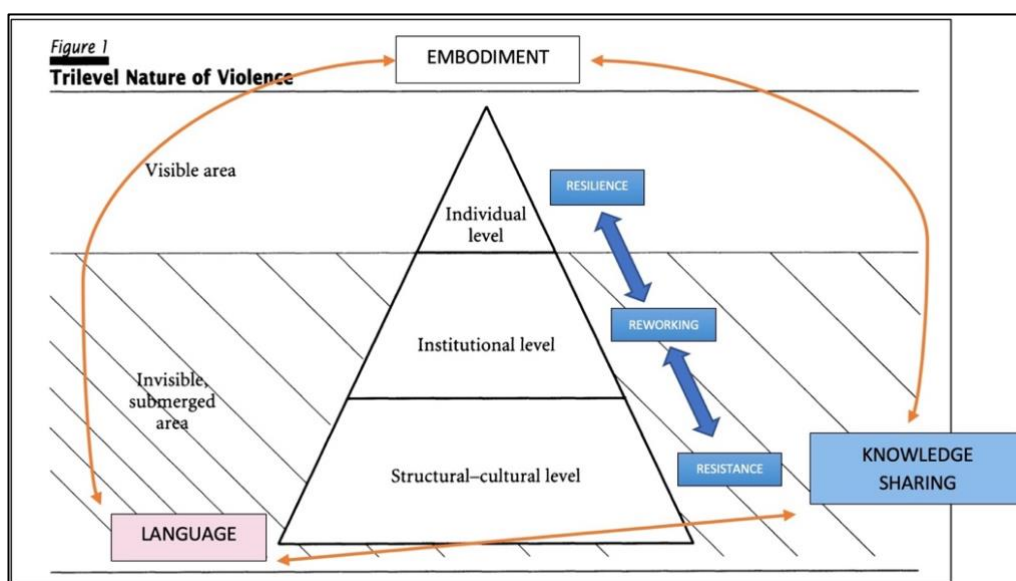


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework by modifying Soest and Bryant's levels of Violence (1994, pp. 551)

CHAPTER 3: EVOLVING METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

To attempt to reinvent social spheres is not an easy task when we are still working in the field of complicity and interlocking oppressions. A collaborative and caring methodological approach must be essential to ensure that the project is safe for our participants and ourselves.

3.1 EXPLORATORY CONVERSATIONS

After my design seminar, I was encouraged to reach out to trans people and understand what is relevant to them. I conducted one pre-research interview via Whatsapp call with Ranga Renjini an employee of the KMRL in June in Kerala, India. I had an in-person interview with Riyaz, the community coordinator at a queer organisation in The Hague called The Hangout during July.

Renjini (Edi³/She/Her)

Her living expenses were not being met with the salary from her job but due to the visibility transgender folks are getting in the state she continued to work at KMRL. She was happy to work at KMRL due to the sensitivity they received, but she recalled the troubles she faced in her hospitality job once she started dressing in her feminine clothes and accessories despite having all the qualifications for her job. She was asked to leave, but she took them to court for this. During her Bachelors, as a commerce student she didn't have to face such trouble since she hadn't physically transitioned. When I asked her about her family if there were issues of acceptance with them, she shared that her mother accepted her. She talked about the difficulty one faces within the home with partners who often used her for money and were paranoid of who she was speaking on the phone with. We got constantly interrupted by her partner during the phone call interview. This is why she found it difficult to talk on the phone directly. In her experience when she offered dating services for her clients her customers found it difficult to approach her in public due to stigma attached to her being transgender and a sex worker. So when I asked her what can I study which is of relevant use to her – she mentioned interpersonal violence faced from partners, who often used them for money. Mental health is a serious concern amongst TG (Transgender as acronymised in Kerala) community in Kerala, especially after a suicide earlier in the year. Renjini talked about how support or the lack of it from partners also played a huge role in such instances. She was even curious to know if I had heard of her prior to this and expressed interest in the possible freedoms Netherlands might offer her. Thus, TG's like her often took visible space by

³ Term of address for people who identify as women and for children who are assigned female at birth in Malayalam, Kerala's local language.

taking low paying jobs in the public to build awareness of the community by paying personal costs which weren't visible to us at first glance. I grew aware that conducting interviews needed to be done with safer modes of communication. (Renjini, 2022, pre-research interview)

Riyaz (He/Him)

When I asked Riyaz what would be some research problems that are relevant to him and the trans community. Riyaz wondered how to reach socio-economically dis-advantaged groups present in the Dutch queer community so that privileged groups of international students are not the only ones at the receiving end of their outreach. He shared that BIPOC meant something very different in the Netherlands. His community's focus was towards BPOC (Black and People of Color) because the indigenous people in the Netherlands were very privileged. He was thinking of how queer people living even in the outskirts of the Hague could be reached. In the long term, how could you create community for those who are poor in The Hague without making it a white organization? How do you navigate linguistic differences amongst Dutch queer people and international people? How can there be integration of elderly queer population to create a transgenerational support system that could safeguard trauma? Thus, I came to understand the community was the closest to build outreach for the community but also faced complex challenges to balance racial and economic differences. He also enquired about my own safety guidelines while getting involved in research with my participants and I shared that my guidelines were borrowed by other trans researchers. I asked him if there was something, he wanted me to be careful about. He gave the example of their own safe(r) spaces guideline, where you could set your intentions very clearly. He elaborated on how important it is to set expectations and inform participants about consent. Most of my literature was influenced by American researchers on understanding gender and sexuality and we both were wondering if it would be easy to integrate that into trans reality on the ground. How could we think about it? For me the answer was translation of the theories into these contexts is how we could really understand the reality. He finally shared about how they learnt from the previous coordinator on how one can build a community through the integration of care through rest and fun into their practice, it made me recall the experiences of displacement I mentioned before. Joy was important in displacing binaries. (Riyaz, 2022, pre-research interview)

Ethical Guidelines

To combat concerns with regards to sensitive material getting published in my R.P., I adapted the precautions in Rees's (2010) research with trans youth and The Hangout's safe(r) spaces guideline (Riyaz, 2022) -

1. I was clear about the purpose of the study with the participants and went through informed consent of use of the material collected for research.

2. Shared transcripts of the interviews and made edits if there is any information that participants didn't want to disclose.
3. Participants could pick pseudonyms and freely define their gender identity which may fall outside modern binaries in the interviews if they want to remain anonymous.
4. Protected the empirical materials collected by taking data protection measures.

3.2 INVITING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Virtù (2020) observed trans/disorganising processes in the environment of a workshop of sex toys for trans bodies, where the organisers were able to encourage participants to re-orient categories to reflect on one's own ontology while understanding the reasoning people associated towards binary categories. I want to initiate similar reflections to analyse embodied ontological challenges to binaries through a variety of methods.

There was high amounts of research fatigue and distrust towards researchers due to bad experiences in both locations. Most participants had a high workload from June to Sept which is when queer and trans groups are heavily involved in pride events. Riyaz, had sent out my call for participants online on Instagram⁴, but there was no response. This was in essence an opportunity for me to understand the violence trans people encounter in the realm of research and respect the labour they put towards creating spaces during pride. Thus, I adapted ethnography into my methodology and attended five events as part of my participant observations. I followed online accounts to digitally archive, visual and textual information on such events found through Instagram and Whatsapp. (Kim, 2016) I also took photographs to supplement this archive. I contacted participants through the information gained from these events. As the exploratory conversations and participant observations progressed, I developed an interview guide (see appendix 1) that had simplified and accessible questions for in-depth interviews (Kim, 2016). It helped me contextualise biographic narratives I was collecting.

After my first interview I removed the use of participatory photography due to participant's discomfort read through her silence on my requests for photographs. I grew aware that research focus on trans bodies was reproducing a cis gaze on them. Instead I focused on information that they shared with me.

After reaching India in August, I started an online call for research participants through my personal networks and had emailed a dozen organisations in Kerala, India. I messaged queer

⁴ A popular social media platform.

people with public accounts. Geethanjali (She/Her), a queer Malayali artist had replied to me responsively and sent me a lot of profiles of trans people she knew online. I messaged all of them and was able to find two transmen – Prithvi and Arjun. Prithvi also shared Sidharth’s contact. Thus I interviewed them online as they were all constantly travelling or working. Through these interactions I was able to conduct participant observations in cultural celebrations in Kochi and Thrissur where I also met with my main contact Sheetal Shyam in the end for her interview. Through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Mazhar, 2019) I concluded my empirical material collection.

Table 1: Spaces of Observations

No.	Participatory Event	Location
1.	Protesting Pride Parade	Dam Square and Vondelpark, Amsterdam
2.	Trans Pride Discussion: Trans Healthcare	Student Hotel, Amsterdam City, Wibautstraat 129, 1091 GL Amsterdam
3.	Trans Pride Discussion: Trans Sex Work Empowerment	Student Hotel, Amsterdam City, Wibautstraat 129, 1091 GL Amsterdam
4.	Onam Celebrations organised by Sahayatrika	Cardinal Parecattil Memorial Renewal Centre, Kaloor, Kerala, India
5.	Thiruvathirakali celebration – Dance	Vadukunnathan Temple, Thrissur, Kerala India

Table 2: Research Participants

No.	Name	Pronouns	Work	Age	Nationality	Place of Residence	Mode of interview
1.	Alejandra Ortiz	She/her	Grassroots Activist, Writer, Researcher, Founder of Papaya Quir for trans and queer refugees	39	Mexican	Currently Residing in Amsterdam, Netherlands	In-Person
2.	Sabrina Michelle	She/her	Coordinator of the European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA), Part of a lobbying group in Spain, Founder of a BIPOC Sex Worker's academy	41	Mexican	Currently Residing in Amsterdam, Netherlands	Online via Zoom
3.	Prithvi Dev	Eda ⁵ /He/Him	Former, Writer, Currently working as a Supermarket Employee	27	Indian	Ernakulam, Kerala, India	Online via Google Meets
4.	Arjun Geetha	Edi/She/They	Product assurance and compliance officer in Amazon, Part of a queer collective called AMIGOS	27	Indian	Ernakulam, Kerala, India	Online via Zoom
5.	Sidharth Mohanan	Eda/He/Him	Former Sports Coach, Currently Unemployed	25	Indian	Ernakulam, Kerala India	Online via Google Meets
6.	Sheethal Shyam	She/Her	Transgender justice board member in the state of Kerala, Founder of Dhwayah Arts and Charitable Society, Artist and Writer	40	Indian	Ernakulam, Kerala India	In-Person

⁵ Term of address for people who identify as men and for children who are assigned male at birth in Malayalam, Kerala's local language.

3.3 METHODS

Unexpected Ethnography

The silence was as an opportunity to adapt the fieldwork to a method that is perfect to understand patterns of navigation and also learn more about the norms of leadership, forms of interaction and organisation. This enables one to build relationships and locate relevant resources. It is an unobtrusive way to orient myself to how the community works and also shape my questions for the interviews in a manner relevant to the context. It was additionally done through following online public accounts on Instagram of these organisations to build a better understanding of relevant events. As Hine (2000, cited by Postill and Pink, 2012) mentions this mode of ethnography need not involve physical travel to a field site but a particular event. It gave me information of what the event was about and why it was being organised and who were the organisers. This form of social media ethnography was done keeping in mind consent. I didn't use any personal details and information from individual public accounts. I used social media as a form of social network analysis to talk to possible participants and contact people who could help in the search for participants and specific events that I wanted to participate in. Contacting my participants was exclusively done via personal chats on Instagram and Whatsapp and I didn't use any information on their personal accounts to inform research. The priority was trust. This form of ethnography meant –“catching up, sharing, exploring, interacting and archiving” (Postill and Pink, 2012, pp. 128) In this manner I was able to maintain my relationship with participants and learn about them in an unobtrusive manner.

According to Werner and Schoepfle there are three different approaches to observation based on the time in the field and level of knowledge (Schensul, Schensul and Lecompte, 2013, pp. 262–64)

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- 1) Descriptive Observation – where all details are recorded early in the stage
- 2) Focused observation - where researchers highlight some observations that take on greater significance
- 3) Selective observation - which concentrates on the detail of specific types of events or interactions

I chose to engage in a combination of focused and selective observation, specifically focusing on trans issues. It also served the process of learning more about my participant's responsibilities and gauge if they had the bandwidth to engage with my research.

Critical use of Narratives.

With a semi-structured format of questions, I conducted in-depth interviews to collect narratives of my participants. The method of the biographic narrative used by Willemse (2014) was best to analyse the research in context. Narratives were best suited to tease out political tensions through personal experiences as –“the way a narrator refers to her past as a means for negotiating her subject-positions allotted to her by dominant discourses in the present.” (Willemse, 2014, pp. 40) was the perfect way to understand how contexts influenced the navigation of cisgendered hegemony. In order to prevent the essentialisation that this method is guilty of, Willemse,(2014) uses the notion of going “against the grain” to critically understand the distinct truth claims of participants in her study by contextualising them-“The notion was originally used to interrogate the unifying, victimizing approach of women as ‘Other’: it was meant to underscore the possible alternative ‘subordinate’ positions women could construct within those systems.”(pp. 40). Due to their function of being able to make sense narratives are a powerful way to understand perceptions of social reality. (Shenhav, 2015, pp. 10)

Shenhav (2015) shares a more comprehensive understanding of narratives developed by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (2002, cited by Shenhav 2015) which is comprised of three components in fictional and non-fictional narratives (pp. 16)-

1. Story – events that are narrated and collectively reconstructed with participants in their chronological order.
2. Text – How is the story conveyed ? In written form or spoken form.
3. Narration – the process of the story being transmitted by narrator to the listener.

Using the notion of “against the grain” (Willemse, 2015, pp.45) by reading texts strictly in the context of my participants I wanted to ensure that I uncover the different layers of their navigation.

3.3 ANALYSIS

I transcribed and translated the interviews and compiled the field notes on both locations. I used the processing method of cutting and sorting and hand-coded quotes and observations to form a paradigmatic analysis of the individual stories and field notes on spaces to identify the manifestations of cisgendered hegemony and the responses of transgender individuals in terms of Virtù's (2020) trans dis/organising processes and Katz's 3Rs – Resilience, Reworking and Resistance (Ryan and Bernard, 2003).

Table 3: Paradigmatic analysis

Levels of Violence	Navigation - Language	Navigation - Embodiment	Navigation - Knowledge Sharing
Individual			
Institutional			
Structural/Cultural Level			

I have additionally done an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), (Parmenter, Galliher and Maughan, 2022) to write notes and reflections on each event and interview to integrate the data into differences, similarities (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) to ensure I don't essentialise the participant's experiences.

CHAPTER 4: FINDING TRUTHS

4.1 NAVIGATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

Protesting Pride Parade 2020 – A new consciousness.

“We are all human before our sexuality, we walk for that basic recognition. Don’t forget pride is a protest.” These words best encapsulated the Protesting Pride Parade that took place in July, in Dam Square in Amsterdam.

Figure 3: Speaker at Protesting Pride Parade (Personal Archive)



Figure 4: Protesting Pride Parade at Vondel Park (Personal Archive)

One of many strong voices burned into my brain. Aryelle Freeman Hopelezz, was dressed in clothes that were grieving her trans siblings who had died in Estonia and Jamaica. It was a protest to all the cracks of trans and queer acceptance in Europe and solidarity around the world. Joy and Anger were a huge part of this space. Joy was emphasized through the beauty in trans and queer bodies and voices that was represented by different speakers. There were people of different communities, nationalities, and ages walking the march day. BIPOC and refugees who bore the brunt of violence, were asked to walk in the front of the march. There was a conscious centering of their experiences. Anger was expressed through the trans and queer speakers sharing their experiences against institutional violence. They emphasized the interlocking privileges cis-white members in the LGBTQ+ community gatekeep in spaces like Pride. This space was in essence countering the dissonances I had felt previously – pink washing, racism, and islamophobia built into institutionalized welfare policies made and implemented by privileged cisgendered people in Europe. But it wasn’t free of ethnic and racial tensions I had experienced before. When Mala

Kenza Badia(she/her), a queer artist was speaking against Dutch islamophobia and homonationalism within the queer community, there were cis white men booing her in the crowd I was standing in. People ignored them and instead paid attention to what Mala had to say but no one called them out. In the end we walked to Vondel Park, the park was lined with volunteers holding different flags of countries where being queer or trans held a death sentence or imprisonment. It was sobering and served as a reminder of violence that gets lost in the noise of pride.

This protest was a conscious attempt to create a different kind of pride. A resistance that was linking different forms of oppression to counter cisgendered hegemony morphed with local forms of domination in the form of islamophobia, capitalism and racism to produce a new kind of solidarity. I was witnessing people experiencing violence at the hands of the system reclaim pride to refocus on the real issues affecting them by dis/organizing language around citizenship and gender through conscious centering of BIPOC, Trans and Refugee's experiences. It was a guide to how the light side of gender is countered by centering the cosmologies and knowledges of those who are systematically pushed to the dark side of the gender system. (P. Dipietro, Mcweeny and Roshanravan, 2019, pp. 15)

Trans Pride at the Student Hotel -

All the speakers were involved in different projects that attempted to fill institutional gaps of housing, education, employment and healthcare. These were responses to rework and create safer access for trans needs. But they brought great insight on the structural and cultural effects that manifested in the institutions, through their experiences.



Figure 5: Panel on Trans Healthcare – Trans Pride 2022 (Personal Archive)

The main speakers of the event focusing on trans healthcare and the access of diverse communities were – Brand Berghouwer, Nancy Siblini and Dr. Camiel Welling. Nancy Siblini, a researcher and student of anthropology mentioned how difficult gender affirming care was to access. There were only 3 gender clinics where every trans person was sent for even basic care needs. Even though

GP's (General Practitioners) could prescribe the use of hormones locally, there was a two-year waiting list for everything. This institutional delay was normalized by the lack of knowledge doctors had about Trans bodies due to gaps in their education. This forces trans people to look for care in the informal market and deal with misinformation that could harm them. Brand disappointedly recounts the collusion of insurance companies to provide care for cis customers and not making same treatments available for trans customers. Nancy reaffirmed this by talking about her own experiences of getting laser hair treatment which was more easily available to cis women as it was perceived as a cosmetic treatment and not gender affirming care.

Dr. Camiel compared this gender affirming need of a trans person to a condition to a person's right to parent. These needs should be understood as a condition like pregnancy that has its own risk and complication. This gives an alternative understanding of the way in which medicine is taught, diversity in bodies is not part of the general curriculum. Treating trans care as a diagnosis prompts questions and comments to dissuade a person from undergoing procedures which in a stigmatized understanding of a doctor who most of the time is cis is saving a patient. Looking at this need as a affirming need reframes transition as a need that is essential.

They all were responding to cisgendered hegemony in trans healthcare differently. Dr. Camiel was part of the Trans Community Clinic started by Trans United Europe, Brand was designing training modules and Nancy had send a letter to the hospital to get the process of her gender affirming care sped up. She also conducted research into studying the trajectory of transitioning in Netherlands. They were reworking the system of trans healthcare by dis/organizing medical procedures shaped by cis white men, by using their embodied experiences pushing for alternative images on their needs in the system.



Figure 6: Panel on Trans Sex Work Empowerment – Trans Pride 2022 (Personal Archive)

The panel on sex work was moderated by Alejandra Ortiz and had a range of diverse speakers – Ceyenne Doroshov founded GLITS (Gays and Lesbians living in a Transgender Society), Dinah who works for several initiatives like Trans United Europe, Trans United Clinic, UN Aids Global

and finally Sabrina Michelle coordinator of Sex Work Europe. Sabrina also works as a coordinator with European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA), founded a lobbying group in Spain and runs a BIPOC SW (Sex workers) academy that tries to fill the gaps of formal education for SW. They were reworking the system with their initiatives and using this dis/organized collective space to highlight the violence that trans sex workers face.

It is difficult for trans POC sex workers to work legally especially when they are migrants. They work in constant fear of arrest or deportation. But it is the only option of work available due to the discrimination in the labor market, where they gain stability and income. Trans and BIPOC sex workers are targeted by vagrancy, tax laws and migration laws, for example people who don't have gender markers on their passports they can be flagged for absconding from their countries. Unemployment was a huge challenge for the trans community and sex work is the only option which provides an income and validation in the face of stigma. In the famed red light district sex workers only get 5-6 windows which is not enough for them to make a living when compared to European cis sex workers.

Sex work is generally separated from LGBGTQ+ issues. Dinah pointed out the lack of BIPOC representation in international organizations like ILGA and GATE which led to fewer efforts to support sex workers. Funds allocated to help trans people couldn't be used for trans sex workers. Sabrina observed the cultural effect of whorephobia being a huge barrier in the fight for trans SW rights. Cis-gay men engaged in sex work don't usually rally behind rights-based negotiation where they support trans sex workers. Transphobia and homophobia were also why these issues didn't take precedence, the violence and disappearances are not addressed due to growing apathy towards SW.

4.2 NAVIGATION FROM MEXICO TO NETHERLANDS

Resonances of new consciousness

“Some people think that transgender refers to when you have to get sex or gender reassignment surgery. Some People think transexual is the right word. I think that trans, the word trans is an easier way to describe yourself without having to think of genitals or plastic surgeries or hormonization because you do not owe to explain this to no one and trans can be that. A term that implies an identity that is not cis, regardless of a transitional process.”(Ortiz, 2022)

From the start of our interview Alejandra was dis/organising language defining trans people through resilient reflection of her navigation of ontological meanings of who she was and how cis people perceived her.

Alejandra was born in a little village in the North of Mexico, into conservative catholic spanish-speaking family. She is the eldest of 8 children with a macho father who did not work and strict mother who did laundry. They lived in a one-room house. Visibly labelled a brown cis boy, she was punished for her voice, the way she moved her hands in a feminine manner. Violently bullied by kids in the village. Neglected by her teachers who assumed she had it coming because she was in her words – mouthy and saucy towards all her bullies. Racial tensions were morphed into the violence of cisgendered hegemony that she was experiencing.

“Even though Mexico is a country full of brown people we have this stigmatized idea of color and poverty. So that also affected the way people treated me.” (Ortiz, 2022)

She left school by the age of 13. Driven by hunger, exhaustion from an unsupportive family and the need to change to become the person she could not explain but wanted to be, she left her home at 17 to go to the US. She met a group of spanish travestis who adopted her. She left Mexico only to be confronted by the same community in the U.S whose violence she wanted to escape. The Anglo community treated her as a joke. She was undocumented, and worked as a sex worker for some time. She was arrested as it was illegal. Her community started disappearing one by one. “in the cosmology of Mexican people. Being trans can only equal doing hairstyling or doing prostitution and being bad people. People who bring problems. People who bring shame and people you don’t want to be associated with. These are people that usually you don’t see during the day because most are forced to do sex work for survival. Most work at night so you don’t see them. Even in the big cities you rarely see trans people during the day.”(Ortiz, 2022)

This violence led to severe harassment in restaurants and spaces where she worked. People would hit her on her testicles she had back then, choke her, spit on her and local restaurant cooks would put soap in her food. It was hard to talk about this violence. Her manager didn’t believe her. He had the same attitude her teachers had. The denigration of her pain was the effect of the dark system of relations, that didn’t see her as human. The bullying only stopped when a US born cis colleague complained. Showing who had legitimacy in stopping the violence. There was resilience in the way she complained but the manifestations of violence were strong. There was only one way for her to navigate this violence.

“Sadly, and this is something no one should go through, violence, invisible violence diminished the more I became cis-passing. The more I, the less I shouted – Girl come here Girl. Because also my American colleagues were policing me – Alejandra, Alexa, women don’t raise their voices, women are not opinionated. If you want to be a woman, behave like one. Alexa, close your legs. Alexa sit straight, Alexa don’t move your hands or your head in an exaggerated way. This continuous policing helped me in the sense I became extremely cis and boring.” (Ortiz, 2022)

Her submission to this policing helped reduced the violence she was facing but it meant she had to lose her voice in exchange for her safety. She went back to Mexico for her gender reassignment surgery as it was more affordable. She hoped to study and have a career. After getting a job at a call centre where she pretended to be a cis women she would carry tampons, and vomit to avoid the same violence she experienced at her workplace.

After illegally changing her name and undergoing surgery she hoped to study and learn in Mexico but the violence against trans people drove her to come to Europe. In the refugee centre the first six months she couldn't get any hormones. Only after a campaign she got the necessary hormones. After three years she got recognised as a refugee. She still resides in the Netherlands. She is still in the system and continues to fight it. Recently, Alejandra published a book on her experiences in the Dutch system, thus dis/organising ideas on citizenship and gender through affective knowledge sharing.

Façade of acceptance in Europe

Sabrina's family was middle class until the 94 financial crises. Her parents both had good jobs. Her mother had the better job. She was the secretary of a general director of an automotive company and later became an English teacher. They had a somewhat educated background. Nevertheless living in Mexico, she didn't fully escape the catholic and conservative society she was born into. She was a lonely child who used to be sporty to avoid being beaten and perform to make friends. Her teachers often smiled when she was being harassed as queer boy.

“But, um, and we are started to be socialized like you know boys to this, girls to this. Boys have this and Girls have this. Boys cannot hit girls and girls have to be quiet and you're allowed to go ____ . You start to feel all this separation doesn't make any sense, but you are still objected to those. And you start to at least in my case you start to experience things that really doesn't have to be that way.” (Michelle, 2022)

She found it hard to understand who she was when compared to older trans women who told her she's not trans because she was sexually attracted to men. There was no reference for who she was, which led to recovery of dormant knowledge despite the erasure of her experience.

Her mother was supportive, she used to buy books in the late 90s to understand her. Her father refused to accept her, and they have no relationship. He was absent as she came out. She underwent medical transition during university get her communications degree. Her distant family distanced themselves from her. Other people admired her decision but she questioned it – “Nobody has to be brave to be themselves” (Michelle, 2022) It was difficult for her classmates mostly cis men to interact with her. Sabrina (2022) talks about how gendered even the way people

greeted her in university was. Men greeted each other with a handshake, but when they met her they didn't know how to greet her, she felt accepted once when one of her fellow classmates forgot her gender and just greeted her like she wanted to be greeted as women culturally are with kisses on the cheek. Thus, we can observe how even culturally dictated greetings were dis/organised through Sabrina's embodied experience creating an alternative image of greeting her classmates. That's the not the only space where she did this. She made it to casting in Sports Radio, recruiters liked the fact that a girl was talking about sports radio. But in her experience in the job market, she wasn't give jobs as soon as recruiters saw her. This prompted her to leave for Spain.

“At the beginning it was really nice. I was very surprised because in Mexico I had experiences when I went to giving the documents, the person receiving would change. Calling the name out loud to, knowing everybody was trans and see you know, It's a red headed, 175 red headed and everyone looked to see for evidence that I am trans. And In Spain. That person was so contrary, I remember when I went to register to the municipality of Gerona. When I gave my passport there was no change at that moment and urgh the woman there came close to me and asked – I have to put this name? I was like yah no no problem. For me that was like that's good a good change. But in the job market it was the same transphobia and also that I am foreigner, and the jobs for people in the communications areas was very difficult to get. So I was in Catalonia so I need to speak and write in Catalan. The same hardship was the same as in Mexico. I started to do Sex work to survive and then I decided to stay.”

She had gone to Spain after seeing that they had a gay minister of interiors, but this façade of acceptance was uncovered with the lack of opportunities in the labor market for her and the false solidarity seen in the cisgendered beliefs of cis gay men and feminist women, who only acknowledge trans people when its pride but don't hire trans people in bars, in banks or airlines.

Sex work was how she got stability. But she was soon met with the tensions of operating as a sex worker in the Netherlands where only Europeans got licenses and trans sex workers did not get a lot of windows to operate in. She dis/organized stigmatized understandings of sex workers through radio shows about sex work – El Puticlu and her efforts to rework gaps for sex workers by participating in Panels like Trans Pride, talks with the EU government and UN, in Geneva. “My best way to deal with this – Espinozian Solution – that is like you know fly away. Leave and find another space. Sometimes talking to them is useless. Sometimes it's helpful to create another space. So, yah that's my solution instead of convincing when I see that there is no way. It's like bye. It's not worth it. To be included in what? Like really? To have a mortgage? two cars? Two kids and a dog? That's to be hetero. My solution is to make another space and escape.” (Michelle, 2022)

She creates new spaces to dis/organize hierarchical institutions with dialogues and projects using alternative knowledge and embodied realities in spaces that oppress people like her. She also gave the example of Covid, where, sex workers and trans groups organized various crowdfunding, trans sex workers were also cooking meals in countries like Argentina and Colombia. Essentially in this bout of relationality in such spaces they look past what oppresses them and extend empathy to people outside of themselves to heal communally. (Chávez and Vázquez, 2017)

“I never realized that the first time I was in the UN in the Geneva inside and invited in the debate I realized if I weren’t this way. I hadn’t this job maybe I never would never have this opportunity to be in that place and be able at least put another reality to the other persons that were there who thought that this reality doesn’t exist.” (Michelle, 2022)

4.3 NAVIGATION IN KERALA

Deeper Coalitions and Sacrifices for Personal Happiness

Prithvi was a native of Ernakulam, in the state of Kerala in the South of India. As a teenager he realised that he was attracted to women as he felt very shy with them. He loved playing sports with the other boys in the class. He only ever saw them as friends. His teachers would segregate him from sitting with other girls in the girls only school. It was a common form of alienating students on the basis of gender roles. Boys and Girls in my classes in Kerala are often made to sit separately. When he was 19, he felt the commonplace pressure of marriage that is normalised for women in Kerala’s patriarchal families. He came out to his family who associated being trans with sex work. They thought he needed treatment. Prithvi calmly told his family that he would understand if they wanted to kick him out for being this way his mother said – “Man or Woman, you were born in my womb so I want you.” (Dev, 2022, Interview) (Translated by me)

Deeper coalitions formed to shape his experience as a transman. His friends in girls only school were also very accepting of him. These small acts of resistance combined with care from their loved ones whom he found in his family or outside his family, kept him going. These forms of dis/organized ideas on care through coalitions built on common experiences of gender oppression are essential in helping participants navigate the violence and erasure which are the product of conservative and patriarchal cultures present in institutions in Kerala.

During his higher education he had to deal with a lot of bullying and couldn’t finish his studies. He found freedom in working at call center Chennai where he felt accepted. He observed that other cities like Hyderabad, Bangalore were more accepting than Kerala. But the acceptance was only found where he worked – as a writer in the film industry at the call center or at the

supermarket where he currently works. He still deals with being misgendered⁶. When it came to personal relationships, he sacrificed chances at happiness. His first relationship with a woman was happy until he had to end it because of her upper caste Nair family. She was the only child and wanted her parent's approval. Being the only child of a Nair Family meant that all the hopes for children are placed on her and the family's perception rested on who she married. There would have been heavy disapproval because of his caste and gender identity so he made the decision to end the relationship with her. Prithvi responded with resilience in the face of this but was met with continual disappointments. Another entanglement left him in falsely accused cases of rape and sex racket. The police helped him, but he was used by a cis couple for them to escape their community and marry. Now he only has casual relationships where women often want to satisfy curiosity of dating a transman with the added benefits of not having to deal with patriarchal behaviour and the risk of pregnancy.

As he undergoes medical transition his neighbours have called his family telling them that he had joined a gang or terrorists. He has confronted them constantly. Dealing with all this alone a person obviously suffers personal consequences of mental health. He observed that there wasn't any proper support for this. Whereas the transwomen in Kerala have a lot of solidarity the transmen experienced fights breaking out due to false friendships. One can observe the alienation of brought on by the personal troubles he has gone through in relationships and education.

Homophobia or a refusal to understand each other relationally?

“Yes, mainly like I said before born as women and changed to men. In their mind its just a physical transformation. For me without hormones and surgery this is still my identity. But only after my procedures was, I accepted since it was a visible change for others. That's something big, we can tell in their tone, for those who have no knowledge about this what they expect is a transformation. Basically, they don't know that's why. But there are people who do know and only accept us after transformation and address us properly. Otherwise, they misgender us. I think the correct idea is not reaching them.” (Geetha, 2022) (Translated by me)

Cis people's imaginations accept medical transition as the ultimate trans embodiment. The misgendering transmen in Kerala experience creates a lot of misconception of transition on trans bodies. Assigned female at birth the transition in their gender expressions is met with strong disapproval. Growing up in Idukki, in school and at home they mostly experienced confusion and ridicule when they expressed themselves in more masculine clothing. It was difficult to explain what they felt to others.

⁶ When a person uses the older name or older pronouns which no longer applies to a trans person's identity

“They would question me, when I dress most of the time they would ask me – are you attempting to be a man? So in that time accepting a human and saying you’re attempting to be something (you’re not). I would say no, if they understand or not with me they would talk down to me as if being a woman is bad and we are trying to be a man for the privilege of getting a job is the mindset. So, in dressing and other matters like that when I wanted to express my gender there were a lot of difficulties from my family’s side. It was everywhere, in school or college, this mindset was everywhere.” (Geetha, 2022)(Translated by me)

In college during, they experienced a lot of phobias. Fellow classmates deadnamed (the name associated with their older gender identity is shared everywhere) on social media. Arjun called them out after taking screenshots on social media. The classmates came and apologised but they knew in their hearts and minds nothing had changed. Even the digital space was not safe from violent behaviour like this. In the process of his medical transition, he gained insight into why nothing had changed.

The trans care infrastructure although new and imperfect in the state of Kerala had supported the trans community somewhat but they had learned to resiliently undergo their transition – “When we start transformation we have a misconception we need this space, but there are a lot of things we can do for ourselves. For surgery we might need some financial support and accommodation. But in cases where we don’t undergo that there are a lot of actions we ourselves can take. In the shelter home a person can stay after surgery to recover, there is financial support. There are a lot of facilities and supportive systems.” (Geetha, 2022)(Translated by me)

They had experienced a lot of transphobia from the government hospitals. In the Shelter home they were treated very homophobically, harassed by a transwoman colleague and Arjun eventually left the shelter home to work in Amazon. They observed that this was common product of the patriarchy in Kerala that we grow up in.

Community work had been very tiring and enlightening for them. Even though there are systems in place for the trans community the queer community in Kerala was struggling as well – “mainly the queer community is very vulnerable. In a lot of matters they require a lot of support. If they are muslims also. Just recently there are a lot of trans people committing suicides. As queer a lot of us have no knowledge of this. In the community those who are out⁷ we know about them but anyone else is too difficult. There is quite a lot of people. So, in this case we don’t have a favorable conditions to give anyone support. Even if they know how much support is required, they are not (the government) trying to understand the actual extent of the support required. Even if there is a 24x7 helpline, transgenders have just access to that and only for them not for anyone else. Other

⁷ Out refers to publicly being open about your gender identity and sexual orientation

queer people don't even have support of anything resembling a shelter home. A lot of lesbian couples can't even have resources to leave bad situations. The government only looks at trans individual's majority of the time. For queer people they don't even think about them. Even in counselling when it comes to your transformation and surgery there isn't much support in the way of that. When we go anywhere there is a lot of transphobia we have to face." (Geetha, 2022) (Translated by me)

After transition they worked in a Shelter Home for trans and queer people as a manager trying to contribute to community efforts to rework queer and trans support provided by the state. They saw people approach the shelter home for sex, because there is a common perception of trans people being sex workers. They assume that queer people are sexual.

Living socially as a male they saw an intense change in how transmen are treated – "Those who are female assigned grow up being very suppressed. There are some privileges depending on the family you are from. Quickly when one physically transitions to look male society's attitude changes. Its positive and negative. People will listen to us more and better than before. They don't misunderstand us a lot. But as a woman our experience is not the same, our words are not given the same value. We know that our own self, within one year living a male social life, there isn't that much acceptance when people understand you were female assigned at birth. I didn't feel like I fit in very well. Even small things like fixing stuff around the house. It shouldn't make a difference that you're male or female you should fix stuff. But your family only teaches these skills to male children. My partner is transgender they are male assigned who is able to fix stuff around the house but I am not able to do anything of the sort. That really becomes a big issues for me. We have been suppressed and lack exposure. What we should have gotten. That' an issue. I am not able to fit in everywhere. Even now in terms of my own body when it comes to cis men, I don't feel comfortable with them after a point. Some transmen say they have no issues with cis men." (Geetha, 2022)(Translated by me)

Arjun's transwoman AMAB partner who hadn't transitioned felt very uncomfortable seeing them transition while they hadn't undergone transition. Thus, transmen must deal with complex positive and negative sides of the transition living life socially as a male. They have no frame of reference for their experiences. Arjun shared how transmen are better integrated into cis-hetero society because of strategic choice of choosing to date women when they are bisexual or gay out of fear and misunderstanding. One person told them – I don't even care to know about the T(Transgender). I just care to know M. (Male). There is difficulty in accepting oneself due to society one inhabits, leading to a continuation of sadness in personal relationships. This erasure is due to the attention and violence towards femininity. The gaze on transwomen, subjects them to personal

attacks, troubles with police and high rents due to the historical media attention they have on them. Therefore, transwomen have more solidarity as a community. (Geetha, 2022, interview)(Translated by me)

Arjun currently works as a product assurance and compliance officer. They are now a coordinator of a collective called AMIGOS. Thus, Arjun's Experience had prompted them to respond to this institutional and cultural violence by starting their collective for queer people called AMIGOS, a collective dis/organizing the support provided to trans and queer people in Kerala, India.

Bangalore better?

These experiences of dissonance are heavier in isolation and heavily echoed in Sidharth's experience as well. Born in Kollam and currently living with his cis female partner in Ernakulam. He explored his gender much like Arjun and Prithvi. He had no idea about the word trans and even now doesn't share it with anyone except close friends, most people treat him like a boy and he is fine with the label of a man. In his case, his family failed to accept him. He had undergone medical transition and his experience there reflects contradictions to Prithvi's belief that Bangalore was better.

He had to go through 4 doctors for getting hormones, most of whom who thought he was a lesbian and he didn't need to go through a physical change. Cis Heteronormative doctors find it easier to conflate his sexual orientation with his gender identity. One doctor even went far to say that he had a mental disorder. He had to get an attestation from the doctor for his hormone injections. They tried to dissuade him by asking intrusive questions as to how he is going to handle changes to his sex life? He responded – "Life is not just about sex." (Mohanana, 2022, Interview) (Translated by me)

Clearly the system of trans healthcare had a serious lack of understanding of trans bodies. But Sidharth's reworked response dis/organises stereotypes that reduce the multiplicity of trans materialities in medical institutions of human beings who undergo such changes to conform to cis-hetero norms of sexuality.

He came back to Kerala as he lost his job as a sports coach after the pandemic. He continues to be rejected after recruiters see him physically at the final stages of selection. He was disappointed with the lack of support from community organisations when one of his friends was physically attacked. He lamented saying at moments like these we are not looking for solutions but for people to show up.

Onam with Sahayatrika

Sahayatrika, is an organization that specifically coordinates support for trans and queer people. They were organizing an Onam celebration at the Cardinal Parecattil Memorial Renewal Centre a Christian outreach centre. Onam is a harvest celebration where we Keralites decorate our houses with designs made with flowers in the entrances of our houses. We buy new clothes with money given to us by our elders and eat grand vegetarian feasts. People of all faiths celebrate this holiday in Kerala. But I was surprised that the church was allowing them to use this space, there was a deeper coalition at an institution that had caused so much violence against the same community in Europe and the Netherlands and Mexico. I had gone in the hopes of observing a collective space in Ernakulam, India.

Such organisations were reworking and dis/organising oppressive structures through taking space in different embodiments and normalising the use of religious spaces for those who are denigrated by it. The attendees were sharing job leads and encouraging each other to show up for pride events for building visibility. For many of them this was their only familial space. It was an alternative to families that didn't accept them. One of the attendees highlighted how important Sahayatrika has been in finding community that understands them and helps them come out to their family.

Figures 7 & 8: Onam with Sahayatrika (Pictures from Instagram Account)



Thiruvathirakali at Vadakkunnathan Temple



Figure 9: Thiruvathirakali at Thrissur

Thiruvathirakali is a traditional dance performed by women during festive events in Kerala. Sheethal my first contact in Kerala had invited me to come interview her after the event. It was being officiated by the Mayor of Thrissur and a famous RJ (radio jockey). There was a mixed crowd of locals, media professionals, police, government and NGO officials. The event started off with each person giving some introductions to the event. There were volunteers singing prayers and then each member of the organisations gave speeches, supporting the TG community highlighting their talents and experiences. Sheetal's speech addressed all the violence faced by the trans community through the police and their own families. This was an opportunity for them framed as "revenge" and a promise that they will continue to fight and work to having better spaces for TGs. Dressed in festive and traditional clothing, they commenced the dance. Many people left but, younger women and older women took pictures with them, their families remained to support them. It was a singular end to fieldwork where I was witnessing TGs dis/organising religious practices gatekept by cisgendered people through alternative language and embodiments that happened for the first time in Kerala. It was not the first time they had done this. But, it was the first time they had used the societal and media focus on them, right in front of a religious space that is frequently used by those who denigrate them.

Affirmative to Transformative – Sheethal's Take

Born in Kozhikode, Kerala India into a family dynamic that was difficult at a time in Kerala with no support for TGs. Sheethal only had her mother as support. She often helped her mom at home. A good student who was passionate about learning and art. Her mother supported her when she wanted to learn traditional dances. Her father would push her saying she should do break dance.

In school she was bullied by boys and sexually assaulted frequently. She was alone till her friend Nandini and her started to confront these people. Her principal would call her mom to school and suggest that she go and get conversion therapy. Her mom defended her, but she had limits to her power. She was forced to work in manufacturing, night duty and construction. She learnt Tamil and started working in sales afterwards. At a point she was chosen to go and work in the new showroom in Bangalore. That's where she met other groups – Kinnars, LGBTQ+ People, Hijras and Sex workers. She got involved with Sangama, an LGBTQ+ rights organisation (works in different parts of south India) and worked in various community level projects. Inspired by the fight for rights and the experience of joy and pleasure exploring her life in Bangalore changed her. After a tense journey back to Kerala, she got familiar with the human right's activists in Thrissur through the work of organisations like Maitreyi, Jagratha and Sangamam. She was targeted by the police for this reason. Sahayatrika, the main organisation for trans men and queer people began to take shape around this time. Unexpectedly her mother committed suicide around the time she had founded Pride in Kerala. She has spent immense time and energy working for the community. She has also starred in a tv show which brought a lot of intrusive and harmful scrutiny to her life. Her landlord had asked her to vacate her house.

With her inspiration of deeper coalitions in Bangalore and Thrissur, Sheethal's experience of violence at different levels had forced her to passionately learn the skills and acquire tools to build projects reworking the existing support for trans community in Kerala. Today she is an integral part of the welfare infrastructure for trans people in Kerala, as a member of the transgender justice board for the State of Kerala and the founder of a charitable society that promotes art and culture for Kerala's Transgender community. She is also an activist, actress, writer, model and singer. (Shyam, 2021, 2022)

When I brought up the differences in the community outreach for transmen, Sheethal clarified that most of the time transmen are integrated into the society as men, so when they come out or are outed, they deal with a lot of biases from people it can be quite difficult. In the case of transwomen many are still in the closet. The community is their only space hence the solidarity. She gave the example of transmen who are part of the national council and district TG justice board.

When I mentioned Kerala's history of medical negligence and trans suicides, Sheethal shared – “All the hospitals in Kerala are run with money. We know. Health system is fully run by money now because of that charities or the provision of humanity or even the presence of either is not something we can even think about. It's a social change, because they make a building, establish a system to provide us services for free. The government service that we need depends on the care-

provider's availability. They even say that this is a favour they are doing for us out of generosity. But this, isn't a favour right?"(Shyam, 2022) (Translated by me)

This echoed the same collusion that Brand was talking about in the panel on Trans Healthcare. The homophobia in hospitals persists because of the stigmatised belief that trans people don't have a family and there is an attitude of entitlement to their money since it is all earned through sex work, which is heavily stigmatised in India.

When I shared my discovery in the requirement of spousal and parental consent forms for trans people undergoing medical procedures. She said that they weren't involved in making this policy, for them to remove the clause needing spousal and parental consent forms the policymakers would have to lose the treatments entirely. They had to make these strategic agreements which run the system on a binary cis-gendered understanding. It was an enormous effort reworking the current system slowly.

Sheethal shared how it will take time due to the nature of patriarchal and caste-based society in Kerala. She shared the importance of affirmative steps (Fraser, 2003) in building awareness towards the violence against trans community. These steps in reworking the current system would create deeper coalitions in Kerala –

“Those who are wealthy are the one who still make wealth. Those who govern continue to govern. They help each other. So how are we able to deal with those privileges. In our state, development will happen not because of another temple or building but to provide education that makes people think and worry about other human beings, how to care for women and ensure their rights. How to prevent attacks on them and the people with different gender identities accepted. That is human development and that will bring about change in Kerala which will empower it.” (Shyam, 2022) (Translated by me)

At the same time she is honest about how the violence against trans people was increasing but the crisis management for these issues had improved much due to their efforts for creating awareness – “police has started to see trans people as people who need their protection. That's when they see that any violence at a physical and mental level is a violation, and trans people require justice which is given by them. That's something that the police has understood. So there is a change in how they approach and perceive trans men and women. So there is quite a social change. That's why we are able to handle any matter more efficiently and approach people at the minister's level. Ages ago we didn't have the convenience of going to the local police station for any support for any of our issues. At the Zila Panchayat⁸ or even Nagar Sabha. There wasn't anything like that. Now they come for our programs as guests, they say we will come as guests. This is because a lot

⁸ Local Government at the District level in urban and rural areas

of people in our community a lot of people have committed suicides, have been attacked and a lot of people have been dead from hanging themselves. They were all people who died to live. So the noise they made is what we stand on to be heard. This change is the fruit of that. I don't think it's merely the trans community but also the queer community has also created a freedom for regular heterosexual individuals.” (Shyam, 2022) (Translated by me)

Kerala trans community and government was focusing on reworking the given structures to improve social outcomes. What is interesting to see is the transformation was already happening through dis/organising processes focusing on creating alternatives developed by actors on the ground in their daily life.

Therefore, in this chapter we see how each space and individual from Netherlands, Mexico and India (en)counters cisgendered hegemony. I hope how they think, feel and act within their interlocked oppressions and complicities was visible with all their multiplicities.

CHAPTER 5: LEARNINGS

5.1 MANIFESTATIONS OF CISGENDERED HEGEMONY

Through the help of Soest and Bryant's (1994) conceptualisation of violence we understand that trans individuals face violence in different levels. At the structural and cultural level, all locations have different manifestations of cisgendered hegemony with illusory beliefs about gender which manifest as whorephobia, transphobia and homophobia in policy and law. In the Netherlands, Christian patriarchy, racism and ethnic tensions; In Mexico, patriarchy, culture of Machismo and Christian beliefs; In Kerala, India, patriarchy and Casteism shape institutions of immigration, education, healthcare, housing and law enforcement. This also manifests in homophobia and transphobia in trans and LGBTQ+ communities.

At the institutional level, these tensions and cultural beliefs bring out different areas of violence in each location. In Netherlands, the migration, tax and sex work licensing system inflicts the violence of repression on Trans Sex workers and Refugees. There is a commercialisation and centralisation of healthcare which forces navigational labour on trans people who have to meet their gender-affirming needs from a bottlenecked system. In Mexico, the school system is extremely violent towards trans youth who are alienated. In Kerala, India, both the school and higher education system are extremely violent physically and mentally towards trans youth and young adults. The healthcare is severely lacking due to insensitive behaviour and medical negligence. Across all locations trans people have a hard time getting jobs in the beginning of their careers. They also face prejudiced behaviours in municipality settings where a document needs to be changed. The system drains energy by creating multiple check points for access to urgent gender affirming medical and legal needs.

At the individual level, visible and invisible harassment are a common experience for trans youth due to their gender transgressions – in the form of their gender non-conforming behaviour and gender expression through their clothes. The level of trans erasure within the system leads to feelings of confusion in the gender non-conforming behaviours within both cis and trans environment that conform to heteronormative behaviour. In Europe, USA and Mexico there is constant surveillance at their place of work and it is often hard to find work other than sex work or jobs at a call centres. In Kerala, there is surveillance from neighbours and from places of work but in general spaces of higher education are terribly violent towards trans men. Thus, we can see the link of standardised medical norms, procedures and knowledge travel and reproduce gender oppression in the Global South and North.

5.2 NAVIGATIONS DISMANTLING CISGENDERED HEGEMONY

In the process of this research we see a variety of responses towards cisgendered hegemony primarily in the form of reworking existing spaces to deal with inequities and resilient acts of defiance. At the individual level violence is navigated with resilient acts of cis-passing in isolation or defiant acts of confrontation if there are friends and family who support around transgender individuals. There are personal and collective initiatives which are reworking the current system in different areas – housing, education, welfare and sex work rights. The participants in their individual and collective spaces are dis/organising existing ideas on gender roles, community of care and citizenship through pushing for an alternative image by encouraging self-reflexivity and validation in diverse experiences of gender transgression. Thus developing personal, collective and localized standards of knowledge of trans and queer people builds capacity for trans healthcare and welfare in different locations. Resistant responses are present in spaces that undermine the existing light side of gender by emphasising the dark and neglected side. This can be observed through the conscious centering of trans, queer and BIPOC refugees's experiences in protesting pride parades that reclaim pride from LGBTQ+ cisgendered European citizens or celebrating Onam in religious spaces that play a part in denigrating trans identities. Overall, this research demonstrates how trans individuals (en)counter cisgendered hegemony and dismantle gender binaries through the multiplicity of their responses.

CHAPTER 6: AN OUTLOOK ON THE PROJECT AND MY POSITIONALITY

I am a South Indian cisgendered woman in my twenties. I belong to an upper middle class, caste-privileged background I acknowledge not having the embodied experience of being trans or belonging to an underprivileged class and caste background. This might lead to participants hesitating to trust me. I faced this unique pressure of distrust while conducting my open-ended initial interviews and my call for research with transgender and queer community through their silences. There were constant tensions of navigating between my role as a researcher and an ally in the process where I had to deal with the research fatigue of my participants and refusal to my requests. I had gotten good at this point at reading silences (Willemse, 2014). Their refusal (Tuck and Yang, 2018) also made me reflect on my behaviour throughout this process and constantly evolve my ethics and position as a young researcher from the South of India. I navigated conversations to justify my research with family where the interactions with them was met with curiosity and fear. I was told not to share the topic of my research with other family members, citing how older members of the family would disapprove, while being fully supported throughout the process in my fieldwork by my family mentally, emotionally, and financially.

Cisgendered reality is hard to describe when you have the privilege of being cisgendered, but my experience of multiple complicities and oppressions allowed me to be an insider/outsider. I could trace cisgendered reality in the expectations and compliance of gender norms that I feel placed on me in different spaces, I could see it helped me build and understand the responses of my participants. By, listening to trans individuals I was able to look at research that was relevant to them as well. I developed stronger objectivity (1993, Harding) in the course of my research by connecting my experiences of gender oppression with the experiences of oppression with my trans participants. As a feminist and ally, our shared passion for justice and my own experiences as a young woman in Kerala, a South Asian woman in the Netherlands helped us build trust.

Being a teacher leader in Bangalore gave me the experience of working with students and families coming from challenging and abusive backgrounds. I employed the same level of effort and care towards this research. As a practitioner it was important for me to learn by reflecting on the contexts I was situated in and passionate about. I searched for collective spaces to gain knowledge for the research and build relationships. This involvement I believe produces research that is reflective of the truths of my participants. But, my dominant role as researcher meant that I

constantly asked questions and was transparent in the research process to ensure my willing participants were heard. I constantly checked with them to receive criticism and feedback. It helped me unlearn and change my research focus by evolving my stigmatised understandings. This also meant changing my methods according to their comforts and convenience and realising my own limits and the constraints of time and energy that affect the scope of the project and adaptation on the ground. I constantly shared the transcripts of the research and often invited my participants at different stages of the research for input, I reinforced their refusal by often making sure they could say no due to any discomfort with my questions or requests. Overall, this practice of building stronger objectivity enabled research that was consciously reflective of the environment it was carried out in.

Reflections on better research practices

I was hesitant to jump early into the process of contacting participants because I had misconceptions about how research must be done through organisations who could vet me and send participants and I did not feel fully prepared to have sensitive conversations with my participants at the point of research design stage. I corrected this hesitancy by the end of the research process through constant reflexivity and the preparatory conversations that gave me insight.

The nature of my enquiry needed interaction to bring alive aspects that would have been missed in a media analysis and the discovery of this methods was well into my fieldwork. I still discuss openly the mistakes made here in an effort to spread knowledge on less extractive research practices. A major disappointment I had with the process was first not being able to compensate all my participants for the labour of narrating their experiences to me. Alejandra had suggested I crowdfund to compensate participants from the global south, I was not sure if I could raise adequate funds for my participants in a week's time when I was doing fieldwork in India. All my energy was drained into travelling back and forth. I was also frustrated with the extractive aspects of the research, where I engaged in cold dropping emails to possible respondents and the extraction of pain in the research. I tried to remedy that by also focusing on the responses my participants had to reduce the focus on violence. There were points in my online interactions with other queer and trans people where I refused to do research and instead I shared resources they required. I engaged in dialogues with fellow researcher Shilpa M. Parthan, who suggested the method of media analysis as I was wrapping up my fieldwork in Kerala. It was, less intrusive

manner of conducting research on trans issues as there is so much media generated by them. She also suggested the idea of volunteering and making your skills available to participants to build trust in the relationships.

I think as someone who is passionate about justice, this experience showed me that research will never be the whole answer. It is only part of the answer meant to help us reflect and critically update our existing knowledge and practices. It must be done responsibly with care. Sheethal's experiences and thoughts could not be more clear on how careful and sensitive we need to be while conducting research on trans issues—

“I have seen a lot of researchers who come to us. They come at a last minute for their thesis and other things. If you are people with passion and sincerity then you should do this, otherwise please don't do this. Don't just go into a marginalised community.... There should be an output right? ...For that output you need to spend your time. Another thing, for anything.. After the research, at least try to smile at us when you see us. At least that much, other than that nothing... A lot of courses come my way which I attend. I can talk for 1 or 2 hours. But, what's a benefit for me. It's not even a problem of benefit. They don't write everything accurately. They write things which I haven't said. They don't translate properly and use bad words about trans people, misconceptions about us....Whatever I say to them they must try 100% to bring that alive in their research. Inaccurately writing the words we say just for their education is something that is bitter.” (Shyam, 2022)(Translated by me)

In the end, when I asked most of the participants how the community or allies could better support trans people, they urged people to understand themselves, reflect on their own privileges and use those privileges to support their causes and projects. I think the experiences in this research showed me that the societies we inhabit have lost touch with our relational abilities to understand one another to care for one another. To recover that we need to learn more about how we think and feel about ourselves. Developing that understanding enables us to extend that love towards others, ultimately reducing the violence we are subject to and the violence we are complicit in.

Word Count: 16,384

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Interview Guide

A little about my research project. Before I start asking you questions. I am doing an exploratory project. I am studying how trans individuals navigate cisgendered spaces in their everyday life to try to find some principles which we can adapt to displace gender binaries and all the oppressions it puts on us. I was a teacher before this and met activists who were training us on how to make our classrooms safer for trans students, so the more I learn the more I realise how difficult the issue of trans rights are. There are similarities in how governments deal with it is specifically in the context of Amsterdam and Kochi.

Basic Information

1. How do I address you ?
2. Would you like to be anonymous for the interview ?
3. What name should I save you as in my records ?
4. How old are you?
5. Where are you from originally?

Identity

1. What are the words you would use to describe your identity? Who you are? (Doesn't have to be in English.)
2. What does the word – trans mean to you?
3. What do you think trans means to cisgendered people ? How does that make you feel?

Primary Environments – Family, School and Trans Role models

1. How was your experience growing up?
2. When did you first realise that there was danger in sharing who you are?
3. Who were the people around you that created that atmosphere?
4. Was there any place over there you felt safe?
5. School – peers ?
6. Did you see other trans people around you? What did you think about them initially? How was their life?
7. How did people around you perceive them? How did that affect what you thought about yourself?
8. Is there a different experience? What would you say is causing a different experience?

Work/State

1. Were you able to work there ? What kind of work was available for you?
2. How different was the actual experience compared to your expectations?
3. What work do you do now? Did you try to get other jobs here? How was that experience?
4. How were you feeling during that time?
5. Were there instances where you felt if you were from a different racial or caste or class background, your experience would have been different ?

Medical

1. Did you undergo transitioning treatments?
2. How was your experience in terms of the care you received?
3. How involved was your family?
4. Where there things that could have gone better? Done differently?
5. Who were the people that supported you in this transitioning process?
6. Did people's behaviour change after the transitioning ? In what way? Why do you think that happened?

Other questions were contextualised according to each participant's location and as I kept learning about different relevant themes from the interviews and participant observations. I went over how I plan to use this information and went over consent, during different points of the interview.

Appendix 2

Pictures of Participants - To put a face to the ones who shared their knowledge with us.

Prithvi Dev (Eda/He/Him), 27 years old



Sidharth Mohanan (Eda/He/Him), 25 years old



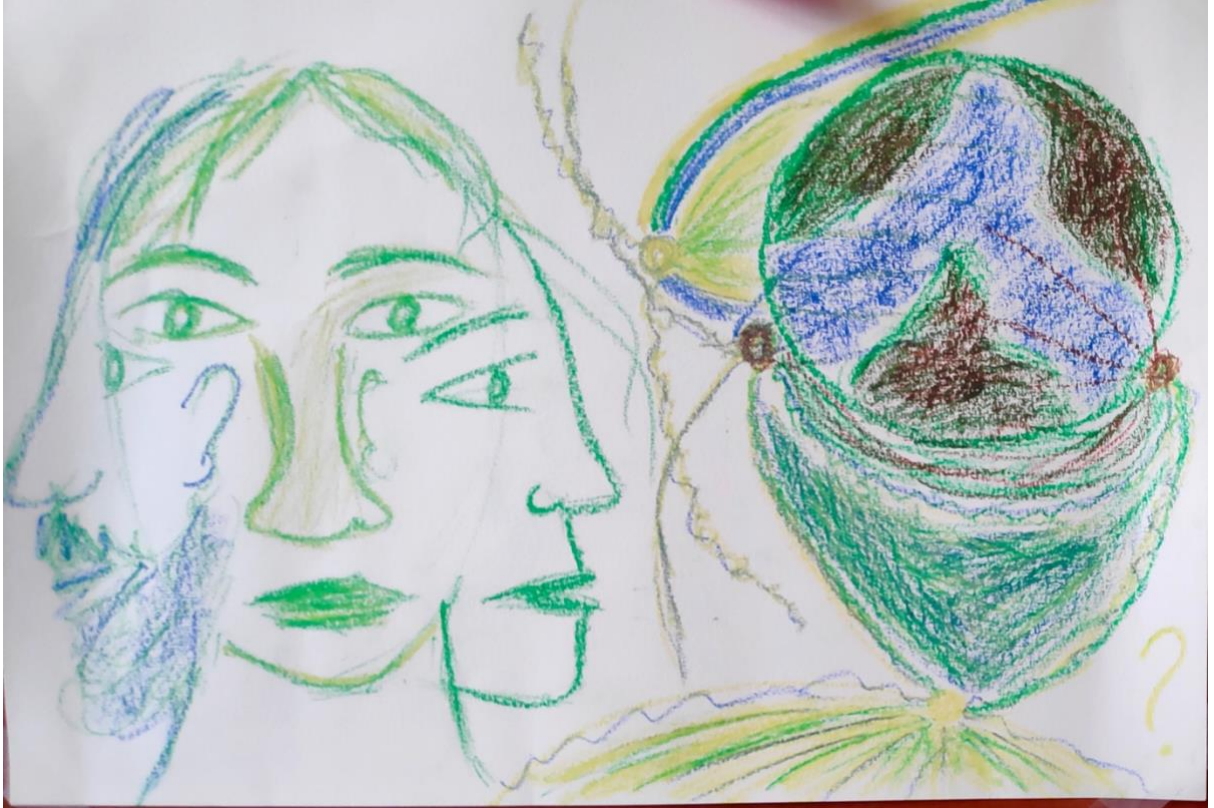
Sheethal Shyam, (Edi/She/Her), 40 years old



Appendix 3

Conceptual Photos that helped me during the RP

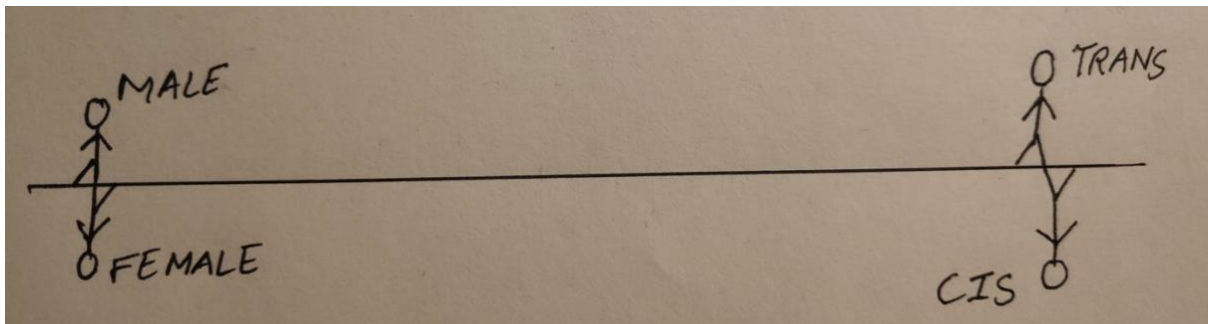
1. This drawing helped me conceptualise an outcome even my design was all over the place.



2. This drawing represented my hopes for the RP and the values that I wanted to be represented in it.



3. This was a conceptual drawing as I was reflecting on Alejandra's experience of cisgendered hegemony- "I was walking this thin line of pretending to be cis when I wasn't. When you are pretending to have a life you don't have at the any moment anyone can discover you. At one point I got a job at a call center thanks to speaking English and I think people were quizzing me all the time – Alejandra why do you have such a big shoe size. I am 168 cms tall. For the Netherlands is the perfect height for a woman. But in Mexico, 168 is the average height for a man. So I was, in my hands, my jaw, many things that can't give me away here could give me away there. I think to this day, what saved me is that in the Mexican imaginary a trans woman can't exist. So there was a woman who looked a little fishy, but carried tampons, every month she was going to the toilet to vomit because she had bad cramps. I did that. Nevertheless, I was never safe." (Ortiz, 2020)



4. This was my final drawing while writing my analysis, it represented the processes of navigating cisgendered hegemony for trans and queer individuals combining Booker's (2007) plot of the Voyage and the Return and Cypher's (2020) analogy of the dandelion growing out the concrete. Representing the ongoing journey of my participant's on the cisgendered landscape. I ultimately had to take out the analysis but the picture helped me write their experiences and their learnings in the context of the participant observations and interviews.



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