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Muslim entrepreneurs in public life between India and the Gulf: making good and doing good

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Muslim entrepreneurs from Kerala, South India, are at the forefront of India's liberalizing economy, keen innovators who have adopted the business and labour practices of global capitalism in both Kerala and the Gulf. They are also heavily involved in both charity and politics through activity in Kerala's Muslim public life. They talk about their 'social mindedness' as a combination of piety and economic calculation, the two seen not as excluding but reinforcing each other. By promoting modern education among Muslims, entrepreneurs seek to promote economic development while also embedding economic practices within a framework of ethics and moral responsibilities deemed to be 'Islamic'. Inscribing business into the rhetoric of the 'common good' also legitimizes claims to leadership and political influence. Orientations towards self-transformation through education, adoption of a 'systematic' lifestyle, and a generalized rationalization of practices have acquired wider currency amongst Muslims following the rise of reformist influence and are now mobilized to sustain novel forms of capital accumulation. At the same time, Islam is called upon to set moral and ethical boundaries for engagement with the neoliberal economy. Instrumentalist analyses cannot adequately explain the vast amounts of time and money which Muslim entrepreneurs put into innumerable 'social' projects, and neither 'political Islam' nor public pietism adequately captures the possibilities or motivations for engagement among contemporary reformist-orientated Muslims.

While historians have written extensively about the participation of elites in processes of social and religious reform in late colonial India (see, e.g., Gupta 2002; Joshi 2001; Robinson 1993 [1974]; Walsh 2004; cf. Sharma 2001), the role of contemporary elites has been largely neglected (Fuller & Narasimhan 2007; 2008; Harriss 2003 are exceptions).¹ Meanwhile, analyses of contemporary Muslim politics focus on phenomena such as 'political Islam' (e.g. Eickelman & Piscatori 1996; Roy 1996), private/public piety (e.g. Deeb 2006; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005), or Muslim 'public spheres' (e.g. Salvatore & Eickelman 2003; Salvatore & LeVine 2005), with little attention paid to articulations between politico-religious orientations and economic practice in the production of contemporary Muslim subjectivities (exceptions are Hefner 1998; Rudnyckj 2009; this volume; Sloane 1999; Soares 2005).

We are engaged in exploring relationships between Islamic reformism and contemporary forms of capital accumulation in Kerala, at India's southwestern coast. We

discuss ways in which reformist Islam is invoked to encourage participation in practices named in current literature as ‘neoliberal’, global capitalism. At the same time, we suggest that the economic environment constitutes the ground against which contemporary reformist religious discourse seeking to transform Muslim selves is articulated, discussed, taken up, or contested.

A small group of very wealthy male entrepreneurs’ lives are intertwined through friendships, business interests, marriage links, and high-profile public involvement with Muslim community life. They stand at the forefront of India’s post-liberalization economy – sharp innovators who have adopted the business and labour practices of global capitalism in both Kerala and the Gulf.² Embodying the dream of success, these entrepreneurs are recognized as ‘community leaders’. Self-avowedly concerned with the ‘*upliftment*’ of Kerala’s Muslim community, they are involved in community associations, orphanages, schools, trade organizations, and everyday politics. Their orientation towards ‘reform’ is intimately enmeshed, on the one hand, with an effort to produce a ‘Muslim modernity’ (where the main referents are the Gulf and, more recently, Malaysia and Indonesia), and, on the other, with business interests. In Kerala, education remains the yardstick by which *progress* is measured and imagined.³ Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery (2008) remind us that ‘education’ in India is an over-determined marker of ‘development’. It is by cultivating themselves as enlightened educationalists and by promoting ‘modern education’ that contemporary entrepreneurs inscribe their specific business interests and practices into rhetorics of the ‘common good’, eventually legitimizing wider claims to leadership.

The role of Kerala’s elites in reform is neither unusual nor recent (F. Osella & C. Osella 2000). Among Muslims (as in other communities), early twentieth-century orientations towards socio-religious reform, modernization, and ‘progress’ found support especially amongst the educated property-owning classes, who become drawn towards a growing reformist ‘*ulama*’ (religious scholars) (Abdul Haque 1982; Miller 1992 [1976]; F. Osella & C. Osella 2008; Samad 1998; Sikand 2005). Similarly to Lebanese Shi‘is (Deeb 2006), Kerala’s turn-of-the century middle-class Muslims made themselves ‘modern’ through a generalized distancing from ‘tradition’, be that social, economic or religious. Reformists’ success undoubtedly comes down to their ability to join forces with the wider modernizing middle class on a platform of socio-religious reforms, producing a confluence of orientations towards ‘community progress’ which coalesce around a perceived fundamental need for ‘modern education’ – with considerable slippage between ideas of ‘education’ as reformism, modernized morality, technocratic qualifications, and civilizing process. Kerala reformism produces itself on the ground both through practice and through dialogue with significant others, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, giving it a particularly ‘progressive’ flavour (see F. Osella & C. Osella 2008; Sikand 2005). While reformists⁴ have only 10 per cent of Kerala’s Muslim population formally affiliated as followers, they – especially Kerala’s Naduvathul Mujahideen (KNM) – have set the wider agenda. Nowadays all Kerala Muslims support moderate reform – from education, business, and employment, to family life and everyday sociality: for the sake of community ‘progress’; to compete with Kerala Hindus and Christians; to be self-reliant in the face of a state dominated by or host to unsympathetic Hindu revivalist parties (F. Osella & C. Osella 2008).

Coming to prominence in the wake of post-1970s Gulf migration and post-1991 economic liberalization, the entrepreneurs we discuss are committed to a ‘moderate’

modernizing Islam which is neither over-critical of 'traditionalism' nor openly supportive of (organized) Islamic reformism. Their keen promotion of community development projects and their very public participation in charitable activities brings to mind the early twentieth-century shift from religious gift-giving to modern forms of charity which underscored North Indian entrepreneurs' successful participation in the colonial economy (Bayly 1983; Haynes 1987; Palsetia 2005). In South India, religious endowments and gift-giving are a time-honoured means for the production and reproduction of status and political leadership (see, e.g., De Neve 2000; Mines 1994; Mosse 2003; F. Osella & C. Osella 2000: 200ff.; Price 1996; Rudner 1987). While in the name of 'Muslim unity' they show allegiance to the Muslim League⁵ – with which they maintain relationships of reciprocal patronage – they are seldom interested in political office. This caution could be read as the pragmatism of traders and entrepreneurs who hedge their bets in order to forward business regardless of political circumstances. One might also argue that public-sphere activity is anyway essential for entrepreneurs, who need to garner goodwill among both the wider community and politicians.

Indeed, accusations of self-interested instrumentalism – of using charity as a means of enhancing prestige, extending patronage, and eventually forwarding economic interests – are routinely made by detractors in response to these men's public interventions. Emerging from the aesthetics of cynicism popularly deployed in Kerala to scrutinize the morality of participants in public life (see C. Osella & F. Osella 2000: 154ff.; cf. Waggoner 2005), such accusations cannot be simply dismissed as malicious gossip. But it is also apparent that these men are not merely hard-nosed profiteers callously exploiting popular religiosity for their own ends. Many Kerala observers consider entrepreneurs' involvement in community development as expressions of genuine piety arising from dual concerns over the fate of fellow Muslims and their own afterlife. Entrepreneurs themselves talk about their 'social mindedness' as a combination of piety and economic calculation, in their minds the two clearly not excluding, but actually reinforcing, each other. After all, they often reminded us, how could one help the poor and needy – or the community as a whole – without money?

These entrepreneurs strive to live moral lives, beyond simple observance of religious obligations: as wealthy Muslims, they do feel responsible to the community as a whole and they are committed to its progress. Their preoccupations with making and using money in a 'correctly Islamic way', and their interest in how to shift their entire community away from practices or lifestyles considered 'backward' and towards modern (conscious) Islam, bring these Muslim businessmen close to the Malay entrepreneurs discussed by Sloane (1999).⁶ Writing about Malaysia, Sloane (1999) notes that when it comes to questions of business ethics and spending, Malaysian entrepreneurs frame their activities within an Islamic framework concerned with morality, with making money ethically, and with helping everyone to benefit. Sloane argues that networks of information and mutual help, the continual search for synergy and 'win-win' situations, and the wise use of profit in socially responsible ways, all mark out Malay business style. At the same time, Rudnyckyj (2009; this volume) discusses, via a notion of 'spiritual economies', ways in which Islamic ethics have become part of management practices in an Indonesian steel plant. These ethnographies are deeply resonant here: entrepreneurship – combining material success with moral connectedness – is coming to be seen as the exemplary contemporary way of being a modern, moral, Muslim.

One might cynically argue that, since Muslims are bounden to give *zakat*, the donations of the rich to worthy causes are no cause for comment, being simply within the bounds of mere obligation (Kuran 2006: 19ff., 41ff.; Tripp 2006: 24ff; cf. Kozlowski 1985; A. Singer 2005). But instrumentalist arguments cannot adequately explain the amount of time and money which Muslim entrepreneurs put into innumerable 'social' projects, nor would they account for why actual and considerably energetic public activity rather than mere donation is adopted (for a critique of instrumentalist analysis, see Deeb this volume; Metcalf 1976; Robinson 1993 [1974]). But we are also dissatisfied with recent studies which, we feel, suggest a uniqueness to Muslim religious-moral experience, thereby at once exceptionalizing Islam among religions, and also setting organized pietism as a uniquely 'Muslim' way – perhaps the only Muslim way – to be modern (e.g. Deeb 2006; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). We prefer to explore the lived complexity and multi-layered forms of political engagement within contemporary Muslim communities, a framework which better allows for appreciation of contradictions and plurality of interests, glossed over or dismissed as insignificant in many accounts of contemporary pietism, where coherence of subject and action are privileged (see Bayat 2007; Marsden 2005; this volume; Schielke this volume).

As in Sloane's and Rudnyckj's cases, Kerala Muslim entrepreneurs seek ways of framing their business practices within frameworks of ethics and moral responsibilities deemed to be Islamic, and they are also committed towards re-orientating local Muslim subjectivities and practices towards the requirements of contemporary capitalism. Promotion of wholesale self-transformation through education, rationalization of practices, and goal-orientated planning in daily life (expressed locally in notions of 'systematic life') – all of which is acquiring wider currency with reformism – is mobilized to sustain novel forms of capital(ist) accumulation. This apparent appropriation of religious values for economic ends is possible, we argue, because the 'morality of political economy' and the 'political economy of morality' – to use Marx's words (Marx 1964: 173) – here neither denote competing socio-cultural orientations towards economic practice (see, e.g., Scott 1976; Gudeman & Rivera 1990), nor do they stand for different forms of reproduction pitting individual and societal interests against each other (e.g. Bloch & Parry 1989). On the contrary, attempts to harness the possibilities offered by the colonial and post-colonial economy and to master the dispositions underpinning a successful engagement with capitalism have been constitutive of projects of self-fashioning cultivated by Kerala Islamic reformism since the early twentieth century (F. Osella & C. Osella 2008; cf. Rudnyckj 2009; this volume; Tripp 2006). Economic success via business, entrepreneurship, or professions – made possible by the adoption of a 'systematic' orientation – underpins community-wide projects of self-transformation and takes on the connotation of a virtuous act which produces and expresses a sense of the self as a '*proper*' Muslim – in Islamic reformists' terms (cf. Bornstein 2005; Coleman 2000; Gifford 2004 on relations between economic practice and evangelical Christianity; see also Laidlaw 1995). We argue, then, for a convergence between differently grounded processes of subjectification, produced within neoliberal capitalism and Kerala Islamic reformism, respectively, thence underscored and articulated by a shared preoccupation with 'education' as the privileged site for the production of modern *and* Islamic subjects. And it is because of this convergence that the businessmen we discuss – perceived as embodiments of Muslims' dual goal of economic success and piety – are then

expected to provide leadership to the community and can then legitimately attempt to translate their economic clout into claims to political authority.

Muslim entrepreneurs

We meet PV in Nilambur, a small hill town in north Kerala famous for colonial teak plantations. He left here as a young man in the 1970s to seek his fortune in the Gulf and from modest beginnings built up a thriving business empire in the United Arab Emirates, including a major company providing maintenance and supply of tools for the oil industry, warehousing and shipping, franchises of Euro-American industrial vehicles, and so on. Unlike many Malayali Gulf entrepreneurs, PV has never been shy of investing in Kerala, famous – or notorious – for buying loss-making companies and restructuring them into competitive businesses. His money and clout were also crucial for the construction of Kozhikode's airport.

PV enjoys a reputation as a 'people's man': he has brought hundreds of people to the Gulf and is always ready 'to help out'. When we arrive for our meeting, we find a crowd of people, and as we walk together, PV stops to listen to the pleas of two elderly women – one Hindu and one Muslim – to whom he readily gives Rs 500 (around £8.50) each, two crisp notes taken from a fat wallet. When one woman keeps following him, PV soon gets annoyed. 'You had 500 rupees', he hisses to her. 'What else do you want?'

Sitting behind the director's desk of the private residential school – which he has built along the lines of the famous British-style private schools of colonial 'hill stations' – PV is not shy to talk about his 'humble origins'. His is an exceptional 'rags-to-riches' tale, known to all Malabar Muslims and part of Kerala's Gulf migration mythology. His story exemplifies the resilience and entrepreneurship of Malabar's Muslims, who, in the span of thirty years, have reversed their economic fortunes through Gulf migration. It also evokes rhetorics of brotherhood and mutual help deemed to be central to Islam and characteristic of Muslims: PV benefited from the trust and goodwill of Arab Gulf Muslims; in turn he actively helps his Muslim brethren in Kerala. Admirers say that PV's philanthropic orientation springs from his modest origins, which enable him to empathize with 'the problems of ordinary people'.

Fidgeting with his not-so-ordinary platinum diamond-encrusted wristwatch, PV recounts, 'I grew up [financially] with the growth of Dubai, and Dubai also grew up with me. I was only a shop assistant in a clothes shop here in Nilambur; my family had only eight *cents* of land and a small house'. For six months in Dubai in 1974, he tells us, he stayed in one of his uncle's houses, with no job. PV had eight people to support back home and his uncle lent money to send as a remittance. When his uncle started his own company, dealing in spares and tools, PV joined him. In 1981, his uncle retired, leaving PV all the assets on condition that PV 'would not ruin the reputation the company had built, nor ruin his [uncle's] reputation' and that uncle would not be liable for any debt made by PV. PV agreed. 'And, by the grace of God, things went very, very well'. He now employs around 5,000 people.

Like many others, PV argues that Kerala Muslims 'have remained backward' because of their lack of education. 'Muslims suffered because of the British?',⁷ he tells us.

So they began to hate the British and everything that the British brought, including education, English language, etc. So they opted out from the mainstream and did not benefit from British education. But nowadays, Muslims know that opting out is not possible and therefore they will not boycott Bush and American products. In the last fifty years, there has been a real Muslim renaissance under a very good

leadership and Muslims are almost equal to other communities, especially with regard to education. For example, this year [2003], out of fifteen Malayalis who passed the civil service examination, five were Muslims. This is the first time that this has happened, and it shows that Muslims have understood that they must take on prominent position in politics, government, administration, and professions.

The fact that PV chooses to be interviewed from the grounds of his school is highly significant. He established this private residential school to cater for the children of middle-class Muslim Malayali Gulf migrants. PV's involvement in education does not stop in Kerala: his group of companies also runs two 'international schools' for Indian migrants in Saudi Arabia (Jeddah and Riyadh). PV stresses the role of education in the *upliftment* (English term used) of the community and argues for a long-term relationship between Muslims and education – in its widest sense – via historical trade links: 'Muslims brought prosperity, technology, education and culture to Kerala. When Arabs first came to Kerala, Malayalis did not even know how to wear clothes'. Yet he is also keen to stress that education itself might not be enough to bring economic development, for education might be a double-edged sword.

The problem [for the development of Kerala] is the attitude of Malayalis. Because they are educated, they think that they know best, that any one of them should be prime minister. This is good, in that Malayalis think with their own heads and cannot be easily manipulated, but it is bad for business: you can't make them work! Then, those who have no job are not destitute because they can always rely on income from relatives in the Gulf. This means that Malayalis are never desperate enough to take any job at any salary.

PV highlights the entrepreneurial spirit of Muslims against this generalized malaise of Malayali society: 'Prosperity came to Kerala via trade and business, which Muslims dominated', PV argued:

Muslims do not put money away nor enjoy interest – it is *haram* (forbidden) ... If things go well today, you cannot be sure about tomorrow. You live and enjoy day by day at God's will ... So, we have a culture of investment and risk-taking. Malayali Muslims are, for example, the main smugglers in Kerala: this is an example of people prepared to take very, very high risks. Because of this risk-taking culture, they are number one in business.

But Muslims' entrepreneurial ethic is tempered by a strong 'community orientation'. PV reminds us, 'A Muslim cannot enjoy his wealth and life if people around him are suffering. A Muslim should help needy neighbours, that is why we give *zakat* (mandatory alms) and *sadaqah* (voluntary alms)'. As seen, PV is famed for being always ready 'to help out' and is involved in countless charities and social projects directed towards the 'Wellbeing of all Muslims'. Alongside the private school he opened in 1992 – with hefty annual fees of Rs 60,000 – he has also started an English medium *day school* (English term used) recruiting only local students, paying just Rs 375 per year. PV notes, 'Many come for free – this school is for the benefit of the whole community'.

To his many detractors, especially the established trading middle class, which chides him for having 'more money than sense', PV's success is attributed solely to political connections – in Kerala and the Gulf alike – and shrewd practices rather than genuine business expertise. PV's philanthropic activities are criticized as the self-advertising stunts of a parvenu. Critics mention that when a committee for the construction of Kozhikode airport was formed, businessmen were asked to donate up to Rs 50,000 for

the campaign, but PV gave one million without batting an eyelid, simply because he wanted an airport near his house to impress Arab business partners. It is PV who is said to have started the fashion of giving large donations to mosques and Muslim organizations, a practice which has increased his popularity within the community and most lately gained him a nomination to the Rajah Sabha as a Muslim League MP.

Our next entrepreneur, MK, is managing director of an Abu Dhabi-based group most famous for its department stores and hypermarkets across the Gulf. Employing more than 10,000 people worldwide, this company has set up production and export units in East Africa, China, and Southeast Asia to supply the retail business, which is predominantly directed towards the Gulf's lower middle classes (especially Indian migrants). Unlike PV, MK has little direct business investment in Kerala, but does maintain an extremely public presence, giving speeches to public meetings (invited by reformist and non-reformist organizations alike) and contributing to Muslim educational institutions and to infrastructure (such as Cochin airport). MK appears on the management committees/board of directors of many business and educational institutions in both Kerala and the Gulf, and he is a member of the Indian government's Central Waqf Council.

MK left Kerala as a young man to join his uncle's small food-exporting business in Gujarat. He soon followed his uncle to Abu Dhabi to work in the latter's small supermarket, started in 1966. The big break came in the early 1990s, during the first Gulf war. MK, by now managing director, launched a chain of supermarkets. 'Everyone was hesitant to invest in those days,' he remembered (in an interview published by NRIn-ternet.com⁸),

and it was a big risk to build on a new concept ... You have to take risks at some point of your life. Without risks there is no success. It is like driving a car. If you think of all those big trailers, the speeding vehicles, and that old man trying to cross the street, you will never be able to drive.

No one doubts MK's business acumen, but he is also praised as shrewd for surrounding himself with able staff and for developing strong connections with Arabs. 'He speaks very good Arabic and understands very well Arab people's ways and minds', one of his business acquaintances tells us: 'He has a very sharp business mind'. On the walls of MK's headquarters in Abu Dhabi and in his sprawling Kerala house hang framed photos of his meetings with various members of United Arab Emirates ruling families and ministers, who, he tells us, 'have always been very supportive of [my] business'.

We meet MK in his Kerala house, a peripatetic conversation taking us around the house and its sprawling grounds, where replies to questions are interspersed by MK pointing out the property's many features: central a/c system, private Ayurvedic massage centre, swimming pool, collection of American vintage cars, and so on. MK arrives exactly on the agreed time, telling us that we were 'lucky to get an appointment at all. I've been here for six days, attended eight weddings and some inaugurations, and a meeting to congratulate me on my election to the Waqf Board. And every time I come back, I also have to look after more than 400 people here!' It is no surprise when MK says: 'My main concern is education, especially that of Muslim girls. I'm chairman of the new MES [Muslim Education Society] medical college dedicated to the development of Muslim education. It will become a "deemed" university, starting courses such as nursing for Muslim girls'. Here, he quickly corrects himself: 'It is for the whole society. I respect people of all religions, but not atheists!'

MK continues, 'After the *Khilafat* movement,⁹ Muslim clergy refused English and modern education, but now they should change and recognize education's importance. What development can there be if the wife of a businessman cannot even answer the phone because she does not speak English?' Later on, introducing his wife, he comments, 'She, for example, does not speak a word of English!' But then he calls upon one of his daughters, a young woman who studies at the American University in Abu Dhabi: 'You can ask her anything – she's very clever'. If education is directed towards community economic development, for MK it also plays a wider role in transformation of Muslim social practices. 'The big problems for Muslims are divorces and dowries, both arising from Gulf migration. It is very bad and the clergy should educate people that for Islam it's *haram*. Educated people', he concludes, 'Do not behave improperly'.

We hear MK a few months later addressing a 'Sunni' (see note 4) public meeting. His speech – delivered to sympathizers of an organization that until very recently advocated boycott of any form of Western education – focuses on the need for Muslims to study English, to learn modern sciences, and to become professionals and 'Ph.D. holders' – essential skills which the Gulf experience proves, according to him, vital if Kerala is to 'be part of globalization'. But the first part of his speech is about 'the value of Muslim brotherhood' and the need for Muslims to be united 'to achieve progress'.

PMA is our third exemplar of this emerging breed of Malayali Muslim businessmen. PMA's company, with more than 14,000 employees, is one of the largest construction companies in the Gulf, recently diversifying into mechanical, electro-mechanical, and heavy civil engineering sectors. The company has also landed in India, entering the hotel and construction business in Kerala and Karnataka. PMA attributes his success to a mix of calculated risk-taking and technical/ business skills. 'I do take risks', he declared (in an interview in *Oman Economic Review*),¹⁰ 'but I do not jump into the fray without doing my homework'. He continues,

Whenever and wherever my people need me I will be, physically, there for them, no matter what. We have to make people believe in themselves and in their capabilities in order to motivate them. You need your people to trust you; when they believe in you and in themselves, the company moves forward.

This image of a modern and enlightened business manager is what PMA presented to us when we met him in his Muscat office, keen to stress all the benefits – free food and accommodation to labouring staff, company cars and free petrol to technical/ managerial staff – which his company provides to employees on top of their salaries. He tells us that in recruiting, his first concerns are qualifications and work experience, although, he admits, he does give preference to Indians – especially those who have some family members or friends already in the company.

PMA has also branched out into the education sector, building private schools and colleges (a medical school and an engineering college in collaboration with a UK University) in Oman. He justifies these investments, saying that,

I'm not a saint, but raking in money does not goad me anymore. I won't deny it was enjoyable when I could afford to meet my first few needs ... However rich the country may be in terms of its GDP and economic indicators, if its citizens are not educated and competent to handle its wealth and resources, what is the use of money? Education is the key to developing people and the community (interview in *Oman Economic Review*).¹¹

PMA is determined, he tells us, to bring 'this vision' to Kerala via the construction of a new university.

From business interests to community 'upliftment' and back

PV, MK, and PMA rhetoricize their lives as 'rags-to-riches' tales, speaking of success as built from hard work, dedication, and business skills, where 'traditional' Muslim skills honed in the bazaar – such as risk-taking, hard work, familiarity with *wasta* (Arabic: favours, contacts) – are refined via adoption of modern business techniques – learned on the job in the Gulf as much as by studying in management institutes. Gulf-based Malayali businessmen have been successful not just because they were at the right time in the right place, but also because they combine inclinations for risk-taking in business and an affinity to the politics of Arab *wasta* with modern forms of management learned during early days in the Gulf. They now insist that entering and succeeding in the global labour market requires both 'traditional' business acumen and familiarity with new skills and technologies.

They thrive in the Gulf and have an affinity to Arabs – both as Muslims and as Malayali Muslims, with long-term Arab world connections (see F. Osella & C. Osella 2007) – but they also benefit from close links with Indian politicians, who support their investments in Kerala (cf. Sloane 1999). Like the contemporary Malaysian entrepreneurs discussed by Sloane, who sharply criticize 'old-style' fatalism and limited horizons, framed as un-Islamic because wasteful of the opportunities given by God, these men wish to see others follow their lead and adopt their dynamic approach.

These men's tales set them as iconic figures for all Muslims, an image they are keen to cultivate. They appear regularly on television, in newspapers, and so on. But they are not distant heroes: any Muslim will know someone – a friend or relative – who works for them and has a story to tell. And here a degree of accountability comes in: these men are also subject to wider public criticisms. As we might expect, the established middle classes commonly claim that these men are to be discounted, simply *nouveaux riche* and with 'no family history'. They are also sometimes portrayed as men who have simply extended the slippery rules of business beyond the usual rule-bending/bribery, and so on, which is taken for granted as necessary common practice to *all* businesspeople. And those who work for them might have different experiences of their apparent enlightened benevolence. One accountant told us, 'We have to work ridiculously long hours, just so that if MK decides to pass by our office, one of us will be there to explain to him what is happening and show him the books. We never know when he is coming, we always have to be ready'. And everyone well knows that Gulf-based businessmen make money by ruthlessly exploiting (predominantly) Malayali labour: in a deregulated labour market, workers work long hours, often live in spartan conditions, and are paid barely above Kerala rates.

All the entrepreneurs described here link the need for education to reform and future progress of Kerala Muslims, and this is not mere talk: they promote and build schools, colleges, and universities in both Kerala and the Gulf. This relationship between private interests and the common good, the advancement of business while working for the 'upliftment' of the whole community, unfolds in the Social Advancement Foundation of India (SAFI). The brainchild of PMA, the SAFI trust is constructing a new university on the outskirts of Kozhikode, inaugurated in 2006.

SAFI's glossy publicity, directed towards attracting donors from both Kerala and Gulf, connects the university-to-be to the re-awakening of the great scientific traditions

of Islamic civilization. 'The inheritors of those treasures of knowledge', one of the brochures reads, 'are today the poorest and backward people'. 'It is time we move on from self-pity to self improvement', we read in the same text,

from servility to leadership, from ignorance to the frontlines of scientific and social advance ... A few philanthropists, educationalists, jurists and other leaders met and resolved to take practical measures to realize [this] dream. It is a colossal plan to liberate the intellectually colonized sections of India, and to enable them to excel in all areas of knowledge, particularly science and technology ... SAFI will strive for the transformation of the backward sections into a society competent in every respect in the contemporary world, upholding ethical and religious values and achieving excellence in social, educational, and economic spheres.

Donors are asked to support construction of a university consisting of 'a network of centres of advanced study' in IT, medical sciences and biotechnologies, and social sciences. While the science centres are described through a list of sub-disciplines which are to be taught, the social sciences are presented through the role they will play in the wider ideological struggle of Muslims and Islam to counteract 'the entry of several pseudoscientific theories and social concepts ... [which] are targeted to rupture of the very fabric of religious faith ... our duty is to restore the healthy relation between rational knowledge and ethical values'. PMA tells us that SAFI aims to set itself as an alternative for those (Indian and non-Indian) Muslims no longer willing to send their children to study in non-Islamic environments. SAFI will provide 'cutting-edge teaching and research in an Islamic environment'. Although this move attracted substantial cash donations, it somewhat backfired. Arab donors insisted that Islamic studies should be a major component of the university curriculum and, bending to their wishes, one of the first two programmes inaugurated in 2006 was that of Islamic studies.

In SAFI, Kerala Muslims are offered not only the chance of doing good for the community, but also a very good investment opportunity. SAFI bought – at low cost – around 600 acres of agricultural land in an excellent location – 10 kilometres from Kozhikode, 15 kilometres from the airport, and 5 kilometres from the national highway – but only half of this property will be used for construction of the university campus. The rest will become a residential (25 per cent) and commercial (25 per cent) area, promising top-class infrastructure and amenities. People 'donating' Rs 200 000 (£2,500) are given full title over ready-to-build plots of 20 *cents* each, a real bargain given Kozhikode's current land prices. The children of 'donors' are also guaranteed entry to the university and all the nurseries, schools, and colleges which will be built in the new township.

'Donations' came in ready and fast, collected through public meetings organized by SAFI in collaboration with community and trade organizations. Filippo attended a Kozhikode meeting in early 2004 – an all-male Muslim audience of businessmen, bazaar traders, and entrepreneurs. After a slick PowerPoint presentation where, through maps, flow charts, and statistical tables, construction plans and predicted land price growth were illustrated, the stage was taken by Dr HR,¹² chair and medical director of Mangalore's 'Unity Health Complex' (hospital and medical school) and vice-chair of SAFI. Dr HR shifted the focus of the meeting from business to education. 'SAFI will focus on cutting-edge subjects. An important American economist has written that the sectors of biggest future growth will be biotechnologies, IT, and moral-religious values. SAFI will follow this path'. Education is to be framed in the

context of Muslim development and renaissance. 'Muslims have to develop and re-invent themselves. They should not be scared of the future! Muslims must go forward with times and become again leaders in India and the world'. A well-known local businessman takes the stage, telling the audience that it was dynamic entrepreneurs like himself who had convinced SAFI that 'Kozhikode Muslims should be given an opportunity to participate in the project. 10 *crores* [100 millions] of rupees have already been raised. We are also eager to contribute. Don't let me down!' In less than fifteen minutes, thirty-seven plots were sold - to the total value of Rs 7 million - to a number of professionals, businessmen, and returned migrants.

Projects like SAFI are not at all unique in Kerala. Migration and Gulf business-led investment have brought the development (as among Kerala's other communities) of private services (hospitals, schools). Muslim-owned and Muslim-run, these then tend to become perceived as specifically Muslim and to attract a Muslim clientele. An often-expressed argument within the community runs that communalized investment is necessary for Muslims' 'development'. The need for this turn is reinforced by political events: locally, the emergence of strong and successful Hindu and Christian communal/caste organizations which dominate the public sphere and have built a whole string of 'community-owned' services; nationally, generalized Muslim marginality and the state of living 'post-Ayodhya' and under the rise of Hindutva; internationally, the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions and global post-9/11 Islamophobia. All produce a sense of being a 'community under siege' which must stick together and develop self-reliance. Muslims, it is argued, should follow other Kerala groups in building their own networks of professionals, skilled workers and businessmen to strengthen the community and provide 'economic and political leadership'. At the same time, an educated, self-reliant, and economically secure community would not, according to community leaders, 'fall into the hands of extremists and terrorists'.

But SAFI has much wider objectives: participation in a 'worldwide renaissance of Islamic "moral values" and culture'. It is argued - predominantly, but not exclusively, by Islamic reformist organizations - that an Islamic renaissance would not just rid Kerala of the social problems brought to bear on Muslim lives by 'globalization' - the negative side of Gulf migration - but also set the basis for counteracting 'Western imperialism', understood to be a problem faced by Muslims worldwide. While such pan-Islamic orientations are not new - consider, for example, not just pre-colonial networks across the Indian Ocean, but also the circulation of religious scholars and reformist ideas between the mid-eighteenth and early twentieth century (F. Osella & C. Osella 2007) - they have been significantly strengthened over the last thirty years. SAFI seeks to foster this renewed sense of participation in a wider *dar-al-Islam* (land where Islam prevails) - which is, of course, open to very different interpretations and experiences on the opposite shores of the Indian Ocean - while also tapping into the business opportunities it opens up.

Amongst Kerala Muslims, the Gulf stands for the successful blending of Islam with cutting-edge technologies and modern business practices (F. Osella & C. Osella 2007; cf. Tripp 2006 on 'Islamic capitalism'; Springborg 1989). Regardless of the unevenness and ambivalence of migrants' experiences, Dubai's skyscrapers, Kuwait's sprawling oil refineries, or Riyadh's opulent neighbourhoods stand for a world where Muslims are both wealthy and self-confident, a stark contrast - as we were reminded many times - to the circumstances of India's many Muslims (C. Osella & F. Osella 2008; F. Osella & C. Osella 2008; cf. Hansen 2007; Jeffrey *et al.* 2008).

PMA reminded us that, although he is committed to the ‘upliftment of Muslims’, he is ‘no saint’. As we have seen, the SAFI project is sold to potential donors as a good investment opportunity. But the business orientation of the project does not end there. As in all Kerala’s self-financing colleges, only 50 per cent of SAFI students will be recruited on merit. The remainder, in Kerala’s usual way, will enter through a ‘management quota’, which normally demands higher fees and payment of hefty ‘donations’. And while SAFI insists that it will provide scholarships to ‘meritorious needy students’, it is clear that actually only solidly middle-class Muslim students will either achieve the grades for merit admission, or have the resources (‘donation’ and/or connections) to enter through ‘management quota’.

Muslim parents spend much time worrying about their children’s education. In Kozhikode, some lobby for admission to the two old-established Muslim schools whose syllabi include Qur’anic classes and good standards of Arabic teaching alongside both English and Malayalam medium streams of the Kerala syllabus. Others worry that something more dynamic and *modern* is required for upcoming generations, but few have any idea where to find it or even how to recognize it. Among the established middle classes, the relative merits of the Kerala syllabus versus the national (CBSE, central board) syllabus are debated and mothers compare notes on which English-medium schools have teachers who are truly competent in the English language. But many Muslim families have been cut off from Kerala’s educational mainstream for so long that, with the best will and all the Gulf remittances in the world, parents still do not have the competence to track down and secure admission to a good school.

In an interview with the principal of the up-and-coming new cosmopolitan school¹³ which our own children attended for two years, the difficulties of bringing Muslim mothers into the school’s ‘systematic’ and Gulf-style ‘modern’ educational culture was a major theme. The principal despaired of the degree of absenteeism, late morning arrivals, children falling asleep mid-morning, children with poor concentration – having missed breakfast – children who had no exposure to English language at home, and so on. She expelled many pupils and we saw her many times haranguing mothers (in English): ‘This child must sleep early, rise early, take proper breakfast and learn to understand some simple English. Otherwise he is out!’ Bewildered mothers, who often clearly did not themselves understand (either linguistically or substantially) much of what was being said to them, promised to get more ‘systematic’, desperate as they were to push their children into mainstream middle-class culture and higher education. When MK highlights the anomaly of having a wife who cannot even answer the telephone in English, he is probably also thinking about the difficulties of having a wife who cannot properly help ‘bring on’ the next generation. PV’s boarding school in Nilambur has, of course, neatly addressed exactly this issue by figuring mothers out of the picture. Here we are reminded of earlier and contemporary reformist efforts at civilizing womenfolk (Jeffery, Jeffery & Jeffrey 2004; Metcalf 1990; cf. Abu-Lughod 1998) and colonial projects of educating Indians for success by placing them away from their ‘backward’ mothers and into residential schools (see, e.g., Haynes 1991; Whitehead 2003); but how much higher are the stakes and how much more exacting the demands in contemporary Kerala, where global standards are setting the pace.

Conclusions

Debates amongst Kerala Muslims regarding community long-term ‘progress’ are neither simply informed by local concerns nor self-contained; they articulate with –

and respond to – discussions taking place both within a transnational Muslim public sphere and within Kerala's wider public sphere (cf. Deeb this volume). Our entrepreneurs do not focus only on the situation of Kerala's Muslims or respond to issues arising within the community, but are continuously reflecting on and responding to their wider Gulf experience as well as the practices of Kerala's other communities.

When successful Muslims propose solutions for the common good, education becomes the core focus of charitable and activist energies. But there is considerable ambivalence about what sort of education is required and to what purpose it should be aimed. Debates have raged in the past – even to violence – between 'traditionalists' and 'reformists' or between different reformist groups over issues such as Arabic versus Malayalam versus English as teaching medium; or the relationship and relative proportioning of religious and secular education (F. Osella & C. Osella 2008).

The position of women is, as ever in Kerala, interesting. When reformist groups insist upon education for girls, this seems to be simply a question of some sort of human rights in line with contemporary (global) interpretations of Islam as granting equality to women in many arenas, including education (cf. Huq 2008; Mahmood 2005). While a photograph of girls learning to use computers while wearing *pardah* (here, a coat and headscarf, see C. Osella & F. Osella, 2007) invariably appears in reformist publications, at the same time reformists stress that women's employment should not be encouraged. 'Educated women' – by which reformists invariably intend women with good religious education and basic Secondary School Leaving Certificate qualifications – are envisaged as the prop for the family as a whole, fostering religious morality and supporting their children's education (cf. Jeffery *et al.* 2004; Metcalf 1990). In line with Kerala's general social and gender conservatism, there is here absolutely no suggestion of women becoming entrepreneurs, unlike Malaysia, where modern Muslim morality via business activity is incumbent on both sexes (Sloane 1999; see Deeb and De Jorio in this volume).

As in Sloane's Malaysian case, businessmen believe in the possibility of a win-win situation: the uplift of the entire Muslim community and access to a flexible and qualified workforce shaped into global standards. Illiterate labourers are brought in by Kozhikode entrepreneurs from Bihar or Uttar Pradesh; meanwhile one's own community can be educated, moulded, and targeted to provide the accountants, middle-managers, software specialists, and so on, which contemporary business needs. India splits into the 'backward' other regions and the 'modern', to which Kerala stakes a strong claim (C. Osella & F. Osella 2006). But within Kerala, the Muslim community is outstripped every time by Kerala's Christians and Hindus. As we found in our earlier work on Hindu reformism, the Christian community and its institutions – such as Malabar Christian College in Kozhikode – are felt to offer not simply top-class education, but also necessary training in rational and 'systematic' lifestyles, offering 'exposure' and inculcating discipline (see Froerer 2007). But use of or even emulation of such institutions is, for Muslim community leaders, no longer an appropriate goal. While the 1930s Kozhikode Muslim elite were, like the Hindu elites of the time, happy to adopt practices they drew both from the colonial modern and from the local Christian modern, in contemporary Kerala the situation is more complex. Long-standing participation in and familiarity with trans-oceanic Islam has fostered affinities to Islamic reformism and has revived romanticized notions of *dar al-Islam*. This heightened sense of the self *as a Muslim*, in turn, underpins community-wide projects of self-transformation. The Arab Gulf provides a direct example of the existence of another

modern, an Islamic modern stripped of what are perceived as the excesses (atheism, sexual freedom, individualism) of 'Western' modernity (C. Osella & F. Osella 2008).

Ultimately, entrepreneurs' public-sphere activity focused on education has a dual effect. It satisfies the moral and communitarian aspirations of Muslim elites; but we perceive as an equally motivating factor the production of the sort of workforce that entrepreneurs feel they need: young men (*sic*) who are flexible, educated, and equally competent in English- and Arabic-speaking environments. An emerging public discourse attributes the relative 'underdevelopment' of Kerala Muslims, and of Muslims worldwide, not only to their alleged aversion to 'modern' education, but more generally to their lack of ambition, inability to defer gratification, or outright laziness, all marked out as deleterious to individual and community. Entrepreneurs hope to reproduce amongst youngsters their own dynamism, which ties in well with local Islamic reformism: attitudes of individual responsibility, energetic activity, and self-advancement are all part of the self cultivated by reformists. As in Sloane's Malaysian example, entrepreneurship is called upon to stand at the core of contemporary reformulations of Muslim morality. Here it allows – actually encourages – ideas of a synergistic interplay between business and morality, where material progress and religious reform become intertwined indexes of modernity (see Deeb 2006).

As in the early twentieth century, we are again seeing – in the Muslim businesses which have emerged over the last twenty years – convergence between middle-class practices and Islamic reformist discourse, by now thoroughly imbricated with generalized ideas about 'progress' and resonating with middle-class aspirations. Ordinary Muslims are encouraged – often in public speeches made by 'community leaders' such as our entrepreneurs – to embrace 'modern Western education', to re-craft themselves as disciplined and 'systematic', to learn English, and to perfect their Arabic in order to compete in the West-Asian-South Asian nexus of the global labour market; but they are also being asked to accept a high degree of competition and uncertainty – for example, flexible labour practices, the key to future employment. Entrepreneurs' enthusiasm for the sharp practices of global capitalism reveal the unfolding of a class-specific road map towards community development.

As one might expect, a discourse linking religious virtuosity to economic performance cannot but entail and generate unevenness, slippages, and tensions. While not everyone has benefited from the opportunities offered within India's post-liberalization economy, access to higher education remains more than ever determined by class, and all that many young Malayali Muslims can aim for is a low-paid Gulf job. Predictably, those who fail either to 'modernize' or to make the most of life's chances – e.g. old-style bazaar traders and the working classes – are increasingly marked out as morally lacking and thereby become the object of middle-class reformist intervention, often via Muslim NGO activity (cf. Elyachar 2005).

The notion of elective affinity (Weber 1985 [1905]) might seem an all-too-obvious framework to make sense of the processes at hand. But articulations between economic and religious practices remain contingent and contextual and any possible outcomes (including 'rationalization') are unpredictable. We wish at this point to make clear that we are adopting none of the clearly discernible and common positions found in analyses of Muslims' relationships to the economy. The Weberian thesis, attributing fatalism and an undeveloped rationalism, is obviously rejected by us, as are post-Weberian analyses which would trace out developmentalist teleologies of the growth of 'rationality', especially associated with Islamic reformism (e.g. Geertz 1963). More

recently, two different arguments have emerged: Roy and Kuran explore moves towards production of 'Muslim economies', but conclude that these are doomed to fail, being ultimately at odds with the goals and the institutional architecture of capitalism (Kuran 2006; Roy 1996, cited in Feillard 2004). Feillard discusses the production in Malaysia of an 'ethique islamique du travail' (2004: 95) and attempts to argue – against Roy and Kuran – that the Islamist stress on personal transformation, individual responsibility, and accountability to God (e.g. in matters of *riba* or *zakat*), and in particular the production of new subjectivities, is both sufficient to transform economic activity and neither incoherent with nor antagonistic towards existing structures of capitalism. This is similar to the position taken by Rudnykyj (this volume), and we find ourselves in agreement with both authors, and with Sloane, on this particular point; vigorous engagement in entrepreneurship, Muslim public spheres, and Islamic reformism have clearly been running together comfortably in recent years. We absolutely reject, then, the wholesale assumptions of negativity and predictions of failure to be found in the writings of Weber, Roy, and Kuran, and share with Feillard and Rudnykyj an interest in how Islamic work ethics and new entrepreneurial subjectivities may be compatible with contemporary forms of capitalism.

But here we do also wish to mark some divergence. We take a very cautious line and absolutely avoid projections or discussions of the 'success' or probable outcome of such projects. We also want very strongly to distance ourselves from any suggestions of sheer instrumentality on the part of entrepreneurs. We insist upon maintaining an equivocal stance on the issue of whether contemporary Islam is perfectly compatible with forms of contemporary capitalism, and we are also strongly arguing for an appreciation of the complexity within any individual subject's relations to economic activity – a complexity which allows for both pragmatic instrumentalism and pious sincerity coexisting within the same persons (cf. Marsden 2005). We refuse to answer what is for us a non-question, but is, sadly, often posed: that of whether these entrepreneurs are 'really' sincere Muslims or are 'really' canny capitalists (cf. Coleman 2000).

The experience of our entrepreneurs suggests that success in the neoliberal economy depends just as much on 'new' technocratic management and rational calculation as it does on 'old' connections and luck (cf. Geertz 1963; for a critique see Fanselow 1990 and Ray 1995); and even amongst the most reformist-orientated, 'traditional' charitable practices continue to be mobilized alongside more engaged forms. At the same time, Kerala Islamic reformism, increasingly preoccupied with the possible excesses of 'Western capitalism' – individualism, hyper-consumerism, and corruption – seeks ways to set ethical boundaries for engagement with the neoliberal global economy (see Hefner 1998: 232ff.; Maurer 2005; Tripp 2006: 150ff.). This is neither a condemnation of wealth accumulation and consumerism *per se*, nor a rethinking of the need to cultivate 'systematic' dispositions, but is, rather, a continual critical reflection of the perceived effects of contemporary economic practice on everyday lives.

Elite projects of hegemony might indeed prove elusive. Reformist organizations have lately become vociferous in their critique of 'globalization': globalization is deemed to be synonymous with American imperialism, the cause of many problems faced by contemporary Muslims and hence demanding resistance. At the same time, unlike Malaysia (Sloane 1999), Turkey (Buğra 2002; Erensü n.d.) and Indonesia (Rudnykyj 2009; this volume; cf. Hefner 1998), Kerala's Islamic reformism has become deeply concerned with the consequences of adoption of 'Western' models of economic development. Corruption in business and politics, hyper-consumerism, individualism, and

increased socio-economic inequalities are discussed as negative outcomes of rapid economic change. What is desired is a properly Islamic globalized modernity which provides a moral and restraining framework for workers and entrepreneurs alike and also sets clear limits to capitalist activity. Reformists' far-reaching moral critiques are experienced by emerging entrepreneurial and professional elite fractions as an obstacle to their desire for full participation in national and global middle-class lifestyles. At the same time, a good dose of pragmatism often informs engagement with the ethical demands of Islamic reformism. Entrepreneurs needing to rely on modern banking argue, for example, that the sin of usury (*riba*) applies to lenders and not to borrowers, leaving them free to rely on bank or government loans to expand their businesses.

Reformist critique led organizations such as Jama'at-e Islami to declare full support for the (Communist Party-led) Left Democratic Front during 2006 assembly elections, while the KNM advised supporters to vote on the basis of individual candidate's 'moral standing'. This unexpected turn – given Muslims' historical hostility to the atheist left – contributed to the defeat of many Muslim League candidates in what normally had been safe seats. Significantly, amongst the defeated we find many former ministers closely associated with entrepreneurs discussed here. It remains to be seen whether, over time, this apparently opening chasm between the demands of contemporary business and labour markets and orientations towards community development and reform can continue to be mediated by entrepreneurs' service and donations to community and charitable organizations working for the 'upliftment' of all Muslims. As Elyachar (2005) has noted, there may be ways in which, in recent years, capitalism has been able to 'occupy' the ground where people place the very fundamental values of their social life; and as Maurer (2005) has explored, attempts to wrest out a 'pure' sphere of Islamic finance (or other moral economies) may be over-determined by existing market conditions and rhetorics; but at the same time, we can also think about the ways in which Islam may come to permeate capitalism. Finally, we note that such processes are not linear progressions nor do they have stable outcomes. 'Assemblages' – whether constituted before or within capitalism's neoliberal moment – can unravel with the same ease with which they come together.

NOTES

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¹ Recent debates have moved instead to consider the emergence of the so-called 'new middle classes', their engagement with novel consumption practices apparently underscoring a shift away from the redistributive logics of Nehruvian developmentalism (Corbridge & Harriss 2000; Fernandes 2000; Khilnani 1997; Mankekar 1999; Srivastava 2006).

² Gulf Indian workers often come from Kerala (Prakash 2000: 4534; see also Nair 1989: 343). Throughout the 1990s, Gulf remittances amounted to up to 50 per cent of GDP (Kurien 1994: 765), more than doubling Central Government budgetary support (Zachariah, Mathew & Irudaya Rajan 1999: 18ff). Despite recent shifts, Zachariah, Prakash & Irudaya Rajan (2002) estimate that 58 per cent of all United Arab Emirates remittances received within India still come via Kerala migrants.

³ Although Kerala Muslims nowadays participate enthusiastically in mainstream education, they continue to lag behind other communities (see F. Osella & C. Osella 2007; 2008). Until the beginning of Gulf migration in the 1970s, rural Muslims, especially in Muslim majority Malappurram district, suffered from long-term economic marginalization (Miller 1992 [1976]; Panikkar 1989).

⁴ All Kerala Muslims are Shafi Sunnis, but 'Sunni' is nowadays used to mean 'orthodox' or 'traditionalist' Muslims. Kerala has a few adherents of Tablighi Jama'at and Jama'at-e Islami, but by far the two biggest groupings and most culturally salient distinction is that between 'Sunni' traditionalists and 'Mujahids' (supporters of the KNM, Kerala Naduvathul Mujahideen; Abdul Haque 1982; Miller 1992 [1976]: 275ff.; Samad 1998; Sikand 2005: 130ff.; see also F. Osella & C. Osella 2008).

⁵ Formed in 1948 from the ashes of Jinnah's Muslim League, the Indian Union Muslim League has since established itself as the bearer of Kerala Muslims' political interests.

⁶ More than to their Hindu Tamil neighbours – industrialists made famous by Milton Singer (1972) and re-studied by John Harriss (2003).

⁷ On the Mappila *lahala* (uprisings), see Dale (1980); Miller (1992 [1976]); Panikkar (1989); Randathani (2008).

⁸ http://www.nriinternet.com/NRIentrepreneurs/Middle_East/A_Z/A/Yousuf_Ali/Pravasi_2004.htm, accessed 22 January 2009.

⁹ The *Khilafat* Movement (1919-24) sought to preserve the Turkish Sultan as Kahlifah of Islam (Minault 1982).

¹⁰ http://www.oeronline.com/php/2002_march/main2.php, accessed 22 January 2009.

¹¹ As previous note.

¹² Renowned for his piety, every year he publishes the 'Unity Islamic Diary', a 'practical guide to success with a brief outline on '11 Principles for Successful Islamic Living' (cf. Harriss on the Gita as a technique for dynamic living – 2003: 352, 357; 'Jesus CEO', cited in Feillard 2004).

¹³ Muslim-owned/managed; Muslim business class parents; Christian head-teacher recruited from a Dubai UK school to bring aspects of UK-style school culture to Kozhikode; National (CBSE) rather than regional syllabus; majority of teachers North Indian non-Malayalam-speakers.

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Les entrepreneurs musulmans dans la vie publique entre l'Inde et le Golfe : avoir des biens, faire le bien

Résumé

Les entrepreneurs musulmans de l'état indien du Kerala sont en première ligne dans l'économie indienne en voie de libéralisation. Ces innovateurs ont adopté les pratiques d'entreprise et de gestion de la main-d'œuvre du capitalisme global, aussi bien dans le Kerala que dans le Golfe Persique. Ils sont également très engagés dans la bienfaisance et la politique, par leur activité dans la vie publique des musulmans du Kerala. Ils parlent de leur « esprit social » comme d'une combinaison de piété et de calcul économique, lesquelles sont perçues non pas comme mutuellement exclusives mais comme se renforçant mutuellement. En promouvant une éducation moderne des musulmans, ils tentent de favoriser le développement économique tout en plaçant leurs pratiques économiques dans un cadre d'éthique et de responsabilités morales considéré comme « islamique ». En inscrivant les affaires dans la rhétorique du « bien commun », ils légitiment du même coup leurs revendications de leadership et d'influence politique. L'orientation vers la transformation de soi par le biais de l'éducation, l'adoption d'un mode de vie « systématique » et une rationalisation généralisée des pratiques ont été largement adoptées parmi les musulmans sous l'effet de l'influence croissante des réformistes, et elles sont à présent mobilisées à l'appui de nouvelles formes d'accumulation de capital. Dans le même temps, on invoque l'islam pour fixer des limites morales et éthiques à l'engagement dans l'économie néolibérale. Les analyses instrumentalistes ne suffisent pas à expliquer la masse de temps et d'argent que les entrepreneurs musulmans consacrent à d'innombrables projets « sociaux ». Ni l'islam « politique » ni le piétisme public ne peuvent non plus rendre compte de façon adéquate des possibilités ou motivations d'engagement des musulmans réformistes contemporains.

For the last twenty years Filippo Osella has conducted research in Kerala, South India, and lately in a number of West Asian Gulf countries. His current research focuses on the emergence of Islamic reformist movements and the rise of a new Muslim middle class in Kerala in the context of an intensification of economic, cultural, and religious links between South India and the Gulf region.

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