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Empty Citizenship: Protesting Politics in the Era of Globalization

Abstract
Globalization is often indexed by the rise of a consumerist ethos and the expansion of the market economy at the expense of state-centric formulations of politics and citizenship. This article explores the politics and practices of gendered democratic citizenship in an educational setting when that setting is newly reconfigured as a commodity under neoliberal privatization efforts. This entails an attention to discourses of consumption as they intersect postcolonial cultural-ideological political fields. Focusing on the contemporary trajectory among politicized male college students of a historically important masculinist "political public" in Kerala, India, the article tracks an explicit discourse of "politics" (rashtriyam). This enables an exploration of a struggle over the meaning of democratic citizenship that opposes a political public rooted in a tradition of anticolonial struggle and postcolonial nationalist politics to that of a "civic public," rooted in ideas about the freedom to consume through the logic of privatization.

Keywords
politics, consumption, education, neoliberalism, India

Comments
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Empty Citizenship: Protesting Politics in the Era of Globalization

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During the mid-1990s, while conducting fieldwork among college students in the Indian state of Kerala, I would walk to the college daily from the nearby student hostel where I lived only to find it closed and largely empty, a situation that was to last for months. Kerala was touted to be the "education miracle." Its nearly 100-percent rates of literacy and high mass participation of both boys and girls at all levels of education had become exemplary of the "Kerala model" of development.[1] However, as part of a larger mobilization of students and political parties against economic liberalization policies begun in the early 1990s, student strikes had closed the college in protest over government attempts to privatize higher education by authorizing the expansion of privately funded colleges. At the end of the first day, after most of the students had left, the teachers were still hanging about, reading the newspapers or gossiping. Unlike the students, they could not leave if they wanted to be paid. Shaking her head as she watched a political procession *(jatha)* of mostly male students move through the corridors, shouting "Inquilab Zindabad" (Long Live the Revolution), she laughed and said cynically, "it's not democracy, its demo-crazy."

This article is an exploration of the emptied college and its relationship to concepts of citizenship in contemporary India. Educational institutions are often understood to be key spaces for constituting modern public spheres and central to the production of citizens in modern nation-states.[2] Over the last century, within Kerala's developing narrative of modernity, this public has come to be understood as a "political public," driven by the political agency of revolutionary or revolutionizing young men. Education has become a key space (among others) for the constitution of this "political public," as well as its object, in ways that express gendered and generational practices of inclusion and exclusion. Girls and women have been included to a very high degree in the public places of work in Kerala's highly touted educational system while also being excluded from this "political public."

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My aim is to examine what happens to the politics and practices of gendered democratic citizenship in an educational setting that is being newly reconfigured as a commodity under the neoliberal economic reforms that constitute globalization, focusing specifically on the politics of privatization. By *privatization,* I mean a set of discourses and policies that portray the state as pitted against the market, in which the state is understood to be "public" and the market is understood to be "private."[3] Although privatization arguments often hinge on discourses of quality of services, supply, and demand, I argue that what is most at stake in debates about privatization are competing notions of the public and meanings of citizenship.

In Kerala, as elsewhere, transformations associated with globalization are often indexed by the expansion of the market economy and a consumerist ethos, often at the expense of state-centric formulations of politics and citizenship. Debates about privatization usually revolve around two competing arguments. On the one hand, some herald privatization as the engine of economic growth and prosperity, relieving states and citizens of the draining effects of large state bureaucracies and inefficiencies. On the other hand, those who oppose privatization argue that the withdrawal of the state from social services and the concomitant rise of consumption and market ideology lead to increasing inequality. What is often missed in these debates are the ways in which claims are made on the state by both sides of this debate. Moreover, although both positions target consumerism, little attention is paid to how discourses of consumption work to reconfigure politics, citizenship, and democracy. This reconfiguration is the subject of this article. I examine the state-market nexus that structures the educational field in Kerala, tracking the persistent yet transformed understandings of the relationship between private and public through which the meanings and functions of education and citizenship are debated and struggled over. In particular, I pay attention to discourses about "politics" that pervade college life in Kerala as a key site where citizenship is being reformulated through discourses of consumerism.

To track the relationship between privatization and citizenship, I examine the contemporary trajectory of a historically important masculinist "political public" in Kerala as it intersects with multiple understandings of the "private" in ways that demonstrate their mutual and changing entanglements.[4] This entails unraveling the dense connections between Kerala's postcolonial political and educational trajectories, given the centrality of educational spaces and students to the constitution of this political public. The contemporary contestations that mark this political field within Kerala reveal a struggle over the meaning of democratic public life that opposes a political public, rooted in a tradition of anticolonial struggle and postcolonial nationalist politics, to that of a "civic public," rooted in notions of efficiency and freedom to consume through the logic of privatization. A contrast between the civic and the political has been given renewed salience in the recent work of Partha Chatterjee (1998, 2000, 2004).[5] The term *civil society* allows Chatterjee to mark that domain of organizations and norms of behavior that are understood to conform to bourgeois Western, and secularized Christian forms of

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associational life, while pointing to another domain, "political society," in which other, nonelite practices of mobilization and participation in engagements with the state run counter to the norms of civil society. My discussion of a civic—as opposed to a political—public resonates with this distinction, which I find useful. However, I am less interested in a conception of political society that lies outside of the domain of civil society than in the ways in which notions of the civic and the political confront each other within an already constituted public space of politics.

Drawing on extensive work on the public–private dichotomy in feminist scholarship, I suggest that the public that grounds the confrontation between the civic and the political is grounded in masculine forms of sociality and mobility. The tension between the freedom to occupy and traverse public spaces in the discourses of both a "civic public" and a "political public" is grounded, I argue, on competing masculinities that are class inflected.

Further, I mark this contemporary moment of neoliberalism by demonstrating how this "civic public," which Chatterjee links to the emergence of middle-class bourgeois nationalism during the colonial period, articulates with discourses of consumption that are tied to notions of the freedom of the market. The "private consumer" lays claim to the state by trying to construct a civic public, based on notions of efficiency and orderliness, in opposition to a political public, deemed to be unruly, disruptive, and sometimes violent, in ways that are reconfiguring politics, democracy, and citizenship under conditions of globalization. Explicit discourses about "politics" *(rashtriyam),* its limits and characteristics, point to the ways in which self-conscious political activity among students is situated within a wider social field of gender and generational practices that structure this confrontation between a civic and a political public. In particular, these discourses mark the ways in which notions of citizenship are tied to anticolonial and postcolonial notions of politics and how they intersect with neoliberal conceptions of consumption.

To comprehend the reconfiguration of politics and citizenship within this new moment of globalization, a focus on discourses of consumption is centrally important. Within the Indian context, several formulations have marked the rise of consumption as a new terrain for the reconfiguration of citizenship in the globalizing 1990s, supplanting the national developmental citizen of the postindependence Nehruvian state (Breckenridge 1995; Deshpande 1993; Niranjana 1991, 1999). The anthropology of globalization has also been marked by a focus on consumption (Appadurai 1996; Ong 1999).[6] The centrality of consumption as a site for the exploration of globalization dovetails with the growing influence of cultural studies (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1981; McRobbie 1991; Miller 1991) within anthropology that has also privileged consumption as an object of cultural analysis. Much work in the cultural studies and anthropology of consumption has been devoted to exploring this hitherto undervalued and neglected domain of social life, arguing its importance for understanding identity formation under the intersecting frames of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism (Burke 1996; Hendrickson 1996; Tarlo 1996).

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Rather than viewing consumption as a naturalized set of social practices that needs to be examined and deciphered, I would like to begin by examining the space of consumption itself as something that needs to be actively produced through discourse, practice, and imagination (Appadurai 1996:42). As Beng-Huat Chua states for East Asia, much theorization and research on consumption focuses on identity politics and comes out of an argument about the importance of consumption vis-à-vis debates about cultural distinction within the Euro-American context (2000:19). Although the politics of identity and cultural distinction are certainly at stake in consumer practices globally, especially for the cultural politics of youth, the cultural-ideological context within which that politics is played out has distinct histories in different locations. A focus on discourses of consumption reveals the specificity of these contexts, particularly when the politics of identity and cultural distinction are linked to discourses of citizenship and politics. Within the privatization debates in Kerala, discourses of consumption insert themselves into dense narratives of politics emerging out of the cultural and ideological terrain of postcolonial states struggling with the legacy of colonialism and anticolonial nationalism as they intersect with a new global order. The terrain of consumption as "social practice" or "everyday life" operates in and through these political fields.

Joan Vincent has recently remarked on a new engagement with questions of citizenship within anthropology (2002). The framework of citizenship has become a lens through which to explore the changing and dynamic processes of sovereignty, belonging, and politics at the interface between nation-states and transnational movements of capital, labor, media, and commodities (Appadurai 2002). This approach has expanded the notion of what constitutes the proper domain of citizenship. Although a conventional legal definition of citizenship rests on political rights and obligations with respect to a sovereign state, anthropologists have emphasized the ambiguities of citizenship as these are lived in the cultural politics of everyday life (Holston and Appadurai 1999; Ong 1999). Although the expansion of citizenship beyond the boundaries of the officially political is a useful and salutary move in studies of citizenship, I have found it useful to track definitions of "the political"—more specifically, the how, what, when, and where of the political—to understand changing conceptions of citizenship (Appadurai 2002; Butler 1992; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000).[7] I examine a self-conscious discourse of politics and its limits in and through various spaces of articulation focusing on the politics of privatization in a college institution established for lower-caste students.

The Public in Kerala

Tracing a genealogy of the public in Kerala helps to illuminate how the politics of privatization is playing out in educational spaces. In July 1994, a group of middle-class businessmen belonging to a consumer organization staged a jatha down Mahatma Gandhi Road in front of the State Secretariat in

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Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city. Unlike most political processions, however, they did not march on foot but drove cars, motorbikes, and scooters, not because they had the financial means to do so but, more pointedly, they did so to assert their "right to use the roads." This was part of a larger mobilization to initiate what they called an "anti-*bandh* culture" in the state (*Indian Express* 1994). *Bandh* is a commonly used Hindi word that literally means "closed," but it can refer more specifically to a general strike, usually called by a political party, in which workplaces, schools, colleges, transportation, and shops come to a standstill. A petition was also filed before Kerala's High Court asking that a court injunction be issued against the frequent bandhs initiated by political parties. Although this was not initially successful, the Kerala Supreme Court officially banned bandhs in 1997, and later that year, this ruling was upheld by the Supreme Court of India. In 2003, another petition was filed before the Kerala Supreme Court arguing that the government and various other organizations were getting around the 1997 ruling by renaming bandhs as *hartals* (*Hindu* 2003a). The word *hartal* is often used interchangeably with bandh, although it usually refers to a strike that is called suddenly, a more delimited form of protest in duration and scope. The petitioner, who was the president of an organization called the International Society for the Preservation of Human Rights and the Rule of Law, argued that bandhs or hartals, however one chose to name them, violated the rights of citizens based on the constitutional right to "equal protection" and the "right to life."

A conference was organized in the city of Kochi to promote this anti-bandh culture under the auspices of the Consumer Protection Magazine and a civic organization called the Kochi City Vigilance. Conference speakers condemned the violence done to people and property under the "cover of democratic dissent." Several pointed to the fact that at one time, general strikes were necessary and genuinely expressed the "will of the people." They drew a distinction between the genuine use of bandhs and hartals during the independence movement and their abuse in postindependence India. The general strike in 1907 to protest the arrest of nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak by British authorities was "spontaneous." Mahatma Gandhi's fasting and noncooperation movement was "nonviolent." Today's bandhs "victimized the public" and "[were] no credit to civilized society." Conference speakers cited the large sums of money lost because of property damage and the undermining of the work ethos caused by lost working days. People observe bandhs by not going to work or school and by closing down shops not because they always approve of the protest but often because of fear of violence. By forcing people to stay indoors, bandhs are not an expression of democratic rights but end up violating the people's "fundamental right to move about freely," hence, the "anti-bandh" jatha to drive the public roads of Thiruvananthapuram. Although the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) led by the Kerala Congress Party was chastised for not doing enough to prevent the bandhs, the blame was squarely placed on the left parties. Veteran Communist leader E. M. S. Namboodiripad, who was the leader of Left Democratic Front (LDF) headed by the Communist

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Party of India–Marxist (CPI-[M]) that was the opposition party at that time, fired back that bandhs were an expression of the people's fundamental right to protest and that to ban them was "fascist" (*Hindu* 1994). Whether they were legal or not, he averred, such agitations would always take place. Asked about the violence associated with strikes, he stated that it was a part of the struggle itself. After all, he contended, during the freedom movement many had lost their lives.

This rather striking contestation about the forms of Kerala's political culture brings to light a set of cultural and political struggles tied to notions of the public in which the space of politics (rashtriyam) is mostly understood to be occupied by the left. At one level, this speaks to the history of Kerala as a bastion of the communist movement in India. Therefore, many people in Kerala believe that to be critical of politics is to be critical of the left, and to be critical of the left is to be critical of politics. In this way, the politics of anti-politics is mapped onto a set of political distinctions between left and right,[8] pitting middle-class businessmen whose use of the roads is illuminated by the headlights of their cars and scooters against the ordinary folk *(sadharannakar)* who walk on foot and carry burning torches.[9]

One way of gesturing toward the history of what one might call a modern public in Kerala is by looking at the history of the jatha as a mode of political protest. The Punjabi word entered the political vocabulary of Malayalam, the state language, in the 1920s, when a jatha of supporters came from the north to join the Vaikom Satyagraha, a pivotal moment in the struggle to constitute an egalitarian public in Kerala (Menon 1994).[10] This nonviolent struggle *(satyagraha)* challenged the caste-based geography of space whereby lower castes could not enter the temple or walk the roads around it. The protest pitted a notion of a unified Hindu nationalist community, defined in largely upper-caste terms, against caste regulations based on exclusion (Menon 1994). Caste regulations that produced not only untouchability but unapproachability[11]—regulating the visibility and distance between caste bodies—were challenged by the jatha, in which members of different castes marched together, traversing caste-based understandings of places, to produce an egalitarian public space. The jatha became a potent political mode in the 1930s during agitations over temple entry, salt marches, peasant protests, and various forms of civil disobedience. They challenged very specific meanings of body, mobility, and place around temples, but they were also central to the production of Kerala as a regional identity. An important series of jathas mapped a regional cartography from Malabar in the north to Trivandrum in the south. The "jatha idea," as the communist leader A. K. Gopalan called it, has become emblematic of Kerala's political modernity (Jeffrey 1993:121).[12]

The political public, instantiated in the jatha, was also inextricably intertwined with spaces of education, a key component of Kerala's claim to development and modernity.[13] The success of the educational system—spreading education at all levels to a wide spectrum of the population—occurs in and through a process in which education has historically been both a key object of political contestation

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and a crucial space for the development and enactment of a vigorous political culture. One could not write the modern political history of Kerala, indeed the history of modernity in Kerala, without writing about education—either as an object and site of contestation or as an institution that produced key political actors (i.e., students and teachers). As Robin Jeffrey argues, "Most Keralans have first encountered government—and, indeed, public politics—through a school system that has become the heart of the new Kerala" (1993:153).

Furthermore, the very political history of Kerala has a strong gender and generational narrative.[14] The "youthfulness" of politics was one of its key features, but this was a youth understood to be militant and masculine. For example, like many of his contemporaries, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the now-deceased veteran leader of the CPI-(M) in Kerala, embarked on a life of politics straight out of college. Having arranged a successful boycott of his history class, he left education for good. In 1932, he was arrested, and in his autobiography he writes: "With this my life had taken a new turn. My transformation from a boy . . . to a youth dedicating his entire life to active politics became complete" (Jeffrey 1993:64). The story of Kerala's modernity is written as a generational one, with young militant sons dragging their elders into a new Kerala. The 1938 campaign for responsible government in Trivandrum is a case in point that, many would argue, cemented the form that public protest would take on the Kerala landscape. What was unique about this protest, the largest that Kerala has ever seen, was that the elder upper-caste members of the dignified Legislative Council, who usually dressed in western suits and ties, had donned homespun cotton *(khadi)* to march in the jathas, shouting slogans at the goading of student and peasant groups (Jeffrey 1993).[15] As such, youth as a space of masculine political agency has been key to the articulation of public politics in Kerala.[16]

In 1924, the satyagraha in Vaikom focused on the rights of lower-caste individuals to use the roads surrounding a temple. In a stark contrast with this earlier moment, the 1990s assertion by middle-class businessmen of their rights to use the roads was a self-conscious challenge to the prevailing conception of the political. The contemporary contestation over the dominant forms of political culture in Kerala touches at the heart of Kerala's self-identity as modern and revolutionary and reveals the larger contours of a debate about the very meaning of democratic politics and citizenship in these globalizing times. This struggle to define citizenship is also manifesting itself in spaces of education and youth as well, as I discuss in the next section. The political public, a conception of the public rooted within a tradition of public politics that emerged out of the colonial period, is now confronted by a privatized citizenship linked to a conception of a properly functioning civic public.[17]

The idea of the public being contested in the jatha of middle-class businessmen is both literal and conceptual. Literally, it is about the functioning of roads, shops, schools, and workplaces. These public places are linked to the conception of a space of the public, conceptually, through the language of rights, democracy, the

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people, property, and politics. Literal places are linked to contested conceptual notions of the public by the ways in which they are used and occupied. What is being contested here are two notions of the public, one civic and one political, both linked to the functioning of literal spaces deemed to express the nature of the public that constitutes them as "public," and the use of which somehow expresses "fundamental rights." Crucial to the constitution of a civic public is the erasure of the political through the assertion of the well-mannered and orderly use of this public space and through the respect for property by those deemed to be citizens. "The people" are disarticulated from these places in the reconceptualization of public space defined in terms of consumer citizenship. This new conception of the public defends the rights of its citizens to consume public space and to seeking redress in a consumer forum.[18] These rights are defined in relation to being forced to stay indoors and not being able to "move around freely" because of a fear of violence. In this conception, the public has been forcibly privatized—incarcerated in the home—by politics. Although the privacy of the home is an incarceration, the privacy of the market is glossed as the freedom to choose.

The privatizing logic of the market asserts its claims on the public through the logic of consumption. The freedom of consumption is linked with the freedom to move in an uninhibited way through public places. In this way, the "public citizen" articulates with the figure of the "private consumer." For the civic public, on the one hand, the limit of a genuinely democratic public is violence and fear of violence. For the political public, on the other hand, violence is not a limit as such, but when justifiable, it lies at the very heart of politics. The public is not constituted by lack of fear and well-mannered behavior but by the "right to protest" as a popular expression of political legitimacy.[19]

The Politics of Emptiness

In this genealogy of the "political public" in Kerala, education is a centrally important space for politics, and youth is defined as a category of masculinized political agency. Within the political culture of the state, the space of the college is a particularly charged and routinized one. Student politics is almost exclusively structured by the larger political culture, and the college system, and increasingly other kinds of schools as well, is integral to the reproduction of the official political culture.[20] Very often, the student wings of the national parties were called on to do the hard labor of grassroots political mobilization and education and to be at the forefront of larger political demonstrations. Student leaders and cadres were socialized into party politics, and they moved up into the ranks of their respective parties. Therefore, in very straightforward and routinized ways, colleges reflected and reproduced the official political culture of the state.

At the same time, the everyday life of politics (rashtriyam) within the college must be situated within the everyday contexts that young people occupy. Politics emerges from a terrain of gender and generational practices, particularly the

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struggles of young men as they restlessly navigate fun, friendship, and romance in public. Masculine forms of sociality and mobility are central to understanding the ways in which public spaces of politics and citizenship, as constituted in college life, are lived and contested. Elsewhere, I discuss the complex of practices that embody an unruly, restless masculinity, including notions of fun and style (Lukose in press). With respect to everyday practices of politics, I focus here on notions of mobility through public spaces as important to understanding the ways in which politics emerges within the college. The conditions of possibility of a jatha in the space of the college lie in the restless navigation of public space by young men.[21]

A contrast between feminine and masculine modes of navigating public space should be instructive here. The emptiness of the classrooms does not mean that the college is not occupied. Just as with the street, the beach, or the bus stand, the classroom becomes a gendered space of sociality. Women students stay inside the classrooms, rarely traversing the corridors and open places of the campus. The goal-oriented, demure comportment necessary to traverse the public means that if there is no class, women are expected to go home. This demure femininity, rooted in the notion of a closed, contained body moving toward a clearly defined destination through public space, both enables and constrains a women's presence in public.[22] At times women students may stay and hang out with their friends at school, then go shopping, or if really adventurous, they go to an ice cream parlor or the India Coffee House. They may also meet their "lines" (a slang word for a romantic interest) on the road behind the college where hopefully no one will see. In cases in which there is no official purpose to her being at the college, however, a woman's presence in public is precarious for she cannot be "too free" in her movements. Being too free, of course, involves her sexualization.

This constraint for women may be contrasted to masculine forms of mobility, rooted in the notion of "wandering about" or "gallivanting" *(karanguga),* a mode of restless, aimless movement in search of fun, romance, and friendship. For Biju, a particularly energetic young man, the emptiness of the college enabled all of these things. He related to me how he is everywhere in the college, but never in the classroom. It did not matter to him whether class was conducted or not; it was all the same to him:

> I have been at this college for five years and never had one year of full attendance. I have a very strict schedule, but it is my own. I study from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. at home. I know the syllabus, so I read on my own, take my own notes. Then there is tutorial in Modern College to help me. But I come to college every day. I will wander about [*karangum*]. I will see what is happening. I start on the top floor then I come down to the first floor. I never stop, I just say hello to everyone, my friends. Then I'm on my way. By that time, it's noon. Time for lunch. I eat lunch, then, I leave the college. Sometimes I go to the public library to read. Okay, sometimes I go to the movies. Or wherever my friends might go.

I asked Biju how he could maintain such a poor attendance record because it was impossible to sit for end-of-the-year exams without having attended a certain

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percentage of classes. He said there were many ways of getting around that, such as bribing the office clerk who took attendance every day.

The emptiness of the college is a different kind of opportunity for dedicated political workers. Sissan fits the typical profile of a supporter of the Student Federation of India (SFI), which is the dominant student political organization in the college and affiliated to the CPI-(M). A first-generation college student from a poor peasant background, Sissan was a hard worker and unusually sincere and passionate in his dedication to the ideals of the party. Once I saw him running toward the college and I told him he could stop, he was not late, a strike had been called and there were no classes. The strike was part of a mobilization against the privatization of higher education and the liberalization of the Indian economy undertaken by left parties. He had come an hour and half by bus to get to college. He laughingly said, “It’s only when there is a strike that it’s worth it to come to college. That’s when you must come to college.” If there was nothing to do for the party at the college, he would often go to the district office of the SFI and do whatever was required of him there or attend a few sessions at what are called “parallel colleges” nearby to keep up with his class work. In the past 25 years, parallel colleges such as the Modern College, a private tutorial center that Biju also attended, have sprung up all over Kerala as a set of institutions for tutoring, registering to take exams, and so forth. For many politically oriented students, recourse to a parallel institution for cramming two months before an exam allows them to turn the college into an empty place where no formal learning happens. From the perspective of a civic conception of citizenship, colleges as spaces of civic virtue and public consumption of services are held hostage, incarcerated by politics: the endless strikes that last a day, a week, or sometimes a month as well as fasts and demonstrations.

Although Biju’s narrative emphasizes his freedom to wander about, which he associates with fun and friendship, Sissan’s narrative is one of dedicated and disciplined political work. However, these forms of mobility are not easily disentangled. The masculinity of wandering about freely in an undisciplined way is the condition of possibility for producing a masculinity in which movement is disciplined (as in the jatha). They are intertwined in the everyday life of the college. Incidents of politics are rarely separable from a problem of unruly “(in)discipline.”[23]

One form of indiscipline involves damage to college property. A good example of such an incident involves Prabhu, who was brought before a disciplinary committee. He was charged with running through the corridors with a bunch of his friends, shouting and slamming windows, doors, and shutters against the college walls. He was also accused of breaking the blackboard in the botany department classroom. When a teacher ran into the classroom, Prabhu took off on his motorbike but the teacher was able to identify him. He was immediately suspended but petitioned to have his suspension lifted. Prabhu stood in front of the seated disciplinary committee composed of three teachers and two students; his head was bowed with eyes to the ground and hands clasped behind his back. Under questioning,

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it became clear that he came to college about once every three days to wander about instead of attending classes, and he had previously let the air out of the scooter tires of two teachers. However, he argued that he was wrongly accused because teachers had a grudge against him for being involved in the Student Union and being an active member of the SFI. He respected teachers and the college and would have never done such things. He argued that he was a simple, humble boy *(pawam)*.[24]

The problem of discipline is wrapped around the problem of politics in that both are grounded in a form of masculine sociality that is reckless and restless. Although Prabhu might assert that his demeanor is pawam, it was clear that he is not understood that way. A troublemaker, he is one who recklessly wanders about, destroying property, talking back to teachers, and letting the air out of their tires. However, because he was a prominent member of the SFI unit on campus, once his suspension was lifted, many believed that he had gotten off because the administration did not want any more trouble with the party.

More quotidian forms of fighting take on another character. As one teacher pointed out to me, the problem is often not political trouble but "girl trouble." Narratives of these incidents proceed in a fairly structured way: a boy speaks to a girl in an inappropriate way, another boy gets upset about this (perhaps the girl is his "line," a cousin, or someone from his village) and fights with or attacks the boy. One of them just happens to be associated with a particular political party, the other with a rival party. This will then escalate as members of these groups will be drawn into further clashes. What is at stake in these narratives is a male struggle over the honor and virtue of women that also manages women's sexuality by reinforcing the importance for women of maintaining a demure presence in public.

Politics confronts the public space of the college in the form of everyday problems of (in)discipline that are then understood to be the machinations of "outside forces" (i.e., political parties). An angle of vision on the meaning of this politics, and the anti-politics that confronts it, can be ascertained by examining the attempts to produce a civic public within the space of the college. Both the college administration and civic-minded students attempt to do this in several ways, most notably through student associations that are explicitly understood to be antipolitical. Here, the student–citizen who figures as an agent of development is key. Within the discourse of development, this student–citizen moves from being simply the object of the educational process (and, therefore, in some senses an object of development) to being an agent of development.

This notion of the student–citizen is institutionalized on a national level in the National Service Scheme (NSS). The NSS is a nationwide organization of college students that has a unit in almost every state-affiliated college. The NSS builds gardens, digs tube wells, runs blood drives, and conducts rural surveys. Sometimes they participate as census enumerators as well. Here, the student–citizen does not destroy but builds. The organization encourages participation by

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giving extra points on year-end examination marks, making this a major draw. Students also like to join because it is relatively easy to excuse absences from class by producing certificates saying that one was involved in some NSS activity.

A major project of the NSS unit in the college was the building of a garden in the space between the college building and the campus wall. Full of tall weeds, it had been noted as a place of congregation for the "bad elements" in the college, as one teacher put it. Students would stay after class and come on Saturdays to tend this space. Plants were obtained from the homes of teachers and parents, as the limited budget did not permit buying them. The highlight of the garden was an area of well-tended green grass in the shape of territorial India that the students involved in the project were sure was going to win them a university-wide competition they had entered. The teacher who was in charge of the college's NSS unit described the intention of the garden:

> Every year the NSS has a theme. For this year, the new theme is "youth for sustainable development." Last year it was "youth for national integration." Given that scheme, we made a garden, that garden that you see over there. Yes, according to that scheme, in every college there should be a garden, for the youth [*yuvakal*]. A place of youth. An assembly place of youth, for their studies, for their day-to-day activities. For their discussions. That is the kind of garden that we are growing, that we made. It is the main scheme of NSS silver jubilee. Nowadays, the preservation of trees, it has become a concern of youth. Also, in the ancient system, for students to sit under a tree in the shade and study, there was that idea as well. In the Vedic period, the old system, students used to sit under trees and study. Then for their congregation, to play, to read, to sit, for all that a special place. Then you grow trees, plants, for the beautification of the environment, the surroundings.

This "place of youth" became a space for the congregation of student–citizens, a space of associational civil society, freely congregating in a developed land. It enacts the Nehruvian model of development on the part of student–citizens who are patriotic and productive (Deshpande 1993), but it was also understood to be a resistance to the "empty place" of youth that the college had become. The teacher outlined why he thought the NSS could subsume the politics that incarcerated the college: "The college is in the grip of this rashtriyam. But in the NSS, we have [members from] all [student] groups, KSU, ABVP, SFI. In the NSS there is no problem of politics. On Sundays when they work together, they work together side by side, hand in hand." He went on to discuss the ways in which the NSS engaged in a kind of anti-politics: "When they come to the NSS, they must forget their politics. They have to forget all kinds of political beliefs, while remaining in NSS. NSS is over politics. We have a seminar and raise awareness. So we tell them as a main point, 'don't get violent.' They then spread the message to others."

This struggle between his notion of a "place of youth" and the notion of the "empty place" of the college is a palpable one. Every year that the NSS has tried to build a garden, it has been destroyed:

> This year we must maintain this project. We have to deal with violence, agitated students. Several times, our garden has been destroyed, vandalized. Then we gave a

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> case to the police. Even though the case did not go anywhere, the kids again made it okay, worked and made it right again. . . . We will make it all neat, neat from this end to that end. It is a tiresome job.

Some students, highly critical of all the rashtriyam in the college, were excited about the garden because they thought it would create the kind of public that they wanted to be a part of, a civic public full of opportunity and growth. As one active NSS member states: "Look at this college. It is like a desert. It should be charming and beautiful, full with plants. The garden will make it look different." He went on to say that the college had few activities, nothing to "direct the youth." He added that in the activities he engaged in, there was "direction" and "equality." Even women participated in the National Cadet Corp, studying first aid and signaling, while male students studied shipbuilding and sailing. Within the Nehruvian model of student citizenship, the student is not a roaming, wayward young man. He has "direction." His activities are spatially arranged in an orderly manner, directed toward his own future and that of his nation. Although this Nehruvian public presents itself as gender neutral, it links a middle-class masculinity with the idea of a demure femininity that will perform its assigned nurturing role (i.e., first aid).

The empty college is a product of the contestation between a civic and a political conception of the space of the college and the practices of democratic citizenship that define it. As with roads, shops, schools, and transportation systems, the college is an embattled terrain, a technology of citizenship in which struggles over its proper functioning constitute a struggle over the meaning of democratic citizenship. It is underwritten by gender and generational practices of sociality and mobility that constitute the everyday modes of this struggle.

Politics, Privatization, and Education

The contestation between the civic and the political, so far located within a Nehruvian conception of service to the nation, takes on a renewed and transformed set of meanings under conditions of neoliberalism and the new politics of privatization it has generated. The "civic" is increasingly tied to discourses of consumption and a free market. Nowhere is this more apparent than when education itself becomes an object of politics.

Since the initiation of economic reforms in the early 1990s, the reform of higher education has centered on its privatization. To understand these shifts, I focus on the deployments of a distinction between private and public and its relationship to the politics at stake in these debates. Despite the rhetoric of those opposed to privatization, who often argue that privatization is a new phenomenon, public and private historically have been entangled. Only by paying attention to this prior history will it be possible to delineate the specificity of privatization under neoliberal regimes. Although questions of supply and demand and those of access and quality dominate privatization efforts in education, it is equally important to pay attention to the status of the political within these debates. Usually, this

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aspect of the debate centers on how much blame for the crisis in education should be placed on the pervasive presence of student (and teacher) politics, which are usually tied in varying degrees to the politics of major political parties. Generally, the arguments against the "politicization of higher education" are tied to causal explanations that link it to the disruption of a proper academic life and, therefore, to the lowering of academic standards.[25] At both levels, the distinction between private and public has been central. In an era of neoliberalization, contestations over whether education is a public good or a private commodity are transforming conceptions of the public, citizenship, and democracy.

The large number in Kerala of higher educational institutions within the private sector is somewhat unique within India.[26] The attempt to bring this private sector of education within full public view through state regulation was at the heart of the student politics of the 1990s, in which education as a means for developing a productive citizenry in service to the nation became entangled with the idea of education as a commodity. One important sector of private education is the very powerful and widespread system of educational institutions controlled by Christian churches. Along with several schools and a college set up by the Maharaja of Travancore, Western missionaries and Christian churches were among the first to establish schools and colleges in the 19th century, to serve the long-standing Christian community as well as lower-caste Hindu converts. The demand for access to education also became a central feature of popular struggles by anticaste social reform movements, in particular the Izhava-based Sree Narayana movement.[27] The struggle for an egalitarian public (i.e., for the rights of lower-caste groups to walk on public roads, enter temples, go to school, and get government jobs), was a major object of political mobilization. Within the volatile coalition-based politics of the last several decades, granting approval for new schools and colleges for various constituencies has been a major way to attract votes.[28]

The struggle to control these private institutions has been a major feature of Kerala's politics for most of its history since the founding of the state in 1956. The contestations over the education bill, which was intended to regulate salaries and admissions processes under the sponsorship of the first communist government of 1957–59, starkly reveal the dynamics of this persistent feature within Kerala politics. The opposition to this bill came primarily from the Christian organizations that opposed government interference and saw it as a threat to their rights as religious minorities. Schools were closed and students mobilized. In July 1959, after many deaths and arrests, rule by the central government was imposed and the communist ministry was dismissed. Many of the provisions of the bill were not fully implemented until the early 1970s, when private colleges, through their affiliations to public universities, were brought under more state control. This shift was largely because of the efforts of teachers' unions. From this brief sketch, it becomes clear that the private sector that dominates higher education is both private and public. The private here is understood to be primarily the private of religious minorities and specific upper- and lower-caste communities, which have

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some discretion over a portion of admissions and hiring. However, the degree to which they are strictly private is undermined by the structure and extent of state funding and the requirement that they affiliate with the university system through which the government controls appointments, admissions, curricula, and salaries. This allows the state to set quotas for hiring and admission and to implement the reservation system, used to redress discrimination against lower-caste groups.

However, the market is another realm of the private that colludes and collides with both the private of communities described above and the public of the state. The private market exists in the educational field in two senses. First, despite the control that the state exerts over private educational institutions, private donations for job appointments and capitation fees for student admissions are rampant and common. Another kind of private market for education is the widespread presence of parallel colleges. Completely outside the private sector of education that was described above are the private tutorial centers that Biju and Sissan could count on to get them through exams while not attending class. Housed in a few rooms of a building or hut and often surrounding the regular colleges to which they are quite literally "parallel," these colleges emerged and expanded during the 1970s as a result of policies intended to address a growing demand for higher education that the existing system could not meet.[29]

Therefore, the 1990s debates about the privatization of higher education in Kerala must be placed within a prior context of a state-saturated private sector of education and an expanding parallel system of private education. These contestations escalated in 1994–95 when the ruling pro-Congress UDF government attempted to allow the establishment of new colleges that would be entirely self-financing and unsubsidized but under some measure of government regulation. The emergence of these new institutions would mark another development in the entangled public–private sector relations in the education field. Mr. E. T. Basheer, who was at that time the education minister, argued that although nearly 40 percent of the state budget was being spent on education, it was still insufficient. Although some had argued that self-financing colleges were elitist and would exclude the poor, he disagreed and stated that those who could afford to pay should have the opportunity to do so and this would lead to healthy competition and higher quality. The pro-LDF student and teacher organizations led by the SFI launched a broad and vigorous set of agitations to oppose what they called the "commercialization of higher education," including an "education bandh" that kept many colleges closed for months.

This process of privatization was both similar to and different from what had occurred earlier. If we look back to the agitations surrounding the 1957 Kerala Education Bill, the private sphere that opposed the government was primarily the Christian churches. However, a new actor has now appeared on the scene: the Non-Resident Indian (NRI). Technically, NRI is a banking category of the Indian state intent on attracting the capital flows of the Indian diasporic community. Within the cultural politics of consumption in contemporary India, the marketing of an

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NRI lifestyle has become associated with the effects of market liberalization and the aspirations of a globalizing middle class (Deshpande 1993). Within Kerala, international migration has been extensive especially to the Persian Gulf since the 1970s.[30] Remittances now make up about 30 percent of Kerala's domestic product (Zachariah et al. 1999). The children of Gulf migrants are unable to study abroad because family visas are rarely given, and, furthermore, the citizenship requirements within Gulf countries often restrict access to higher education. There is a demand to open new colleges for the dependents of NRIs, in which these parents could simply pay to have their children admitted and circumvent reservation quotas and other admissions requirements. Additionally, given their semiautonomous status, these colleges were perceived to serve better the global trajectories and aspirations of NRI families through curriculum reform and superior discipline, by being free of the "politicization of education."

Examining a court case brought against the government by the state general-secretary of the SFI reveals the struggle over NRI funding of education. Originally, the state had decided to allow the establishment of several private engineering colleges that would have a quota system for admissions, similar to the one for caste groups. However, in addition to setting up quotas for groups defined as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), 40 percent of all admissions were to be reserved for NRIs. As a result of much agitation and protest, this was reduced to five percent. The stark contrast between a caste reservation category like SC–ST and that of the more affluent NRI points to the increasing demand made on the state by social groups defined by their ability to consume. In a very palpable way, the private consumer was making a claim on the public. An anti-politics that is redefining educational institutions as spaces of civic virtue in place of public politics is increasingly asserted through a language of freedom tied to the market. As with the attempt to ban bandhs on the basis of right to "consume" public places such as roads, the college becomes a space for a contestation between civic and political conceptions of citizenship that are being transformed through discourses of consumption.

How the politics of anti-politics emerges in the college can be seen in the attempt by some students to create a debating society, something the college had never had before. On one of those days when a strike had been called and most of the students who had shown up for the day had left, I met Sujit outside the compound wall where he told me with excitement to come to a meeting later that day. It was to be held at a parallel college located in a one-room shack under a tree at the next junction. When I asked him what the meeting was about, he said they were going to try and start a new student organization, the Association for Open Discussion, to debate the issues of the day. The meeting was attended by about 30 students, five of whom were women. Sujit spoke first. His talk rehearsed the usual litanies about student politics and how it had corrupted education. Rashtriyam prevented students from learning, from getting jobs, and from "doing service" to the country. Echoing the anti-bandh politics, he argued that rashtriyam was

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not about serving the people, it was about personal gain and private careers. The purpose of the debating society was to talk about society but to do so in a way that was "not rashtriyam." He went on to say that the act of debating was explicitly not politics because in a debating society two opponents argue about an issue and one may win or lose a debate but the issue is never decided. What is judged is the language. In a debating society, one did not have politicians *(rashtriyakar)* but orators *(wagamar),* men of flowing words; one would just have a continuous stream of language. He went on to say that rashtriyam began when a right and a wrong had been established. In a debate, there was no right and wrong, there was no conclusion, and therefore it would not be explicitly political.

Here, politics is closure, the end of talk, the stating of conclusions. An anti-politics discourse deploys words and their never-ending flow against this closure. This kind of "free talk" did not happen within the space of the college. In fact, Sujit stated that they must not hold the meeting in one of the empty college classrooms. This must be something outside—in that "parallel" space, that space of consumption, outside the political public. Sujit's notion of "free talk" is located within a notion of a civic public forged by middle-class norms of talk anchored in a bourgeois form of masculinity struggling to articulate itself against a politics rooted in a more unruly form. It relies on a kind of proceduralism, focusing on and valorizing the process of the production of talk itself, rather than the actions that might derive from a process of talk. The latter is understood to be rashtriyam, a logic of means and ends based on firm convictions and conclusions.

The discourse of anti-politics that underlies this student's attempt to create a debating society in the college echoes the discourse of anti-politics about creating a garden in the college. The latter, I argued, was an attempt to instantiate a Nehruvian conception of a productive citizen in the face of what is seen to be a "hyper-politicization" of the college. However, this Nehruvian conception of citizenship is now linked with discourses of consumption, in which free talk articulates with the freedom to consume. This is a shift from an understanding of citizenship as building the nation to one in which one ought to be free to consume the nation.

Conclusion

> The legitimacy of power is based on the people, but the image of popular sovereignty is linked to the image of an empty place, impossible to occupy, such that those who exercise public authority can never claim to appropriate it.
>
> —Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*

Claude Lefort's (1988) "image of an empty place" is his attempt to capture an indeterminacy at the heart of the social logic of democracy. His formulation is an attempt to link "the people" as a politically constituted community to the image of a place. However, just as "the people" can never be understood outside its political constitution, neither can "place." Central to the political constitution

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of the "empty place" of democracy is a spatial distinction between private and public. The struggle about what constitutes politics happens through a struggle over literal places and their conceptual understandings. As such, I have traced the ways in which understandings of places as public or private, for example a street or the gardens of a college, become the grounds on which official politics is contested.

Mapped on to the spatial distinctions between public and private are discourses that pit the realm of the private as the market—specifically as a space of exchange and consumption—against public politics (rashtriyam). I have explored the ways in which consumption straddles this opposition between public and private and how the realm of the political becomes reconfigured in this nexus. Needless to say, the realm of politics is articulated in and through a dichotomized understanding of public and private that renders not only the market but also women as private. The reconfiguration of politics depends on an already existing understanding of the public as an ambivalently gendered space in Kerala. Caste, class, and gendered notions of a "demure" femininity have included women in public spaces of work and education, what one might call the "civic public," while excluding them from full participation in an expressly "political public."

In discussing the trajectory of civil and political society, Chatterjee suggests that, in this latest phase of globalization, an opposition between the two might be emerging (2000:47). I have explored an instance of such an opposition, within an already constituted notion of a modern public, lived through various forms of masculine sociality and mobility. This has entailed examining discourses of politics and the anti-politics that confront it within debates about privatization. In this latest phase of globalization, the opposition between a civic public and a political public is being reconstituted in and through the deployment of discourses of consumption.

The freedom to move through public spaces, as in the anti-bandh demonstrations, and the freedom to consume public goods, such as education—a kind of freedom that I have linked to the freedom of choice in consumption—confront the official political domain at its limits within this discourse of anti-politics that underlies privatization efforts. This freedom to consume public space grounded in a middle-class masculinity that is respectable, orderly, and disciplined confronts another masculinity that is equally orderly and disciplined if not quite respectable. The empty college emerges out of struggles over the meanings and functions of the public in and through practices of democratic citizenship in educational settings.

In this way, I have sought to explore how the consumption that constitutes "everyday life" is saturated by discourses of consumption as an index of the new global order and, therefore, must be situated within the distinct cultural and ideological fields through which they navigate. Within postcolonial Kerala, these consumption discourses intersect with narratives and practices of public politics that emerged out of the colonial period and were consolidated in the postcolonial era. This analysis pays as much attention to the production of discourses about consumption and politics as it has to the fact of their everyday realities, linking

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the two in ways that track how globalizing discourses of consumption and politics intersect in particular cultural and ideological fields.

Notes

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1. The literature on development in Kerala and its status as a “model” is vast and varied. For discussions of the specificity of Kerala’s development experience see Chasin and Franke 1992, George 1993, Jeffrey 1993, and Oommen 1993. Parayil (2000) provides a more recent overview, while Isaac and Franke (2002) discuss recent efforts in Kerala to decentralize the development experience. For a critical assessment of the scholarly literature on Kerala’s development experience, see Tharamangalam 1998 and ensuing responses by Franke and Chasin (1998), among others. For an assessment of Kerala’s development experience within a wider discussion of development, see Sen 1999.

2. The literature on the “public sphere” has received renewed attention through critical engagements with Habermas (1989), in which he lays out the conditions for the constitution of a liberal bourgeois public sphere, a normative ideal that he argues was historically constituted in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe. Historians have challenged his emphasis on rational critical debate as the defining quality of discourse in democratic public spheres, suggesting it more as an ideal than a reality (Calhoun 1992; Eley 1992; Ryan 1992). Feminists have explored the issue of participation, examining the conditions of exclusion within liberal public spheres and the politics this has generated (Benhabib 1992; Fraser 1992). Scholars have also examined the nature of the public and public space in non-Western contexts (Appadurai 1996; Breckenridge 1995; Chakrabarty 2000; Chatterjee 2000; Kaviraj 1997). Drawing on this work, this article examines the explicit discourses and practices of publicness to understand the reconfiguration of politics in the era of globalization, arguing that issues of the nature and quality of public life are linked to questions of inclusion and exclusion. Emergent literature on modern education and schooling has highlighted the importance of such sites for the constitution of citizens in the public spheres of modern nation-states (Foucault 1977; Hall 2002; Levinson 2001; Levinson et al. 1996; Luykx 1999; Mitchell 1991; Stambach 2000). In particular, Mitchell (1991) and Foucault (1977) focus on the school as a technology of modern governance that sought to create autonomous, responsible, citizen–subjects. This article is interested in the contradictions and tensions within such a normative project, as it intersects with postcolonial histories and practices of citizenship. Ethnographies of education have pointed to the everyday contexts of educational spaces, their determination by larger-level discursive practices of citizenship, and the contradictions they engender (Hall 2002; Levinson 2001; Luykx, 1999; Stambach 2000). Drawing on this literature, I focus on the everyday practices of publicness and their circulating discourses as they weave in and out of the site of a Keralan college, focusing on the tensions between a civic and political conception of citizenship in the college.

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3. By denoting the market as *private,* I do not mean to suggest that the market does not function within the public realm or that the state does not function within the "private" realm. My intent is to track the discursive construction of the market as "private" that confronts the "public" of the state within privatization discourses.

4. The public–private binary has received sustained attention and scrutiny within feminist scholarship. Although early work saw the binary as the foundation of a universal gendered social organization, for example in the work of Michelle Rosaldo (1974), more contemporary understandings seek to understand its historical and cultural specificities in relationship to capitalism, colonialism, and nationalism (e.g., Sangari and Vaid 1989). For an overview of recent feminist work on the public–private binary in the West, see Landes 1998. Drawing on this scholarship, I am less interested in substantive definitions of what constitutes public and private and more interested in tracking their invocations and deployments within contemporary discourses of politics and citizenship in the context of neoliberal reforms.

5. For Chatterjee (2004), the distinction between "civil society" and "political society" is a way of apprehending forms of contemporary politics on the part of subaltern populations who are enmeshed in the workings of the postcolonial state, understood in Foucauldian terms, as a process of the governmentalization of populations. This distinction displaces that of the dualism between "tradition" and "modernity" in that, rather than seeing the politics of subaltern groups as inadequately modern or traditional, he argues that we begin to understand subaltern politics in contemporary postcolonial societies as thoroughly modern while not conforming to the notions of modernity encompassed by Western bourgeois forms of civic associational behavior. Although Chatterjee emphasizes political society as something outside that of civil society, I am interested in the mutual entanglements and confrontations between elite and nonelite conceptions of democracy within a self-conscious public political field defined by parliamentary democracy within Kerala. Further, given my emphasis on the constitution of public politics in Kerala, I see the gendered nature of this public as underwriting the confrontation between the civic and the political. Chatterjee mentions gender as "the darker side of political society," and on matters related to gender, he states, "one can discern the inescapable conflict between the enlightened desires of civil society and the messy, contentious, and often unpalatable concerns of political society" (2004:77). This seems to conflate mobilizations based on gender with that of civil society rather than political society in ways that are left unexamined. I see the gendering of the civic and the political to be differential yet nonetheless related.

6. This has led to significant overlap—if not identity—between what one might call the anthropology of globalization and the anthropology of consumption, although clearly, they are not reducible to each other (Appadurai 1988, 1996; Liechty 2003). In this sense, it is argued that consumption is a privileged site for the study of globalization.

7. As Judith Butler states, the very act of delimiting the boundaries of a political field is a political act, and tracking contestations over what is political and what is not is a revealing moment for examining questions of citizenship and belonging (1992). More recently, Appadurai (2002) and Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) focus attention on the ways in which explicit political discourses of democracy and civil society operate within everyday contexts and in popular discourses.

8. I borrow *anti-politics* from Ferguson (1994). However, the sense in which I use it here is somewhat different. Ferguson argues that development produces anti-politics, a depoliticization that masks its own very instrumental operations—namely the bureaucratization and expansion of state power—by turning poverty into a technical problem in Lesotho. The "politics" that Ferguson marks as being "depoliticized" is rendered self-evidently as the workings of political parties. In this way, what constitutes "politics" is naturalized. My

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analysis uses the language of "politics" and "anti-politics" to examine a self-consciously produced political field within Kerala so as to understand its limits and possibilities.

9. Kaviraj (1997) discusses what he calls the "plebianization of the public" in Calcutta. He tracks the changing valences of public space in the city, marking the ways in which parks, for example, shift from being understood as middle-class spaces to plebian ones.

10. *Satyagraha,* meaning nonviolent struggle, was a key weapon in the evolving language and practice of Gandhian forms of protest. *Jathas, bandhs, hartals,* and *satyagrahas* became the language of nationalist politics, with the Vaikom Satyagraha being an important early example.

11. The uniqueness of unapproachability within the caste structure of the region has often been noted. See Dumont 1970.

12. This form of protest, with its regimented marching, slogans (usually, "Inquilab Zindabad") and the raised, clenched fist, entered the representational repertoire in the narrative of Kerala's modernity and in cultural productions such as plays, songs, and posters, all of which were crucial to the history of politics and social transformation. Especially in plays, the break with the feudal, caste-ridden past and the entry into revolutionary consciousness was usually represented by a lower-caste Pulayan or Peruma caste member standing before an upper-caste Nayar or Nambudiri brahmin landlord, 10, 20, or 30 paces away, one hand over his mouth, the other across his chest, in a pose of servility and supplication. That same man then proceeds to march right up to a landlord's house, shouting slogans, fist clenched in the air (Zarrilli 1996:xii).

13. High rates of male and female literacy, a widespread system of school education, high rates of female participation at every level of education, and one of the least expensive systems of higher education in India are key to the "Kerala Model of Development." The model, however, is contradictory. The success of primary and secondary education has greatly increased a demand for higher education during the last 25 years that the state has not been successful in meeting. Further, and this is a contradiction within the more general "Kerala Model," the labor market of the state has not been able to absorb the vast numbers of graduates of this system. Chronic and high unemployment of the educated is a persistent and central feature of the Kerala economy (Mathew 1997).

14. In this article, I move easily between *youth* and *student,* although, of course, there is no necessary link between the two. Within Kerala, there are also political organizations such as the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) that primarily caters to young men in their twenties and early thirties outside the educational system. However, given the educational history of Kerala, the relationship between "youth" and "student" is clear and strong.

15. For a discussion of the semiotics of *khadi,* see Cohn (1996) and Tarlo (1996).

16. "Youth" as a category of political and social agency is very much underwritten by a family romance, crucially tied to the idea of a revolutionary or revolutionizing young man. As Zarrilli (1995) and others have argued, plays were central to the spread of the left movement in Kerala, perhaps the most important one being *You Made Me a Communist* by Tooppil Bhaasi. First staged in 1952 by the Kerala People's Arts Club, which was founded by a group of student activists intent on raising popular awareness of sociopolitical issues such as land reform and caste inequality, the play has been staged more than 2,000 times since and continues to be staged today. During the 1950s, it is estimated that it was regularly staged four times a day. Although actors play the characters today, in the 1950s it was activists, many of them students, who played the various roles. In 1957, when the first freely elected communist government came to power in Kerala, many attributed the victory of that election to this play. Like many plays of its kind, this one involved a transformation of consciousness on the part of a character. The central character in this play is Paramu Pillai who is "made a Communist." He is an older man of a declining dominant Nayar family whose son Gopalan

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is already a communist. Various struggles over land and the dishonoring of an untouchable girl form the plot of the long play. Another aspect of the play is the romance between Gopalan, the dedicated communist, and Sumam, the daughter of the capitalist landlord who comes to see the evils of capitalism while falling in love. By the end, Paramu Pillai asks to join the party. The play ends with him raising the red flag as the slogan-shouting youth march against another injustice. The lower-caste female character is understood through her sexuality, which the communist youths protect from dishonor by a capitalist landlord. The upper-caste daughter of the capitalist landlord escapes her oppression (her father tries to marry her off) through romance with the young communist. And the elderly upper-caste man is made to see the error of his ways by the dedicated work of the communist youth. In all cases, the youthful agency at work here is a revolutionary or revolutionizing young man. Often, this young man is an upper-caste male—either a decadent young man who gets politicized, as in another of Bhaasi's plays entitled *Prodigal Son,* or an already politicized upper-caste youth showing his elders the error of their feudal ways. If the young man is not upper caste, the narrative presents a lower-caste young man who moves from being servile and humble to being aggressive, disciplined, and militant. The family romance that structures this narration of the emergence of a political public demonstrates both a politics of youth and the youthfulness of politics.

17. This is not to say that civic conceptions of the public did not exist during the colonial period and during and within the nationalist movement. Quite to the contrary, the origins of these conceptions are to be found in colonial and nationalist conceptions of civil society. I am looking at the articulation of this historically constituted conception with newer, circulating discourses of consumption within neoliberal regimes.

18. I do not want to imply here that all mobilizations of consumer discourses erase "politics." Consumer identities have been mobilized to insert a language of politics into conceptions of citizenship. In the United States, the antisweatshop movement mobilizes consumer identities in antiglobalization politics. In India, movements against the raising of prices of essential goods have also mobilized consumer identities. Most importantly, the Swadeshi Movement—the economic boycott of foreign goods in favor of domestically produced goods—politicized the consumption of commodities in the name of anticolonial nationalist politics in India. For a discussion of the changed ideological meanings given to consumption in the Swadeshi and contemporary period, see Deshpande (1993). During the 1990s in Kerala, consumer forums and magazines emerged to help consumers navigate the increasing influx of goods in the marketplace. Interestingly, they quickly became spaces to seek solutions to the difficulties of dealing with state services, such as getting telephone service and paying an electricity bill. Increasingly, these organizations began to take on the state, for example in the anti-bandh movement described above, through joining with civic organizations.

19. The gender-neutral, universalist language of citizenship, politics, democracy, and rights belies its masculinist character whenever the universal is equated with the masculine. For a discussion of the ambiguous deployment of rights discourse within the Kerala context, see Arunima 1995, 2003.

20. As I have indicated, the political culture of the state is dominated by the opposition between the center–right Congress party and left parties, the most dominant one being the CPI-(M). The most important student parties are the SFI, the student wing of the CPI-(M); KSU, the student wing of the Congress Party; and the increasingly prominent Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), a separate student party with strong ties to the Hindu fundamentalist and nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

21. The literature on masculinity has been helpful in shifting the study of gender beyond that of women and femininity to processes of gender that structure gender relations.

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Within the South Asian context, the work of Jeganathan (1997, 2000) and Dareshwar and Niranjana (1996) focus on nonelite forms and practices of masculinity that underwrite the political. For a discussion of different styles of masculinity in the context of migration and the cash economy in Kerala, see Osella and Osella 2000a.

22. *Oudhukam* is the term I gloss as *demure,* literally meaning "closed" or "contained." Elsewhere, I situate a discussion of this type of embodied femininity within the cultural history of the emergence of the "New Indian Woman," an embodiment of a modern yet Indian femininity: virtuous, chaste, and of upper caste and class. (Alwis 1998; Chatterjee 1990; Lukose n.d.; Sangari and Vaid 1989).

23. In 2003, the Kerala High Court, in the case of *Sojan Francis vs. M. G. University,* ruled against a 19-year-old college student who was barred by his principal from taking a college exam because he did not have the requisite attendance record. The college, in central Kerala, was unusual because the principal had banned strikes, meetings, and demonstrations within campus walls unless those meetings were recognized by the college administration as "official." The student had argued that this ban violated his constitutional rights and that he was targeted by the principal because of his participation in the SFI. More than upholding the decision of the principal, the ruling was widely discussed for its lengthy deliberation of the constitutionality of barring politics from college campuses. In addition to citing other court judgments that discussed the obstruction to learning and proper functioning of institutions by the presence of politics, the court likened students to government employees who are banned from political activism in their places of work (*Hindu* 2003b).

24. Osella and Osella (2000a) discuss this style of masculinity, among others.

25. For an assessment of the "crisis in higher education" and the role of politics in institutions of higher education in India, see Béteille 1995.

26. Private colleges have grown to include those of the Nayar Service Society (NSS), The Sree Narayana Trust (of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana [SNDP] Yogam), and the Muslim Educational Society, among others. Along with this private sector of higher educational institutions, there are four public universities to which most private colleges are affiliated.

27. This is the largest caste in Kerala. For a recent discussion of the experience of social mobility of this formerly untouchable caste, see Osella and Osella 2000b. For a discussion of the politics of the anticaste movement, see Isaac and Tharakan 1985.

28. These constituencies include caste organizations, the most important ones being the Nayar Service Society (NSS), representing the dominant Nayar caste, and the Sree Narayana Trust (of the SNDP Yogam), representing the formerly untouchable Izhaya caste. Other important constituencies include religious organizations representing various Christian denominations and the Muslim Educational Society, among others.

29. Although the state has allowed the number of formal educational institutions to expand dramatically in the last 40 years, it has clearly not been enough. Private registrants make up as much as 40 percent of the total student enrollment in regular colleges (Mathew 1991).

30. The lack of economic development within Kerala coupled with high rates of emigration, escalating in the 1970s to the Persian Gulf, has turned Kerala into a remittance economy in important respects. This traffic of people and money, in addition to intersecting global flows of goods and images, has produced a situation in which the state is heavily dependent on the global economy.

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ABSTRACT *Globalization is often indexed by the rise of a consumerist ethos and the expansion of the market economy at the expense of state-centric formulations of politics and citizenship. This article explores the politics and practices of gendered democratic citizenship in an educational setting when that setting is newly reconfigured as a commodity under neoliberal privatization efforts. This entails an attention to discourses of consumption as they intersect postcolonial cultural-ideological political fields. Focusing on the contemporary trajectory among politicized male college students of a historically important masculinist "political public" in Kerala, India, the article tracks an explicit discourse of "politics"* (rashtriyam). *This enables an exploration of a struggle over the meaning of democratic citizenship that opposes a political public rooted in a tradition of anticolonial struggle and postcolonial nationalist politics to that of a "civic public," rooted in ideas about the freedom to consume through the logic of privatization.* [politics, consumption, education, neoliberalism, India]

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