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**'EARTHING'<sup>1</sup> WITH EXPECTATIONS**Mathew A Varghese<sup>2</sup>

Multi-storey apartments have proliferated, in the Kakkannad region. A new 'site' appears almost every week and the finished and partially finished structures are the most visible symbols of transformation in the region. The advertised intention is catering to the needs of information technology spaces that are getting developed. The majority of these are developed by Malayali corporates based in metropolitan cities in India and some who are based overseas. Though Harilal (2003) argues that the construction boom started off after the mid nineteen seventies as a result of overseas remittances, the contemporary process has not been a logical follow through.<sup>3</sup>

Instead, this is directly linked to the post nineties economic policies and the growing role of the state as the promoter of corporate order. Bhaduri and Nayyar (1999) suggest that neoliberal Indian state has been both a continuation and reconfiguration of the nexus between corporate business and the state.<sup>4</sup> "These groups have in fact determined the direction of reforms since the nineteen nineties with phenomenal state support" Corbridge and Harris (2000).<sup>5</sup> In the newly urbanising places in question, as Harvey (2003) argues the 'accumulation by dispossession' has been buffered out/watered away to a great extent by state intervention with respect to compensations, labour rights, or

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<sup>1</sup> Used in the sense of earthing apparatuses in electrical installations that earths out any surge and maintains the balance.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Mathew A. Varghese is currently working as Assistant Professor (FIP Substitute), Department of Political Science, Maharajas College, Ernakulam. He was awarded a Ph.D from the University of Bergen, Norway for his thesis "Spatial Reconfigurations and New Social Formations: The Contemporary Urban Context of Kerala" in the year 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Harilal, K.N. and K. J. Joseph, 'Stagnation and Revival of Kerala Economy: An Open economy Perspective', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 23, Jun. 7-13, 2003: 2286-2294.

<sup>4</sup> Bhaduri, Amit and Deepak Nayyar, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Liberalization*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Corbridge, Stuart and John Harriss, *Reinventing India*, Polity Press: Cambridge, 2000.

drawing of frameworks.<sup>6</sup> But these do not curtail financial reforms that provide easy routes for real estate investment. Unlike some of the overtly violent processes through which real estate business got established in cities like Bombay, as represented in popular usages like ‘mafia raj,’<sup>7</sup> here these evolved by getting embedded in the social capital<sup>8</sup>. With infrastructural facilities evenly spread out, the sector fast became the major employer in fields like construction, especially a situation from which secure jobs and primary sectors of production had been going out. In addition the migrant manual workers who flowed into such spaces too saw themselves co-opted in a relatively welfarist order<sup>9</sup>.

More significant is the involvement of those who could be categorised middle men, the facilitators of land based real estate processes. The characteristic roles played by their informal networks as well as the conditions offered by a welfarist infrastructure have spread out corporate investments evenly and co-opted people in a hegemonic process. Through case materials from the urban scene in Kakkannad, the paper intends to communicate how neoliberalism becomes embedded and generates encompassing processes.

### Birth of a Flat: A Case of ‘Entrepreneurialism’

A conversation at the trade union office in *Kizhakkambalam*, a village adjoining the newly urbanising zone east of Ernakulam, was peppered with reminiscences. After the

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<sup>6</sup> Harvey, David, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> This involves a combined rule of powerful people, their muscle men and local encroachers who operate in connivance with revenue and police officials. Such activities have often become part of the processes at a later stage, but were never the modes of establishment in Kerala. For certain reports: ‘Mafia selling Night Safari land’, *The Tribune*, 2007-07-03; Indu Bharti, ‘Usurpation of the State: Coal Mafia in Bihar’, *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 24, No. 42, Oct. 21, 1989 at p.2353; ‘Land mafia buries lake, encroaches govt land’ *Deccan Herald*, Oct. 10, 2008 available at <http://archive.deccanherald.com/Content/Oct102008/district2008100994331.asp> [accessed on: 24 October 2014]

<sup>8</sup> The sum total of resources that accrue to an individual by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutional relationships with mutual acquaintance and recognition, See Bourdieu, Pierre, and Wacquant, Loic J. D., *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, University Of Chicago Press, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> The newly introduced Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme 2010 provides welfare measures to the migrant workers who come to Kerala from other states/Union territories.

occasional ‘loading-unloading’<sup>10</sup> work, the evening routine would be to step out, relax for a while in one of the fresh water ponds, go fishing in the Kadambra, or laze around the green paddy fields that marked the place ‘once’. But now, even though the money they get is more and the work, more frequent, the evening routines have changed. Much of those routines and leisure are ‘nostalgically recalled’.

The ‘nostalgia’ is about the question of the imminence of forgetting or about a certain kind of absence that Milan Kundera<sup>11</sup> wrote about. The truth is that the agricultural milieu, mercantile orders or the everyday routines, from where reminiscences draw from, are not too ‘past’. In fact the scenes had been alive even three years back. Nostalgic reminiscences often became backdrops to the expectations and excitements about ‘today,’ compelled to sever itself abruptly and radically from the ‘yesterday’. The impossibility to reflect on the contemporary went together with the possibility to narrate the past. As Jameson (2001) puts forward, nostalgia in the sense can also be understood as symptomatic of societies ‘incapable of dealing with time and history’.<sup>12</sup> Above all it suggests a delinking or severance of relationship with the then and there and personalised and euphoric packaging of the sense of place into flashbacks to a ‘past’.

There was the case of a youngster who dropped in at the union office at Kakkanad. He had come here to meet some of the union members to talk about an important issue. He, like many other youngsters had found a vocation in small contracts and land brokerage two years back, following the new boom in land prices. Presently he wanted to enter into a ‘fair deal’ with some of the union members over the matter of unloading some tiles. The real unloading would be done by three Bihari migrant labourers and the union members would get a share as part of the informal ‘contract’.

Social relations at a given locality are the key to any type of brokerage as he claims. One basically knows people who know others and who can eventually link up with a major builder or some other entrepreneur in the urbanising zones of Kakkanad. Before registration of a certain sale, the land could pass through several hands bringing in margin money to middle men like him. He was disappointed with the present

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<sup>10</sup> Unionised sector that deals with different forms of shifting, transportations, cuttings, removals etc. for private as well as public purposes. The Act connected with, Kerala Loading and Unloading Act 2002, has precise definitions, available at [www.kerala.gov.in/dept\\_lab/act1.pdf](http://www.kerala.gov.in/dept_lab/act1.pdf) [accessed on 24 October 2014].

<sup>11</sup>Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, Harper Collins; 1st edition, October 1, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Jameson, Fredric, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Vincent B. Leitch, et al. (edn.), New York: Norton, 2001.

legislations by the then left government. This has reduced the space for informal arrangements and *marichu kachavadam*<sup>13</sup>. Transfer of land through authorization, or power of attorney has been restricted, unless the parties are related. Informal practices in land deals, that tempted adventurous youngsters and others into this business, have been curbed. Many are returning to their erstwhile professions. They cannot be happy with modest income, in the context of burgeoning money flows into newly urbanising zones and visible signs of material wealth, whether represented by gaudy houses or profusion of automobiles.

Our young entrepreneur describes compulsory norms [like stipulations on minimum road width and Floor Area Ratio (FAR)] as *vikasna-virudham* (anti-progress/development). His acquaintances in the business are carry-overs from the regular evening conversations, as well as routine gatherings at the several art and cultural forums. As represented by the processes in which middle men like him get into and the contemporary role of ‘unions’ as facilitators, there are radical shifts in roles and expectations in the face of futuristic growth in the region. The changes are about how people participate or incorporate in the present against what is delegated to the past or showcased away as nostalgia. The reasons are grounded and local and the capital from erstwhile relationships feed into configurations in the making that escape earlier forms of placedness.

The different stages in the birth of a ‘flat’<sup>14</sup> start with the finding of a suitable location. In one of the cases narrated, the initial buyers were a retired government employee and a storekeeper from the locality, who turned ‘entrepreneurs’. The ‘entrepreneurs’ discovered a potential seller using their knowledge about the person as well as his social background.

*There was an acre of land (minimum area for a high rise being half an acre) belonging to a person hailing from the southern region of Kerala. His father was one of the many who went to Persia (going to Persia is a popular way people refer to pre-gulf oil boom migrations to the Arabian Gulf region), and married a Baghdadi. He bought land in the present location and built a house here, but never bothered to occupy. Instead this was*

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<sup>13</sup> Transacting, (in this case ‘land’) several times, before actual registration. Each transaction involves a commission.

<sup>14</sup> A flat refers to any of the many multi-storey apartments that are being built for the purpose of ‘living’.

given out for rent. He as well as all his relatives became expatriates in the United States<sup>15</sup>.

During what was perceived as a major land boom, in year 2005, our 'entrepreneurs' discovered a potential seller in the absentee owner. Quick contact was made by one of them. The potential of 'unused' land as a 'site' was immediately conveyed. Besides, the huge monetary gain could be used to purchase much more land in his native place where land price remained lower. Thus the negotiations took place. There was no need of additional brokerage as the buyers were all from the same area.

Once a deal was struck; money got pooled in and the property was bought with the help of a loan. The idea was to follow the trend and invest money in a high rise flat. But then hindrances were perceived by this collective who were not professional builders either. The new panchayat rules for building were already in place and a lump sum of Rupees 36 Lakh (3600000) was to be paid to the local body as fees for construction. In addition different sanctions were needed like ones from the Fire Department, Aviation (because of the proximity to the airport), and the Pollution Control Board.

In addition, the construction per day would cost Rupees two and a half lakh (250000). This was a big amount and the local labour unions had to be co-opted and hence paid a larger wage (Rs.350 a day per person as against less than half this amount for the majority migrant labourers who had started to come in by the latter half of the 90s). Because of all these difficulties the buyers decided to sell off the land to a North Indian contact. The buyer offered them an amount which would avail to them some profit over what had been spent. The new buyer was more of a professional builder<sup>16</sup> consortium from New Bombay who had easy access to funds like the private equities (the provisions for which have been relaxed since the nineties) as well as black money (unaccounted money).

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<sup>15</sup> A large number from Southern Parts of Kerala, like Tiruvalla have become expatriates. Lots of houses remain locked in these parts.

<sup>16</sup> DLF (Delhi Lease and Finance started in 1946), Shobha group, Confident group (Bangalore based Malayali), Mather etc. are some of the major builders here.

*Even then advertising had to wait because of the phenomenal rise in the cost of materials like iron needed for initial piling and pile capping<sup>17</sup> (which is the major work). There were around 60 labourers at this point and all were from the state of Maharashtra. They usually accompany major builders. All of them have pools of such labourers. Buyers, who are relatively fixed, like in the present case, are rare as they seldom have embedded resources like money and labour. So they eventually become “earths”.*

*The labourers find wages and working conditions in Kerala extremely friendly when compared to their home grounds as well as some of the major metropolitan centers. The local unions had already fixed a ratio of migrant labourers against the union (7:3 in the case of piling work). What the union members demand is popularly called ‘nokku kooli’ (literally meaning wages for the on-looker!). The process suggests a change of role as well as the evolution of unions as pools of arbiters in such events. One of the buyers even says that the elected local bodies have been co-opted into the process. Some even demand money from the buyers for local body activities.*

*The social contacts of the first buyers are still maintained by the new builder for needs like arranging living spaces for the labourers as well as selling some of the units (the selling in almost all cases happens before building and housing loans are made available by the builder). Some of those who were involved with the project say that both the recent recession in the U.S as well as the need to regularize un-accounted money, should work well for the completion. Accordingly overseas exhibitions in the US and other places target expatriates who are drawn by prospects of investment.*

The case, the subject of gossip on occasions, became predominantly a case of ‘entrepreneurialism’, which has a positive overtone in these places. But what often are not too visible are the whole sets of relationships that come into play. And this is not about an inert transplantation of relationships, but relationships replete with role reversals and rationalisations that take on a life of their own. They draw on historical investments in social capital for the purpose. ‘Entrepreneurialism’ becomes an everyday process through which ends can justify means ever more and generate the logic for major changes in the state dynamic itself. Rather, the forms the state is acquiring take life amidst such processes.

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<sup>17</sup> Often sited as environmentally damaging as the process dredges out dead soil as well as affects water tables and natural springs. Water scarcities are beginning to be reported from places around Kakkannad.

Of 'Earthing' and New Brokers:

Land brokerage as such is nothing new. But what is 'contemporary' and special are the multiplying levels of participation as well as the ramifications brokerage undergoes at present. The routines seem to have undergone major transformation during the last five years. The number of youngsters who end up in informal sectors linked with land transactions has increased several folds. And noticeably, large numbers of youngsters have assumed occupations like brokerage that had been the domain of the middle aged, the retired, or the un-educated. The reference here is mainly to the more local transactions involving people in the same locality or nearby areas, and not about the more formalised brokerage-firms (which could have implications on the long run). But the people involved find themselves implicated in processes that extend beyond the local.

Among the several titles or roles that youngsters have assumed of late are brokers, collectors, real estate employees, and *goondas*<sup>18</sup> (thugs). All of these feature at one point or another in land transactions which have multiplied several folds. The nature of labour and the necessary relationships may be presenting/structuring new norms of job relations and relationships in public and private spaces.

Brokerage, as an occupational option, kick started among young school drop-outs and the jobless much before the current real estate boom, which runs parallel to the current urbanisation programmes centered on the development of Special Economic Zones and ports. During the period (end of the eighties–the beginning of the Nineties when neo-liberal policies were getting implemented at the national level) most of the village level transactions had been quite informal. Though legal norms had been in place with regard to processes like the registration of transactions and conversion of erstwhile paddy fields, the enforcement lacked rigor.

Lukose (2006) concludes that people had started dividing vast stretches of paddy fields into 'plots', by the end of seventies when there was a major transformation in patterns

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<sup>18</sup> The Kerala Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act 2007 defines a "goonda" as "a person who indulges in any anti-social activity or promotes or abets any illegal activity which are harmful for the maintenance of the public order directly or indirectly and includes a bootlegger, a counterfeiter, a depredator of environment, a digital data and copy right pirate, a drug offender, a hawala racketeer, a hired ruffian, rowdy, an immoral traffic offender, a loan shark or a property grabber".

and levels of consumption and cost of living<sup>19</sup>. In certain regions acute shortage of labour was felt after gulf migrations. Besides, there was increased pressure on the cooperative sector that provided credit for agriculture after land reforms, towards the end of eighties<sup>20</sup>. This practice got much exaggerated all over Kerala during the structural adjustments of the nineties when agriculture was widely considered ‘un-profitable’ especially in the food producing sectors. Sainath (2013) identifies that the phenomenon in Kerala coincides with much disastrous fall-outs in the form of farmer suicides and agricultural indebtedness in the rest of India.<sup>21</sup> But in the course of such practices much of the existing fields were either water logged or cut off from irrigation. Even though there were minor tussles there was never a concerted opposition, nor general calls to protect agriculture.

At the same time the economic life of the people has been undergoing a major transformation with the disappearance of permanent jobs, diminishing support for agriculture, and the rise in the cost of education and health. Talks at homes and public spaces like *kavalas* (Junctions) reflect these new concerns. The worst of these often get published as ‘human interest stories’ in the media. The media itself had transformed, to be dominated by private visual media by the 1990s<sup>22</sup>. The events in family life like birth, school enrolment, and marriage seem to be gaining new dimensions in thoughts and discussion. For instance, in the case of marriages, there had been shared concerns, cutting across these regions, about the cost of marriage. These have given way to grand feasts<sup>23</sup> and exorbitant dowries of an unprecedented scale. This has been especially so

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<sup>19</sup> Lukose, Ritty., ‘Consuming Globalization: Youth and Gender in Kerala, India’, *Journal of Social History* 38.4: 915-935, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Reports in *Nirakathir*, Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) supplement.

<sup>21</sup> Suicides and indebtedness were reported from Wayanad or Idukki as well. These are regions where people have been more dependent on farming both in the cash crop and food crop sectors. But the tendency was halted to a great extent by symptomatic solutions by leftist governments like institution of Debt Relief Commissions and consequent debt relief measures. Sainath P, ‘Farm Suicide Trends in 2012 Remain Dismal’. *The Hindu*, June 2009, 2013. See also Chandrasekhar, C.P. and Jayati Ghosh, *The Market that Failed: A Decade of Neoliberal Economic Reforms in India*, Leftword Books: New Delhi, 2002; *Agricultural Statistics at a Glance*, 2006, available at <http://agricoop.nic.in/agristatistics.htm> [accessed on: 24 October 2014].

<sup>22</sup> The first private TV Channel, Asianet, commenced operations by the end of 1992 and started transmission by August 1993.

<sup>23</sup> Such feasts until two decades back were organised either in one’s own yard or at one of the relatively open places which were not as compartmentalized, physically. The organisation, the preparation, and the serving, at feasts were all done by friends and acquaintances. Only the most necessary items which were not available locally had to be bought. At present feasts are increasingly outsourced to catering groups or in cases they are not, they don’t involve as much local participation and the resources available locally are fewer.

after the gulf migrations of the seventies. Many in the village have land, but the land is increasingly left fallow, and many have to deal with an acute liquidity crunch. Small savings had been the norm earlier. But whatever remains in such reserves is fast depleting, and the earnings of the older generation as pension are proving inadequate for the new economic life and new needs.

It is in such a context and in the general context of unemployment, even of well qualified people, Aravindan (2006) that the young males of the aforementioned category began straying into new career avenues that surfaced.<sup>24</sup> Thus contemporary forms of brokerage are initiated at the *kavalas* and *chaayakkadas*<sup>25</sup> frequented by the young and the old of the region. These spaces had once been part of the political public sphere. Conversations that took place in such spaces invariably concerned the everyday. These have now become sites of new interventions.

The standard gambit rests on initial queries to identify ‘financial need’. Then the talk moves to certain unrecognised assets that are at hand viz. land which is presently lying fallow but holding immense potential thanks to the imminence of *vikasanam*, and proximity to facilities (ranging from roads to the Airport; banks to the Container Terminal). Even if the land is cultivated, the financial returns would be inadequate to address the new pressures of life. The youngsters with contacts outside the region then seek potential buyers.

The availability of land appears to have gone up. In the local context both parties to a deal could be bound by parameters of prior acquaintance and could be informed of the mutual everyday needs. Those identified as potential sellers may have apprehensions about the deal, and may decide to opt out while their neighbours go ahead with similar deals. In such cases, when the land around has been sold and walled up, the owners of unsold properties could feel cramped for space and restricted by the reorganization of adjacent land. Any productive activity on their land becomes impossible.

In due course, such people get ready to sell their land as well. This is where the young brokers are more successful. They present a case telling the seller that there is no more demand and that the price that they might get is much lower than what they would have

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<sup>24</sup> Aravindan, K P (edn.), *Kerala Padanam* (in Malayalam), KSSP, Thiruvananthapuram, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> These are small village hotels often serving coffee, tea, and a regular set of snacks.

got before. Thus the broker ends up with more commission (usually three percent of one third of the total cost, which is usually advanced by the buyer). Many youngsters earn liquid cash this way and the news spreads among the community of these young brokers. Even when a transaction is not made a ‘token,’ is earned, which is a nominal amount that both the seller and buyer pay informally to the broker.

Brokerage becomes more sophisticated during the second phase. Bigger brokers from elsewhere make their entry. Many of the local brokers become informants for the bigger ones, as the new entrants need local contacts. In the improvised and almost standardized jargon of the trade, the local contact becomes the ‘earth’ (in the sense of ‘Earthing’<sup>26</sup> as in electrical installations). The local person literally *earths* his most accomplished patron. A *Karaar* (deal) is entered into which parties like the seller, the earth, the broker, and the buyer, involve in contexts like ‘familial needs’. Major links in this network are the village or revenue officials who are generally passive accomplices, but turn into local *earths* occasionally. Their familiarity and grip on ‘land records’ add to their value, and their involvement guarantees some extra income. In most cases after a small stint of apprenticeship as *earth*, many of the youngsters graduate as fully fledged brokers who are more mobile and can go in search of land elsewhere. Promotional rhetoric in an intimate local idiom, the ability to annotate new developments within the local context, and familiarity with the local people and their cultural sensitivities lend an edge to this kind of home-grown brokerage.

With experience, local brokerage gains considerable subtlety, and often properties change several hands (*marichuvilkal*) on the strength of semi-formal agreements, before finalization and formal registration of the sale. A particular property may also be showcased for a while as ‘in demand’, for a manipulated price spiral.

By the time of the present land boom, most of the land had been parceled into plots as ready products for the land market and locals generally had become used to the idea of land as commodity. More money began coming in with the arrival of Non Resident Indian money, into the real estate business especially after the nineties. With the flood of money, criminal gangs mushroomed to carry out tasks like the filling and leveling of land. Such activities involved the circumvention of legal restrictions, and hence would have been difficult for the transacting parties to take up on their own. Part of the money involved in land transactions would have to be diverted to such gangs comprising

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<sup>26</sup> Often houses have such visible ‘Earthing’ structures-the term has been localized for long.

unemployed youngsters, and at a later stage, to youngsters who found this to be an attractive career option.

Village officers, government officials, and the police got more incorporated in the process to the extent that such involvement got naturalised to the highest possible extent. Real Estate activities swelled the escalating volumes of money in circulation. Much of such activity being on the wrong side of the law – but enjoying bureaucratic patronage and involvement -- developed into a preferred channel for the circulation of unaccounted money. Of course, the new activities generated concerns, fears, and apprehensions in private and public spaces. The much needed legitimations came from a newly spawned breed of god men/women. They could give a spiritual aura to economic activities and desires of a new kind. They, and their adherents, themselves were immersed in extravagance or dreams and promises of extravagance. Religious assertions, like the resistance movements, are produced out of the needs of changing social relations. Common to all the forms of new religious assertions, whether these be represented by god-women or god-men, community consolidations or spiritual exercises, is the promise of alternative spaces. They offer prophylactic for crisis, social disintegration, decadence or disenchantment in the shape of universal love, sense of solidarity, or promise of moral order. They counterpose spiritual spaces against the social structure.

Kapferer (2005: 9) states that the growth and reinforcement of organisational apparatus gains them state-like potencies with no reciprocal obligations and hides the exclusion of people *de facto* and *de jure* from the decision making process, through forms of inclusions.<sup>27</sup> Foucault (1979, 1978) further advances the argument that the spiritual exercises and the arts of living discipline the crisis ridden social body by asocial rationalisations and optimisation of time and space, whereby they exercise bio-power.<sup>28</sup> They school people in self-government that produces individuated bodies that fit into new demands of work and consumption. The liminoid states of new religiosities legitimate social structures through opposition.

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<sup>27</sup> Kapferer Bruce, 'New Formations of Power, the Oligarchic Corporate State, and Anthropological Ideological Discourse', *Anthropological Theory*. Sage Publications, 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, Trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage Books, 1978; Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Of late, the State Government has taken steps to amend the land registration rules in order to stem the flow of black money and the corrupt practices prevailing in land registration cases. Until recently primary contract documents did not need to be presented at the time of registration. But according to the new amendments to land registration rules, the primary contract document should compulsorily be presented. This would bring the actual transaction value into the government records. A fair price categorization has been made to lay down market value brackets for land. The indices for the determination of fair price include the nature of land, and proximity to different kinds of roads. The new classification has been published and made available to Village Offices for verification and monitoring.

The rise in the number of criminal gangs, popularized by dailies, the unaffordable prices of land and material, along with the efforts to ‘order’ the process (fixing fair values and new registration rules) have triggered the consolidation of all the parties involved in land deals. These networks, by virtue of their inclination to violence, have attracted the appellation, ‘mafia,’ which has been adopted and standardized by the media, often with romantic overtones. Many of the major builders and corporate groups have got hold of large tracts of land through well functioning networks of brokers. The boom has reconfigured land and priced it beyond the reach of most people. Even the fixation of the fair price is attributed by some to a master plan. But this may be discounted as it does not, in any manner, figure in the complex narrative constituted by the ingenious consolidation of the different players that constitute the land *mafia*.

In this situation criminalization itself becomes a portrayal of what went wrong with the system, very much like portrayals of the recent recession as ‘what went wrong’<sup>29</sup>. Thus just as markets need correction in the shape of state resources, criminalization necessitates correction in the form of ordering and security. In many ways brokerage in the way portrayed here represents a liminal phase between the crisis of the state as it has been (in the context of neoliberal centralisations and resource constraints) and the corrective (re-ordering of the state within the neo liberal order). The everyday aspect of the ‘caucus’, that becomes ‘mafia’, constitutes a pool of protocols or “*normative communitas*”<sup>30</sup> which involves a necessary distancing from any ideological implication

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<sup>29</sup> The Crash: What Went Wrong? The Washington Post examines the origins of the economic crisis, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/business/risk/index.html?sid=ST2008121600014> [accessed on: 24 October 2014].

<sup>30</sup> Turner, Victor. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1975.

in the political public sphere while still drawing on social capital in the face of crisis/change. Besides, it refers to one of the sites where the new state form, in the making, certainly draws its logic and legitimation from.

It is often the myths woven around the major signifiers, Turner (1969) argues, the institutional apparatus or the liminoid phase they offer the urban reforms those take the form of barricades.<sup>31</sup> “The liminoid phase into which people withdraw voluntarily from their everyday life and thereby escape an alienating social system establishes a state akin to *communitas*” further asserts Turner (1992).<sup>32</sup> So here a full unmediated communication is established or a communion attained, with the social system. Thus the ‘individual’ is often isolated from the society and schooled for the outside in these liminoid spaces. Kapferer (2005: 8-10) suggests here, the states of exception and exclusive spaces become sovereign spaces, that instead of augmenting the existing state apparatus, erect corporate bodies with state-like potencies.<sup>33</sup> In the process these sovereign spaces constitute themselves outside the existing order, and in this exceptional state create zones of indistinction between outside and inside, claims Agamben (1998: 174-177).<sup>34</sup> It is a “fundamental localization” which is not limited to inside or outside normality or chaos, but the threshold between the two. The individual is sought to be acclimatized to the alienating outside while constituting himself/herself in this exceptional state.

With the breakdown of relationship with the signifiers, people crave for new rationalizations in order to constitute themselves in the given social structure. The omniscient circulation of wealth, materialisation of capital and futuristic discourse of urbanisation has created new standards of lifestyle. The market has taken the products further away from the relations of production. Advertisements and media work together to manufacture needs which, in the context of alienation from production, need justifications.

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<sup>31</sup> Turner, Victor, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Chicago: Aldine, 1969.

<sup>32</sup> Turner, Victor, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols*, Edith Turner (edn.), London: The University of Arizona Press, 1992.

<sup>33</sup> Kapferer Bruce, ‘Introduction: Oligarchic Corporations and New State Formations’, *Oligarchs and Oligopolies*, Bruce Kapferer (edn.), New York: Berghahn Books, 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Daniel Hellen Roazen (Trans.), California: Stanford University Press, 1998.

What distinguished<sup>35</sup> the political public sphere has been the positioning of public against private interests. This has been a legacy of political movements, spearheaded by the left that effectively led to redistribution of wealth as well as the institution of state forms that have been pitched against a powerful center. *Jeevitha Sookhika Prashnangal* (roughly social welfare index), the rational use of machinery, interest free loans for various purposes, etc. had been frequent topics of discussions in the public sphere. The primacy of such issues had been taken for granted in a social situation that facilitated a certain level of generality thanks to mutually encompassing issues that are extensive with the generation of the political public sphere - says Kideckel (2009).<sup>36</sup>

The practice of life on everyday basis is seldom a transaction with transnational or globalised conditions as such, mentions Sassen (2003:41-66), as with signifiers that materialise for many against a non-responsive/representative state.<sup>37</sup> Protocols of life materialise in spaces where erstwhile 'ideas of state' become alienated from the 'practices of state'. As a result, the left formations that have historically played the most significant role in the production of those ideas are re-evaluated. Their stances can be deemed archaic while continuing to draw on the material effects. The complaints and criticism of the state against constraints imposed by the center, become subject of coffee table wit. The state is presented as a parasite for the already burdened center.

During the liminal phase, with ideas dissociated from the practices, the state gets evaluated in accordance to the ways individuals are related to new capital and institutions and moreover to chains of expectations. Processes like brokerage also fall in this category. Trade union offices often become facades in the context of the changing face of labour. Those who are members of the union are more often associates of processes like real estate, rather than concerns of better wages or improved work environment. The real labour has been transferred to migrants from other states<sup>38</sup>. This is a function of the de-territorialising force of capital. This force is about a gamut of processes whereby actors are disembedded or "uprooted" from respective local contexts

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<sup>35</sup> Unlike other places where the public private contrasts is not evaluated or emphasised to such a degree, See Kideckel, David A, 'Citizenship Discourse, Globalization, and Protest: A Postsocialist-Postcolonial Comparison', *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 27(2): Fall, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Sassen, Saskia. 'The Repositioning of Citizenship'. *The New Centennial Review*, 3(2) 2003: 41-66.

<sup>38</sup> On the other hand large labour pools of Malayalis in BPOs, Gulf States, privatized finance etc. exist as fragmented entities, dissociated from any kind of effective unionization.

and restructured across space and time. The real estate activities that unravel at present becomes important for explaining and analysing de-territorialisations in the contemporary global context. The significance comes out of the coming together of immobile spatial fixities and the fluid capital that moves in and out of the process, that redistributes actors in their new roles and determinations. According to *The Communist Manifesto*, capitalism dissolves all existing forms. In other words, as Zizek (2010) puts this, no one relies any more on “mechanisms for interpellation of individuals to subjects”.<sup>39</sup> There is an institutionalisation of a value neutral free play of ideas or a “blind drive with no symbolic value-form attached”. In the contemporary period, a similar situation is in the making, especially with the severance of state, from the ideas that once enlivened it as a logical extension of the political public sphere.

People espouse signifiers that signify virtualities and “re-create” themselves often against the ideas that once animated the public sphere (the left, protests, trade unionism etc.). Those who were interpellated as subjects to a mutually encompassing public sphere are now bereft of any such holistic order. Thus *vikasanam* or a new ‘city’ can mean different things for different groups and most are immersed in a world of meanings with self-generating truths from everyday lives (as brokers, aspirant parents, contractors, future workers in SEZs etc.). In its neoliberal predicament, exceptional urban orders, through everyday truths, people get ever more incorporated in the corporate processes.<sup>40</sup>

The systematic corporate takeover of state has been typical of the larger Indian context, whether as the metamorphosis of feudal structures that persisted or corporate inheritance of the metropolitan nerve centers in the North. Monbiot (2000) Argues that the neoliberalising Indian state had already been held captive<sup>41</sup> mainly by the corporate structures that empowered themselves during the latter half of 1900s (Tatas, Birlas, Reliance)<sup>42</sup>. Kapferer (2005) concludes that the Indian state reached a compact with

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<sup>39</sup> Zizek, Slavoj, *Living in the End Times*, Verso, 2010.

<sup>40</sup> I draw on Bruce Kapferer’s (2005) work on the subject in a chapter that discusses the theoretical premises.

<sup>41</sup> Monbiot, George, *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain*, Macmillan, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Emergent capitalists during the pre-independence days, like Samuel Aron or S.S.Codder, never went on to have much of a role in the way the emergent politics shaped the state structure in Kerala, as the Ambanis for instance did. On the other hand the left movements and aspects of reform movements (SNDP for instance was registered under companies act) generated an environment of redistribution and egalitarianism that set a platform for much of the later processes. Gulf migrations post seventies (Lukose 2009) and the post nineties

corporate interests in such spaces. But since the nineties the corporate form nevertheless has been getting ever more entrenched and breaking out of earlier bounds (Kapferer, 2005). In the context the spaces that once got left out of post-colonial state orders are getting arrogated starting from the margins (remote Tribal zones of Orissa or Mining fields in Karnataka). There Das (2004: 227) states: the “infelicities and excuses on the part of the state” become violent exercises of corporate sovereignty.<sup>43</sup>

Processes unfurl distinctly from other places in India where people confront urban processes. Here the state has never been an alien entity. Instead the everyday functioning of state in localities like the ones studied has been moderated by a political public sphere. So when a new order becomes instituted in the urbanisation drive there is no need for an “excuse”. Instead with the fragmentation of mutually encompassing political processes, the complaints are more of “being left out”. The social orders across places are getting ever more fragmented and eviscerated of anything that suggests an interpellation of people as subjects. Instead as part of a liminal and exceptional order, people device new means of living like contemporary brokerage that draw on their placed-ness, but ‘earth’ with expectations.

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situation has certainly produced images like the ‘entrepreneur’ often against the erstwhile associations with state.

<sup>43</sup> Das, Veena and Deborah Poole (eds.), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, School of American Research Press: Santa Fe, 2004.