INTRODUCTION

Liberalization's Children—Nation, Generation, and Globalization

It was a warm and humid day as Priya and I strolled through the long, empty corridors of the college where I was conducting ethnographic research. Located in a small town in the South Indian state of Kerala, the college was closed, yet again, by student strikes protesting the economic reform policies of the Indian government that were intended to open up the Indian economy to larger global forces. Earlier that day, striking male students had marched through the same corridors, shouting "Inquilab Zindabad!" (Long Live the Revolution!), as they participated in a wider campaign with other left-affiliated political parties to protest what they called "the sale" of India to global capitalist forces and "the spread of consumerism." Later, as part of the same campaign, one of these student groups would stage another protest, attempting to disrupt a fashion show that was part of a youth festival in a nearby college, claiming that such shows were "an affront to the cultural ethos of Kerala." Priya was someone who opposed the presence of this type of student politics in her college, going so far as to express her support for legal cases that sought to ban this politics from college campuses, arguing it was an impedi-

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ment to the proper and adequate education that she felt she needed for the lucrative career in Information Technology (IT) she desired.

As Priya and I approached the edge of the campus on the way back to our hostel, we came upon a garden some students had planted for a university-wide student competition. We surveyed what was left of it—trampled grass, uprooted plants, shredded bushes. The center of the garden, an expanse of grass in the shape of territorial India, had been ripped up, clumps of grass and soil strewn among the tall bushes and wild plants. It seemed clear this was also the work of the striking male students. Tired and fed up—it was the second time this had happened over the past year—Priya, who had been very involved in planting the garden, threw up her hands, turned to me, and said, "Here, there is no modernization."

Priya's investment in the garden in the shape of territorial India, and the male students' destruction of it, are apt metaphors for intense debates over the meaning of India under globalization. The nation as well-tended garden speaks to the optimistic narrative of work, growth, and progress that underlies the nationalist modernization paradigm, an important component of colonial modernity, postcolonial nationalism, and international development. For Priya, the garden represented an orderly and well-functioning college—a site for familiar understandings of national development—and the attack on it felt like evidence that the state of Kerala had not, after all, developed as far as she had hoped. Yet the belief that there is "no modernization" in Kerala is somewhat puzzling, for is this not the most progressive, developed state in India, where female students like Priya are well educated?

In fact, the idea of Kerala as laboring to modernize belongs to an almost outdated narrative of Indian nationalism. Priya also responded to a more contemporary and shifting set of conceptions about India's place in a globalizing world, particularly to images and discourses, increasingly popular since the early 1990s, that proclaim India to be an emerging global power.[1] This is "India Rising," as an essay in *Newsweek* put it (Zakaria 2006). Reform policies that opened up the Indian economy to global market forces, colloquially known as "liberalization," have significantly transformed the political, economic, and cultural landscape of India.[2] Media representations of third world poverty, an uneducated, rural, and traditional society, and an inefficient and corrupt bureaucratic

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state—all backward or underdeveloped in comparison to the "modern" West—jostle with images of a world-class information technology industry, a robust economy, and a media-saturated, highly educated, urban, affluent, and globally oriented consumer middle class. The political assertiveness of India as a nuclear power, its economic strength and power, and a newfound global prominence in film, literature, music, art, and fashion have created a sense both globally and within the country that India is fast approaching its moment of arrival on the world stage. Priya's investment in the garden and her frustrations with its destruction must be understood in light of such discourses that proclaim India to no longer be struggling at the bottom of the modernization ladder: when she frames the destruction as the absence of modernization in her college, she is anxiously wondering if she will be left behind in this new India.

The male students who destroyed the garden question and reject the promise of opportunities in a newly globalized India. One way of understanding their explicit politics of antiglobalization is through the framework of inclusion and exclusion. Some popular discourses hold that liberalization has produced two Indias: an urban, metropolitan middle class disengaged and disconnected from the problems and contestations of a wider Indian society through its new global orientation and consumerism and, as Priya feels so keenly, a rural, semirural and small-town India that is outside the boundaries of liberalized India. According to such formulations, those who protest globalization do so because they are being excluded from its opportunities and promises.

Based on my fieldwork on youth social and cultural life in a low-caste college in a small town in the Indian state of Kerala, this book argues that straightforward notions of inclusion and exclusion are far too simple by analyzing the workings of globalization among young people who are on the margins of its dominant articulations yet fully formed by its structures of aspiration and opportunity. Kerala sits at the crossroads of development and globalization; held up as an exemplary and relatively egalitarian model of successful modernization, it has now been transformed through an extensive and largely nonelite migration circuit of labor, money, and commodities, to the Persian Gulf and elsewhere. Mass-mediation and an expanding commodity culture have differentially incorporated young people across the boundaries of gender, caste, and

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class at the intersection of nation and region into the structures and aspirational logics of globalization. In turn, this has generated a wide-ranging politics of globalization in the everyday spaces of education and youth; a politics that reveals the everyday cultural mediations of globalization. It is within this *cultural* politics that I locate the explicit politics between Priya, who supports neoliberal economic reform, and her politicized male classmates, who oppose them.

Student political protests against "the spread of consumerism" and fashion shows in colleges, as part of a wider campaign against liberalization, demonstrate that new forms of consumerism in Kerala are connected and engaged with contestations about citizenship, politics, and democracy in globalizing India. Indeed, practices of consumption and their perceived impact are highly salient and contested sites for debates over the meanings and impact of globalization. In this way, globalization is a framework for understanding these young people's lives, contextualizing their social and cultural practices, their hopes, frustrations, and aspirations. Young people—men and women, pro- and anti-liberalization—are caught up both by powerful market forces that fashion them as consumers and by state-centric discourses and institutions such as education and politics that fashion them as citizens. How do students, as both citizens and consumers, navigate the increasingly mass-mediated cultural and social worlds of youth in globalizing India? To answer these questions, let us further define how globalization marks these students as distinctive: in their generational and geographical positioning, their identities as consumer citizens, and as gendered youth.

The Zippies of "India Rising"

While Priya and her classmates vigorously debate liberalization, the discourse of "India Rising" celebrates the role of their generation as a key instantiation of globalized India. Media discussions of liberalization often highlight statistics showing that 54 percent of Indians are below the age of twenty-five, making India one of the youngest nations in the world.[3] In Kerala, people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five are said to make up 45 percent of the total population.[4] These youth form a potent new market for fashioning India's newly globalized middle class. One major publication has labeled them "zippies":

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> . . . a young city or suburban resident, between 15 and 25 years of age, with a zip in the stride. Belongs to Generation Z. Can be male or female, studying or working. Oozes attitude, ambition and aspiration. Cool, confident and creative. Seeks challenges, loves risks and shuns fear. Succeeds Generation X and Generation Y, but carries the social, political, economic, cultural or ideological baggage of neither. Personal and professional life marked by vim, vigour and vitality (origin: Indian).[5]

This definition does not name specific commodities but draws attention to an embodied demeanor, an attitude, and a set of values. Its reference to the "baggage" of previous generations names a shift in generational sensibilities, attitudes, and values, in which "zippies" are an almost evolutionary alternative to their more backward predecessors.

The media has drawn an even sharper contrast between generational sensibilities in characterizing "zippies" as "liberalization's children." Again embodying India's newly found confidence and ambition on the global stage, they are urban, hip, and cool.[6] The term is a play on "midnight's children"—the generation named after the Salman Rushdie novel which focused on those born during the first hour of the year 1947, when India gained its independence from British colonial rule.[7] The term intertwines the lives of those born in the immediate aftermath of independence with the life of the nation, a nation shaped by the socialist-inspired understanding of national development represented by Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister. In contrast to liberalization's children, midnight's children seem mired in the ideological baggage of Nehruvian nationalist development, with its focus on the rural poor and service to the nation; as lacking in ambition; and being risk averse, "uncool," and fearful.

This narrative directly links the values and attitudes of this new generation to the economic liberalization of the economy and the cultural impact of globalization. It juxtaposes midnight's and liberalization's children in order to dramatize the idea that the liberalization of the Indian economy and its cultural and political effects through the spread of consumerism were a primary cause for the eclipsing of the Nehruvian vision of the Indian nation. In a special section on India's newly globalized youth in the magazine *Business Week*, a table titled "How India's New Generation is Different" elaborates a set of generational contrasts.[8] The

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"older generation" has idealized "Gandhian poverty" and socialism, grew up in the midst of famine, had only one state-run television channel, was technophobic, was thrifty, grew up within a stable single-party system led by upper castes, favored civil service careers, and had low levels of literacy. In contrast, the "new generation" admires capitalism and wants to get rich, grew up in the era of food surpluses, can watch fifty television channels, is technology savvy, consume guiltlessly, grew up with shaky coalition governments and assertive lower-caste political parties, favors jobs in the private, corporate sector, and has higher literacy rates. This construction of the lifestyle and generational sensibilities of globalized Indian youth encompasses ideology (capitalism versus socialism), the state of agriculture (from famine to surplus), the spread of mass media, technology, and consumption, the breakdown of the post-independence hegemony of the dominant nationalist political party, the Indian National Congress, and the rising political assertion of lower-caste political parties, shifting career choices, and rising literacy rates—all harbingers of India as a modernized, global power rather than a poor third-world country. The article's mention of "more voice for lower castes," rising literacy rates, and food surpluses, amid the more conventional indices of globalization such as media, technology, and consumption, is noteworthy and suggests that journalists see globalization "trickling down" to impact the masses. In short, youth and generation are a key site for popular cultural reconfigurations of the Indian nation in the age of liberalization.

Yet these celebrations of globalizing India, heralding a newly consumerist, globally oriented middle-class youth, belie some counterdiscourses. First, popular culture and public discussions are also rife with worry about the consumerism of youth, their lack of interest in the heroic struggles of the anticolonial nationalist generation, and their apathy toward the problems that plague contemporary India. Rather than celebrate the emergence of a consumerist, globally oriented youth, in such discourses there is much anxiety about their roles as committed citizens of the nation. Moreover, neither celebration nor anxiety acknowledges the Kerala students I met who were deeply engaged in contesting visions of India under globalization. Again, one way of understanding this discrepancy is to point to the disparities between the nonmetropolitan, regional, low-caste, semirural social location of these students and the

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metropolitan, upper-caste elite indexed by the category "zippie."[9] This book not only focuses on nonmetropolitan youth; it argues that globalization does more than simply exclude them from its sphere of influence or straightforwardly include them by "trickling down" to benefit them. They are liberalization's children in their own right.

The discourse of "India Rising" proclaims that the nation has transcended its colonial and postcolonial histories. Working against such triumphalism, this book examines globalization in India as a complex encounter between such legacies and their transformations under liberalization. It refutes the notion that globalization is either a radically new force or simply the persistence of older forms of cultural production generated by colonialism and nationalism. I examine globalization as experience, as practice, and as discourse. Young people at the lower-caste Kerala college where I conducted my research are situated as citizens and consumers at the intersection between development and globalization in particularly salient ways. Located between region and nation as well, they provide a nonelite, nonmetropolitan perspective on the dominant, nationalist trope of generational shift that has come to mark constructions of globalizing India.

Consumer Citizenship

While the discourse of generational shift from midnight's to liberalization's children rightly focuses on the eclipsing of the Nehruvian vision of the nation within liberalizing India, it obscures more than it reveals when it simply highlights the triumph of consumerism.[10] For members of societies that are actively being transformed by globalization, consumer practices and discourses become an increasingly important axis of belonging for negotiating citizenship; in other words, for the politics of social membership, for negotiations of public life, and for an understanding of politics within the nation. Through a careful analysis of *consumer citizenship*, this book argues that the breakdown of the Nehruvian vision connects with ongoing struggles over the meanings of public life: lower-caste cultural-political assertion; the ascendancy of a Hindu nationalism; reconfigurations of upper-caste, middle-class aspirations; and attempts by the middle class to reconfigure understandings of citizenship in India.

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Scholars have drawn attention to shifting articulations between constructions of consumer and citizen, arguing that access to consumer goods and the "freedom to choose" was considered a fundamental political right in the West by the middle of the twentieth century.[11] Within India, earlier nationalist constructions of consumption linked the consumer to the exercise of citizenship through the notion of a "producer patriot" in the service of the nation (Deshpande 2003). For example, as Satish Deshpande argues, the anticolonial Swadeshi movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries politicized the buying of foreign goods in ways that sought to produce a new kind of nationalist consciousness. For this movement, the consumption of commodities was linked to an image of the economy as a locus of production in the service of the nation (Deshpande 2003). The elite, reformist, modernizing middle class, as the vanguard of the new nation, was sometimes imagined as comprising consumers whose practices of consumption were tied to appropriate forms of modern domesticity and a productivist paradigm of citizenship.[12] Such discourses of consumerism, and the ways they were linked to understandings of citizenship within India, are marked not by arguments about high and low culture, something that characterizes debates about consumption within the Euro-American world, but rather by debates about westernization, tradition, and modernity generated out of the problematics of colonial and postcolonial nationalist cultural projects (Chua 2000).

Increasingly, forms of consumer citizenship in the era of liberalization articulate the citizen through the notion of a right to consume, a right that must be protected through state action. In dominant discourse, the economy is no longer imagined only as a locus of production; it is now more consistently imagined as a marketplace of commodities for consumption, in a shift that also entails a move away from the idea of the citizen as producer patriot to one of a "cosmopolitan consumer" (Mazarella 2003; Vedwan 2007; Deshpande 2003). In the chapters to follow, I examine such claims as they are made by middle-class-oriented civic groups with respect to education, claims that have important implications for understanding politics. Rather than take at face value their image of a depoliticized and privatized citizen-consumer, I examine how consumerism intersects with state-centric discourses and the practices of education, development, politics, and citizenship formation. Rather

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than see consumer citizenship as simply displacing older notions of citizenship, as these groups do, I examine the articulation between new discourses and practices of consumption and the ongoing productions of public life across the boundaries of gender, class, and caste.

I deploy an expansive anthropological understanding of citizenship in order to explore the crucial role of consumption in the self-fashioning of young people as part and parcel of their negotiations of public life. Moving beyond formal, legal, and constitutional definitions—or, citizenship understood narrowly as rights and obligations with respect to a state—anthropological approaches to citizenship formation have emphasized the everyday practices of belonging through which social membership is negotiated.[13] Here, citizenship is understood as "an on-going process, a social practice, and a cultural performance rather than a static category. It entails . . . struggles over the definition of social membership, over the categories and practices of inclusion and exclusion, and over different forms of participation in public life" (Berdahl 2005, 236). The framework of citizenship is thus a useful entry point for understanding how the changing practices and discourses of consumption, generated by globalization, are reconfiguring the dynamics of public life in India.[14]

The intensification and expansion of commodity flows through the liberalization of the Indian economy have made consumption of goods and mass-mediated images a key site for producing youth identities.[15] Rather than simply view youth as consumers, I examine the contradictions and entailments for young men and women of being marked not simply as consumers but as commodities as well. I focus on the terrain of public culture in India—fashion shows, beauty pageants, ice cream parlors, youth fashions, and movies—in order to argue that it is crucial to pay attention to the ways in which different cultural and political fields shape everyday consumer practices (cf. Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988). Scholars tend to depict the consumer in neoliberalism as a depoliticized and privatized elite in withdrawal from the state. If they consider a wider population, they contrast the sphere of the citizen-consumer with that of traditional citizenship. Nestor García Canclini (2001, 15), for one, argues that consumer citizenship is the reworking of citizenship under conditions of globalization in ways that displace older languages of politics, democracy, and citizenship: "Men and women

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increasingly feel that many of the questions proper to citizenship—where do I belong, what rights accrue to me, how can I get information, who represents my interests?—are being answered in the private realm of commodity consumption and the mass media more than the abstract rules of democracy or collective participation in public spaces." While paying attention to the dynamics of privatization and changing notions of politics, this book draws attention to consumer citizenship not as a form of "private behavior" but rather as a form of cultural politics at the intersection of history, culture, and power with implications for how citizens negotiate public life within and beyond the boundaries of the elite, nationalist, middle class.

So I consider young people as citizens in the making and colleges as sites where society produces them as such.[16] That is, I situate the ethnography in places—a street, the college hostel, the college compound, a performance stage, corridors, classrooms, an ice cream parlor, a train station, or bus stand—but these "places" are not self-evident sites for the location of ethnography. I variously understand them as representing different kinds of publics—consuming, democratic, political, national, and intimate—which also rely on various notions of the private. I examine how notions of the "public" get linked to conceptions of citizenship, consumption, and politics.[17]

I examine notions of public citizenship within the college that include young women within "civic" conceptions of the public yet marginalize or exclude them from a "political" public, and I consider how liberalizing discourses of consumption address these notions. Such discourses and practices of consumption rework education as a formal institution for the production of citizens, and they also transform the everyday negotiations of public life that mark young women and men's sense of belonging and social membership. I also focus on education as part and parcel of social reform movements begun in the colonial period to "uplift" low-caste communities, in particular the Ezhava caste community in Kerala. I attend to the ways in which a community-based anticaste movement emerges and functions within the putatively secular and democratic space of the college and how such a caste-based college and its students are increasingly oriented toward a transnational horizon of opportunity and aspiration. Thus an exploration of young men and women's par-

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ticipation in the public spaces of college life reveals the gender, class, and caste dimensions of the public sphere and democratic citizenship in India.[18]

Indeed, as I explore these struggles within the realm of education and youth cultural life, I look beyond the nonelite students to consider how the liberalizing middle class envisions the nation in order to lay claim to a state that it considers corrupt and ineffectual within a new global dispensation. I demonstrate how their increasing global orientation has led middle-class Indians to very actively critique the postcolonial state, its legacies, and functioning. They are not simply leaving Indian society by becoming more worldly; they also seek to transform it for the purposes of consumption. For example, some organizations attempt to ban student politics from colleges in Kerala because, they claim, such politics prevents the smooth functioning of educational institutions and the preparation of students for a new global economy. A privatizing educational industry links such arguments to conceptions of education as a commodity rather than a public good; in these conceptions, it juxtaposes the rights of citizens as consumers to a more long-standing notion of citizens as producers for the nation. I explore how this elite, middle-class "consumer patriotism" of liberalization encounters new consumer identities among nonelite, nonmetropolitan young people in the small town in Kerala where this study is located.[19]

In the end, my conceptualization of consumer citizenship has several consequences for understanding globalization and citizenship.[20] Phenomena that transcend the boundaries of nation, such as the extensive circuit of transnational migration, commodities, and remittances between Kerala and the Persian Gulf and the construction of the Non-Resident Indian (NRI), are crucial to the chapters that follow. My work here builds on discussions of globalization and citizenship that focus on the deterritorializing effects of globalization that challenge nation-state–derived conceptions of citizenship. That focus has led to a wide variety of scholarship on "postnational," "cosmopolitan," and "global" forms of citizenship.[21] However, I examine these phenomena in terms of the reconfigurations of region, nation, and world *within* Kerala, drawing attention to the dynamic relationship between deterritorialization and *re*territorialization within processes of globalization.[22]

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Engendering Youth and Globalization

Female students like Priya have historically enjoyed high rates of literacy, health care, and education in Kerala, making the state a model of gender equality, development, and successful modernization elsewhere in the world.[23] Built into the discourse of "India Rising," however, is the promise of a better path to liberation from traditional family and kinship structures into a world marked by greater gender equality. When she was faced with the destroyed garden, her exasperated remark that "here, there is no modernization" resonated for me with several possibilities: her marginalization from a long-standing masculinist political culture that is central to Kerala's postcolonial development experience, her sense that the celebrations of gender and education in Kerala might obscure its more ambivalent consequences for young women, and her embrace of liberalization as a more promising path toward greater gender equality and class mobility.

While Priya embraces the opportunities of liberalization, there is a wider sense that globalization is undermining Kerala's reputation as a model of development and is transforming the understanding of the state as a highly developed place that treats women well. Priya is a middle-class aspirant of liberalizing India, someone who is studying computer science on the side, along with her regular studies, in the hope of getting a high-paying IT job and the lifestyle that might come with it either within India or abroad. Yet the prevalence and persistence of moral panics about and protest against beauty pageants, fashion shows, and the celebration of Valentine's Day in colleges suggest the ambivalent and contested nature of young women's opportunities in globalized India. Such objections to liberalization reveal how celebrations of liberalization's promises provoke anxious discourses and regulations of young women, their bodies, their sexuality, and their vulnerability. In exploring such debates, I also consider how struggles among young people about their roles as student-citizens and as political actors—as opposed to youth as consumers engaged in an expanding and youthful commodity culture—position women and men and define masculinity and femininity.

A central argument of the book is that anxieties over globalization surface in highly gendered politics about the place of women in public and the specter of sexual exploitation in an ever-expanding commodity

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culture. A crucial node in the crisis-ridden narratives about Kerala in the 1990s, such anxieties have a long history in the production of modernity in Kerala, and they have become the conditions under which young women and men negotiate globalization. I show that young middle-class women are central to struggles over the cultural meaning and impact of globalization, both on the part of an assertive Hindu nationalism that emerged in the 1990s and the feminist left as it confronts and contests globalization. The middle-class New Indian Woman of earlier articulations of modern gender is now figured as more aggressively public and sexual through her consuming practices, while continuing to be regulated in a variety of ways; at the same time, liberalization has also generated contemporary forms of lower-caste and class masculinity that are newly tied to commodity cultures. These commodified genders become another axis of exclusion for lower-caste and lower-class young women.

In Kerala, the lack of job prospects and extremely high rates of education have transformed life for a large group of young men and women. Instead of moving quickly into marriage and employment, they spend an extended period pursuing one educational degree or course after another, all the while negotiating jobs and marriage prospects at home and abroad. This extension of youth has created a consumer-driven social and cultural world that young people increasingly understand on its own terms. I explore the contours of this sociocultural world in arenas emblematic of youth: fashion, romance, politics, and education. However, I do not render this world as a "subculture" with its own logic, something that has characterized much of the cultural studies literature on youth.[24]

Rather, in order to apprehend these figurations of youth and the ways that young people inhabit them, I reconceptualize youth as a social category that sits at the crossroads between familial and educational contexts, a category that is structured by job, marriage, and consumer markets.[25] It is moreover a category that closely links education and the possibilities of migration and creates the conditions for a complex mediation between consumption and citizenship. Consumer and state-centric developmentalist projects seek to turn people in this category into consumers and citizens, and as a category youth is receptive to global migration and changing ideas about sex and marriage.

In particular, I consider a variety of masculinities and femininities through which young people navigate public spaces of education and a

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wider commodity culture. While femininity is often equated with "difference" and "tradition," one task of this book is to link such analysis to the ways *modernity* is in turn central to gender.[26] Understanding how gender is modern in Kerala entails a complicated and nuanced mapping of the public/private dichotomy.[27] I consider the gendered demeanors young women and young men deploy as they navigate the public spaces of education and new consumer spaces. I contrast the notions of femininity and masculinity that accompany these demeanors, considering them in terms of the embodied politics of public life.

For example, I track the assertion of new forms of masculinity among lower-caste, lower-class young men tied to fashion and commodities as these forms intersect with reconfigurations of upper-class, upper-caste femininity as aggressively public and sexualized in the aftermath of liberalization. I examine how these terrains of masculinity and femininity, marked by young people's engagements with consumption, deny lower-caste, lower-class young women access to forms of commodified femininity in ways that make their claims on the public spaces of education and commodity culture tenuous at best. Moreover, I show that within the context of globalization, processes of reterritorialization often hinge on the young female form, which bears what I call "the burden of locality" on an increasingly global scale. Thus my analysis of gendered spatial divisions tracks the deployment of class-specific, caste-specific, and gender-specific constructions of masculinity and femininity in ways that unsettle and cross the oppositions between public and private and tradition and modernity.[28]

Finally, I mediate multiple locations for the production of knowledge about gender in India and Kerala. In particular, because I am an anthropologist interested in questions of gender and globalization and am located within the United States, my knowledge production emerges from feminist intellectual and political fields within the American academy and within India. Part of the challenge of writing this book was to pay attention to the complexities of the ethnographic encounter between myself as a U.S.-based academic and my informants in Kerala; to the fields of debate and politics about gender and globalization across Kerala, India as a whole, and the United States; and to naturalized hierarchies of the relationship between these sites of knowledge production.

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Genealogies/Sites/Themes

My interest in youth, gender, and globalization in Kerala emerged from my own experiences and that of my family as members of a global Kerala diaspora. I was born into a Christian family in Kerala, raised in north India and the United States, and returned to Kerala as a U.S.-based anthropologist. My religion, nation, class, and gender shaped both my fieldwork and my analysis. In particular, as what the state identifies as a "Non-Resident Keralite" woman, I have lived and negotiated the gendered cultural politics explored in this book, a politics of foreignness shaped by the migratory circuits of the global Kerala diaspora.

The hierarchies of gender, class, education, and geography within my own family—our members are dispersed among Kerala, other parts of India, the United States, Canada, Australia, the Persian Gulf, and Europe —were puzzling and remarkable to me while I grew up. Because my immediate family and I followed a classic U.S. immigrant pattern of social mobility through education, I wondered, even as a young woman, about the role of education as a site for social change in Kerala, with its different histories of colonialism, political radicalism, and migration. As India's emerging reputation as a global power transformed my own experience of being an Indian immigrant in the United States, family visits to Kerala over the years showed me how globalization and experiences of transnational migration were changing what it meant to be young in Kerala.

The central focus of this ethnography is a midsize (3,500 students) coeducational college on the outskirts of a town in southern Kerala. My most intensive period of ethnographic fieldwork there began in the mid-1990s for a period of two years, followed by shorter fieldwork stays over the years. Situated on the national highway that runs through this small yet commercially important town, the college is easily reached by bus, and the railway station is within walking distance of the campus. It is part of a concentration of institutions and businesses that cater to students: several other private colleges, hostels, tutorial centers, bookstores, small restaurants, ice cream parlors, and shops selling drinks, sweets, snacks, and newspapers. While some of its students live in nearby hostels, most come from both the town itself and from the villages surrounding the town. Many travel between one and two hours,

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sometimes three, to attend college there. The college is one of a large number of private colleges in the state, all of which are affiliated with one of the seven state universities.[29] Founded in the 1950s by a private trust, this institution is an OBC college: OBC refers to other backward classes, the official state category under which the Ezhava caste community is classified.[30] The trust itself is affiliated with the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP), a social reform movement that challenged the caste hierarchy of the region beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century from the position of a formerly untouchable caste. It draws a cross-section of students from within the Ezhava caste community, comprising students from middle-class families in town and those from more rural and peasant backgrounds. However, while it is managed by this trust and has a mandate to serve the Ezhava caste community through what is called its "management quota" which allows it to set aside admissions for its constituency, state policies, the college's size and reputation, and the range of subjects it offers, draw a diverse student population from different caste and religious communities. At the time of my most extensive fieldwork, the college granted degrees equivalent to a bachelor's in the United States and offered postgraduate master's courses in a few subjects. In addition, higher education in this college was organized such that the eleventh and twelfth years of schooling were included in colleges and understood as "pre-degree" courses.[31] This meant that the students in the college ranged in age from approximately sixteen to twenty-three years.

During the intensive fieldwork period, I lived in an affiliated student and working women's hostel, run by the same trust and within walking distance of the college. Many of my hostelmates' homes were too far away for them to live at home and commute. While the majority of my hostelmates were students of the college, the hostel also housed women just beyond their college years, who were usually unmarried and working at their first jobs in and around the town. There were also a few older women, sometimes married with children who lived at home while they spent the working week at the hostel and others who were not. Some, like me, came from other parts of India or abroad. Most of my hostelmates were Malayalee (with a few exceptions), Malayalam being the dominant language of the state.

My fieldwork involved living in the hostel, attending classes at the

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college, and generally participating in the everyday activities of a college student. I also pored over documents at the college library, went to youth festivals, traveled with students for various projects and trips, attended political marches and rallies, and participated in many other activities. I went shopping, attended movies, watched television, listened to music, and frequented ice cream parlors and restaurants. Apart from participant observation, I conducted more systematic interviews with a variety of students, teachers, and administrators. At the time of my most intensive fieldwork, I was only several years older than the oldest students at the college, making it relatively easy for me to navigate the formal and informal spaces of student life. My status as a social scientist from the United States conducting *gaveshanam* (research) was simultaneously apprehensible within an institution of higher education and curious to students, teachers, and administrators. While both students and teachers were extremely helpful, providing me with documentary materials, helping me find places to conduct interviews and participating in them, they were puzzled that I could afford to spend a year or two in Kerala. With little funds available to them for conducting research, especially within non-elite, regional institutions, many were struck by the fact that a funded grant enabled me to do research for so long. I also conducted research among students in the nearby capital city while I lived in a student hostel for several months. That research focused on a student population that was more urban, middle-class, and upper-caste and provided some comparative data that was useful for situating my main ethnographic focus.

Before the ethnographic chapters, chapter 2 provides background on Kerala. The state has a global reputation as a model for development, based on its unusual achievements in the area of gender and education, among other development indices. I show that standard explanations of these achievements draw on elements of Kerala's modern history—largely focused on its historically important systems of matrilineal kinship among dominant castes, enlightened nineteenth-century local rulers, caste and class mobilization, and the rise of the communist left—that elide the emergence of a modern and patriarchal gender regime that structures such development gains. Through various projects of social reform, this regime differentially positioned women along the axes of tradition/modernity and public/private. Through women's increasing assertions into public life, further shifts in this modern gender system

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through the 1920s and 1930s allowed women greater access to education and jobs, albeit in gender-specific ways. Nonetheless, by midcentury, a modern norm of middle-class domesticity rooted in the nuclear family was established, something that came to buttress the postcolonial developmental state. I trace a modern gender ideology that underwrites social reform efforts across a variety of caste and community reform movements, including the Sree Narayana movement, in order to highlight the emergence and consolidation of a middle-class norm rooted in ideas about modern education. However, this gender norm was differentially articulated and experienced along the vectors of caste, class, and community. This “model” came into crisis in the 1990s through global transformations and the increasing importance of transnational migration, which led to the emergence of discourses and practices that newly fashioned Kerala as a consumer society.

The following four ethnographic chapters focus respectively on fashion, romance, politics, and education. I explore how these emblematic youth cultural and social practices are situated at the intersection of both conceptual and literal spaces defined as private and public, modern and traditional. I examine the ways in which these ideas of public and private mutually implicate each other and the ways in which people live and contest them along the axes of gender, caste, and class through various kinds of embodied performance. I also situate the ethnographic objects within the colonial and nationalist histories of these practices. For example, I examine how a range of clothing styles index particular kinds of femininity and masculinity that enable and constrain young people as they navigate the boundaries between long-standing notions of private and the public and ideas of tradition and modernity in ways that allow differential access to modern, globally inflected publics. The chapters on fashion and romance explore the effects of new productions of consumer identity on highly gendered negotiations by young women and men of the public spaces of commodity culture and education. These chapters specify how the upper-middle-class “modern” girl who is now understood to be more aggressively public and sexual intersects with the production of new forms of commodified, lower-caste and lower-class masculinity in ways that marginalize lower-class and lower-caste forms of femininity.

Chapter 2, on fashion, examines how new, globally inflected patterns

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of consumption among young people (through fashion, movies, and the staging of beauty pageants) become a new axis of belonging that differentially mediates young women and men's claims on public life. Chapter 3 demonstrates how narratives of modern romance, linked to transformations in the gender regimes of Kerala's colonial modernity, shape how young women understand and navigate their entry into the worlds of education and work, all within the horizon of normative understandings of marriage. Eschewing a sharp distinction between private and public, I examine romance as a form of public intimacy. Given that a college and its environs are one of the few spaces available for heterosocial interaction, the construction of romantic intimacy, more often than not, must be initiated and sustained in public. I track the ways in which practices of romance emerge through a negotiation of the meanings of social interaction between peers within public spaces of education and an expanding commodity culture. Movies turned out to be a key source for mediating the romantic ideal. These and other narratives demonstrate how romance enables and constrains a young woman's entry into and experience of a wider public world.

The next chapters shift the focus to youth practices that are more self-evidently enactments of citizenship: politics and education. I demonstrate how these practices emerge out of colonial and postcolonial configurations of culture and power and how contemporary discourses and practices of consumption are transforming them. In chapter 4, I treat "politics" (*rashtriyam*) as an objectified discourse and domain of activity in which youth confront the state. As such, politics is a crucial aspect of Kerala's political history and highly salient in everyday life as well as in the workings of the college itself. Although it would be easy for me to construct a narrative of exclusion in addressing the lack of women's participation in this "political public" and in the practices and institutions of democratic citizenship, I instead examine the masculinist underpinnings of the space of student politics, rooted as it is in gendered notions of mobility and traversal. I track a contemporary debate about "politics," in which a privatized, neoliberal, consumerist, and civic-minded public confronts a disorderly politicized public that has its roots in colonial and postcolonial political developments. This debate is crucial to the field of education in Kerala, where education is both an object of political contestation and a place for its enactment. I elaborate how

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older narratives of Nehruvian nationalism tied to service to the nation are changed by discourses of consumption that reconfigure the very meaning of politics within an increasingly commoditized and privatized educational context. In chapter 5, I turn to education itself, considering it as a strategy of social transformation and mobility. I situate the college within a colonial-era social reform movement for the eradication of untouchability while locating this anticaste project within an increasingly transnational educational trajectory. Taking up the critique of caste that has defined recent South Asian anthropology, the chapter argues for a "post-Orientalist" anthropology of caste in contemporary India that locates caste within the spaces and practices of secular citizenship. Through an exploration of the politics of identity and secularism within this low-caste college, the chapter goes on to examine contemporary transformations of caste, community, and religion in a Kerala increasingly affected by Hindu nationalism. The chapter also examines the politics of the English language in the college.

In the epilogue, I discuss some of the implications of this research on youth and globalization in Kerala for understanding figurations of liberalization's children as well as point to some more recent shifts and continuities in the cultural politics of globalization in contemporary India.

The book focuses on key cultural practices that young people understand, in highly self-conscious ways, to be emblematic of their lives as consumers and citizens. The unfolding of the ethnographic chapters on fashion, romance, politics and education—in that order—develops an argument about the intersections between consumption and citizenship that seeks to foreground consumer citizenship as constitutive of young people's lives in liberalizing India. While the chapters on fashion and romance highlight the gendered stakes of consumption, the chapters on politics and education feature explicit gendered discourses and practices of citizenship. The ordering of chapters also charts a temporal trajectory of entry and exit from the space of youth. Through fashion and romance, we get a sense of what is entailed for young people in gaining entry to and navigating the spaces of college student life, while the focus on politics provides us a sense of how the college is inhabited by them. As the focus shifts to education and strategies for social mobility, the world of adulthood in the form of jobs and setting up households begins to

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impinge on the highly demarcated zone of commodified youth culture and student politics.

While this book is focused on the region of Kerala within a larger Indian context, my focus on consumer citizenship at the intersection of gender and youth illuminates a wide-ranging and contested set of transformations wrought by contemporary globalization. Consumer practices and discourses of rampant consumerism, especially among young people, have become emblematic of globalization's reach and impact around the world. Through the framework of consumer citizenship, I hope this book will expand understandings of consumption and globalization by drawing attention to the ways practices of consumption and discourses of consumerism intersect with public politics and understandings of citizenship. Moving beyond denunciations or celebrations of consumption as a harbinger of globalization, especially with respect to young people, I invite a more careful assessment of what is at stake in consumer practices for young people, their families, and the nations and states to which they belong. I hope this book will expand our understandings of globalization by drawing attention not only to how globalization structures lifeworlds but also to the ways it becomes an explicit object of contestation and negotiation within everyday contexts. Through the framework of consumer citizenship, paying attention to the cultural politics of globalization carefully contextualized within local and national histories enables a nuanced assessment of both popular and scholarly claims about globalization as a radical new force in the world.

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