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THE NATURAL COOPERATIVES IN THE MUSLIM WORLD: TRADITIONAL ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: This study investigates the structure and socioeconomic roles of traditional entrepreneurial communities in the Muslim world by comparing them with modern cooperative models. Unlike Western cooperatives, which emerged to counter market-induced social disintegration, Muslim communities have sustained themselves through kinship networks, shared values, and voluntary socioeconomic justice. These communities exhibit key characteristics aligned with cooperative aims, including family-business integration, mutual financial support, job creation, and community well-being. However, contemporary research on these communities is limited and often outdated, in contrast to extensive studies on ethnic entrepreneurship in non-Muslim contexts. This study advocates for more exploratory research to understand how Muslim entrepreneurial communities maintain social integration, distributive justice, and Islamic values in their socioeconomic frameworks. It proposes research questions on community organization, economic contributions, welfare mechanisms, and modernization impacts, offering a roadmap for future research to inform policies and community development. By examining the resilience and adaptability of these communities, this study aims to enhance the understanding of Islamic socioeconomic models and their contemporary relevance. These findings highlight the distinctive features of these communities as naturally occurring cooperatives, reflecting their unique cultural, religious, and social contexts. This research advances theoretical discussions in Islamic economics, economic sociology, and cooperative studies, while offering insights into fostering economic inclusivity and social cohesion in diverse settings.

Keywords: *Cooperatives, entrepreneurial communities, ethnic entrepreneurship, kinship networks, social capital, Ottoman guilds.*

Abstrak: Studi ini meneliti struktur dan peran sosial ekonomi komunitas wirausaha tradisional di dunia Muslim dengan membandingkannya dengan model koperasi modern, terutama yang berasal dari dunia Barat pasca industri. Tidak seperti koperasi Barat, yang didirikan untuk melawan disintegrasi sosial yang disebabkan oleh pasar, komunitas Muslim mempertahankan diri mereka sendiri melalui jaringan kekerabatan, nilai-nilai yang dianut bersama, dan keadilan sosio-ekonomi yang bersifat sukarela. Dengan demikian, koperasi Muslim lebih berakar secara organik pada tradisi lokal daripada koperasi Barat. Karakteristik utama dari komunitas-komunitas ini meliputi integrasi bisnis-keluarga, dukungan finansial timbal balik, penciptaan lapangan kerja, dan kesejahteraan masyarakat, yang sejalan dengan tujuan koperasi. Terlepas dari manfaatnya, penelitian kontemporer mengenai komunitas-komunitas ini masih terbatas dan sering kali sudah ketinggalan zaman, dengan fokus pada wilayah-wilayah tertentu. Hal ini berbeda dengan penelitian ekstensif tentang kewirausahaan etnis dalam konteks non-Muslim. Studi ini mengadvokasi penelitian yang lebih eksploratif untuk memahami bagaimana komunitas wirausaha Muslim mempertahankan integrasi sosial, keadilan distributif, dan nilai-nilai Islam dalam kerangka kerja sosio-ekonomi mereka.

Studi ini menyajikan sejumlah usulan pertanyaan riset mengenai organisasi masyarakat, kontribusi ekonomi, mekanisme kesejahteraan, dan dampak modernisasi, serta menawarkan peta jalan bagi penelitian di masa depan untuk menginformasikan kebijakan dan pengembangan masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman tentang model sosio-ekonomi Islam dan relevansinya di masa kini dengan mengkaji ketahanan dan kemampuan beradaptasi masyarakat.

Kata kunci: *Komunitas kewirausahaan, koperasi, modal sosial, jaringan kekerabatan kewirausahaan etnis, serikat Ottoman.*

INTRODUCTION

Traditional entrepreneurial communities in the Muslim world, particularly Pakistan, have functioned as naturally occurring cooperatives within their socioeconomic structures.[1] These communities have evolved through kinship networks, shared values, and voluntary social and economic justice practices.[2] In contrast, cooperatives in the Western world emerged as institutional responses to the socioeconomic disintegration caused by market forces during the industrialization era.[3] The integrative nature of these entrepreneurial communities in the Muslim world has enabled them to maintain social cohesion and economic inclusivity without social fragmentation, which often characterizes industrialized societies.[4]

Despite the significant social and economic contributions of these communities, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the mechanisms that enable them to sustain their socioeconomic status. Much of the existing research has focused on non-Muslim ethnic communities, leaving the internal dynamics of Muslim entrepreneurial communities underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining these communities in greater depth and comparing their inherent characteristics with those of the traditional cooperative models.

The continued relevance of these communities lies not only in their ability to maintain social and economic cohesion but also in their adherence to Islamic values that underpin their socio-economic practices. Understanding these dynamics is

[1] Chin Tee Suan, Anwar Khan, and Muhammad Anwar, 'ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: CAN CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR PLAY ITS ROLE?', *Gomal University Journal of Research* 38, no. 01 (31 March 2022): 11–26, https://doi.org/10.51380/gujr-38-01-02.

[2] Gurpreet Bal, 'Communities and Culture in Entrepreneurship Development in India', *The Journal of Entrepreneurship* 7, no. 2 (September 1998): 171–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/097135579800700203.

[3] Marc Schneiberg, Marissa King, and Thomas Smith, 'Social Movements and Organizational Form: Cooperative Alternatives to Corporations in the American Insurance, Dairy, and Grain Industries', *American Sociological Review* 73, no. 4 (August 2008): 635–67, https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240807300406.

[4] Anna Pilková, Zuzana Jančovičová, and Zuzana Kovačičová, 'Inclusive Entrepreneurship in Visegrad4 Countries', *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 220 (May 2016): 312–20, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.504.

crucial, as it offers insights into how these communities contribute to national economies while navigating the challenges posed by globalization and modernization.

However, research on traditional entrepreneurial communities in the Muslim world is limited. A few papers referenced earlier were found after extensive searches. Papanek[5], Levin[6], and Werbner[7] have produced the most comprehensive work on the organization of these communities, although their work is now decades old. More recent studies include Dobbin's[8] examination of Asian entrepreneurial minorities, which focuses primarily on the Ismaili community; recent works by Javaid[9] have explored some of these communities in detail. Except for Javaid, no comparable studies exist on the Dehliwala and Chinioti communities in Pakistan, which are similarly recognized for their entrepreneurial orientations. Menning's[10] work is also noteworthy, but it offers a more general analysis of ethnic groups in Surat City, India, rather than focusing exclusively on a Muslim community (e.g., the Memon). Another recent study explored the dynamics of the Memon community in detail.[11]

Given the significant socioeconomic impact of these traditional communities in the Muslim world, the lack of substantial research on their internal dynamics contrasts with extensive work conducted on non-Muslim ethnic communities in the West.[12] This highlights the need for in-depth, exploratory, and perhaps longitudinal ethnographic and phenomenological research to understand how these communities'

[5] 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim Separatism, Entrepreneurship, and Partial Modernization', *Economic Development & Cultural Change* 21, no. 1 (1972): 1–32.

[6] 'The Upper Bourgeoisie from the Muslim Commercial Community of Memons in Pakistan, 1947 to 1971', *Asian Survey* 14, no. 3 (1974): 231–43.

[7] 'The Organization of Giving and Ethnic Elites: Voluntary Associations among Manchester Pakistanis', *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 8, no. 3 (1985): 368–88.

[8] *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities: Conjoint Communities in the Making of the World-Economy, 1570 - 1940* (London: RoutledgeCurzon Ltd., 1996).

[9] Omar Javaid, Aamir Feroz Shamsi, and Irfan Hyder, 'Religious Entrepreneurial Communities as a Solution for Socioeconomic Injustice', *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy* 14, no. 3 (1 January 2020): 415–46; Omar Javaid, Aamir Shamsi, and Irfan Hyder, 'Building a Theoretical Model of Socially Sustainable Entrepreneurship Through Comparative Case Analysis of Ethnic Entrepreneurial Communities' (Institute of Business Management, 2018).

[10] 'Trust, Entrepreneurship and Development in Surat City, India', *Ethnos* 62, no. 1–2 (1997): 59–90.

[11] Leo-paul Dana et al., 'Family, Community, and Ethnic Capital as Entrepreneurial Resources: Toward an Integrated Model', *Journal of Small Business Management* 0, no. 0 (2019): 1–21.

[12] Howard E. Aldrich and Roger Waldinger, 'Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship', *Annual Review of Sociology* 16, no. 1 (1990): 111–35; Sharon M. Danes et al., 'The Effects of Ethnicity, Families and Culture on Entrepreneurial Experience: An Extension of Sustainable Family Business Theory', *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship* 13, no. 03 (2008): 229–68; Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner, 'Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on the Social Determinants of Economic Action', *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 6 (1993): 1320–50; Roger Waldinger, Howard E. Aldrich, and R Ward, 'Ethnic Entrepreneurs', *Entrepreneurship a Social Science View*, 2000, 356–88.

foster prosperity, ensure distributive justice, maintain sustainable internal harmony, and embed Islamic socioeconomic principles within their cultural practices.

This study aims to address a gap in the literature by examining traditional entrepreneurial communities in the Muslim world, particularly in Pakistan, and comparing them with Western cooperative models. It investigates how these communities maintain social cohesion, economic inclusivity, and distributive justice grounded in Islamic socioeconomic values. The research proposes questions to guide future studies on their organizational structures, economic contributions, and responses to modern challenges.

The study engages with cooperative economics by advocating for a nuanced understanding that considers cultural, religious, and economic contexts. It contributes to debates in Islamic economics, economic sociology, and development studies, providing a theoretical framework that offers practical insights for policymakers promoting sustainable development in culturally diverse settings. By highlighting the unique features of traditional entrepreneurial communities in Pakistan, it underscores the importance of culturally sensitive economic organization and community resilience, offering new perspectives for scholars and practitioners.

Section 2 examines the historical context and objectives of European cooperatives. Following this, the focus shifts to traditional entrepreneurial communities, presenting a counterpoint in their development and ideological bases. Section 3 details the characteristics, historical contexts, and ideological foundations of these communities. With this understanding, Section 4 conducts a comparative analysis of European cooperatives and traditional entrepreneurial communities, identifying similarities, differences, and future research directions. The final section offers conclusions and broader implications for the study of collective economic structures.

DISCUSSION

1.1 Origins of cooperatives and their present form

Before the onset of European industrialization, production was primarily organized around kinship-based units, such as clans or extended households, a system that persisted for millennia.[13] These kinship-based guilds, which focus on domestic

[13] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001); Michael Hudson, 'Entrepreneurs: From the near Eastern Takeoff to the Roman Collapse', in *The Invention of Enterprise: Entrepreneurship from Ancient Mesopotamia to Modern Times*, ed. Davis S. Landes, Joel Mokyr, and William J. Baumol (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 8–39; Cornelia Wunsch, 'Neo-Babylonian Entrepreneurs', in *The Invention of Enterprise: Entrepreneurship from Ancient Mesopotamia to Modern Times*, ed. David S. Landes, Joel Mokyr, and William J. Baumol (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 50–61.

consumption, can be conceptualized as early forms of natural cooperatives.[14] In Europe, however, the rise of the Church challenged the clan system, threatening the Church's political authority. A critical change occurred with the alteration of property ownership laws, beginning as early as 1066, when women were allowed to own property and enter into independent contracts.[15] This shift in property rights undermined the shared ownership of land, thus removing a critical element that bound the clan system. While the clan system disintegrated, the family structure remained largely intact, transitioning into a feudal system that continued to organize production according to the prevailing social order.

The formal influence of the family on production persisted until the Poor Law of 1834 in Europe. This legislative change forced many to submit to the demands of the market for their livelihood, thus enabling the capitalist market structure to exert a dominant influence over the traditional social order[16] The rise of market society eroded traditional social orders, with market forces gradually colonizing, deconstructing, and reconstructing the sociocultural and political landscape to serve economic interests. Neoliberal ideology, which emerged alongside these developments, advocated minimal state intervention in the market, allowing the "invisible hand" to dictate the allocation of goods and services. This transformation occurred in parallel with the rise of transnational corporations, such as the East India Company, which became powerful enough to influence political orders in their favor.[17] These corporations prioritize shareholder interests, even when these interests conflict with those of labor, the public, or the environment, leading to critiques of their influence as imperialistic, colonizing, and socially disintegrating.[18]

The emergence of cooperatives in America has followed a parallel trajectory. According to Curl, Indigenous communities in America are inherently oriented towards collectivism, cooperation, and communalism.[19] Economic participation is deeply embedded in the social fabric, with family functioning as the fundamental social unit. Within these units, all members shared the responsibility of producing essential goods for communal use. Extended families combine to form clans that operate as natural cooperative units, with tribes comprising multiple clans and family

[14] John Curl, *For All the People: The Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2009).

[15] Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2011).

[16] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.

[17] J. Kornbluth et al., *Inequality for All*, 2013.

[18] Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (USA: Basic Books, 1983); Russell Keat, 'Colonisation by the Market: Walzer on Recognition', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (March 1997): 93–107; Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.

[19] *For All the People: The Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America*.

groups. Notably, the concept of individual private property was foreign to these communities as tools and resources were commonly shared to ensure collective survival. Cooperation extended to various aspects of life, including agriculture, where collective farming practices are prevalent and remain among indigenous tribes today.[20]

The arrival of capitalist structures in America introduced significant changes. Indigenous communities that retained their land and collective practices were among the first to adopt cooperative enterprises as defense mechanisms against the encroachment of capitalist values. These cooperatives were organized along both traditional and modern lines, serving as a means of protecting the natural social order from the disruptive forces of modern capitalism. Before capitalism took root in America, production was decentralized, with workers enjoying relative freedom from wage labor. However, as capitalist systems became dominant, production became concentrated in fewer hands, stripping workers of their autonomy and subjecting them to the exploitative dynamics of wage labor. This shift also disrupted the traditional master-apprentice relationship, replacing it with a more hierarchical boss-worker dynamic, further alienating workers from their communities and exacerbating their psychological and spiritual deprivation.[21]

Therefore, the formation of cooperatives was a reaction to the socioeconomic dislocation experienced by workers in both Europe and America. Cooperatives offered a platform for wage earners and independent workers to come together, bridging classes, dividing and transforming their economic conditions from dependency to autonomy. These cooperatives provide practical advantages, allowing individuals to resist the adverse effects of modernity, urbanization, and secular values while promoting economic, social, and cultural objectives through a democratic and participatory structure.[22]

2.1 What are these cooperatives?

Cooperatives are defined as independent associations of individuals who voluntarily collaborate to achieve shared economic, social, or cultural goals. They operate using a bottom-up approach, with members electing managers and board members who make key decisions regarding the organization's operations. Cooperatives are participatory enterprises that aim to obtain mutual benefits that are equally

[20] Curl.

[21] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.

[22] Brett Fairbairn, 'History of Cooperatives', in *Cooperatives and Local Development: Theory and Applications for the 21st Century*, ed. Christopher D. Merrett and Norman Walzer (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004), 23–51.

distributed among members.[23] According to the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), cooperatives are businesses owned and managed by their members, whether customers, employees, or residents, who have an equal say in the business's operations and share profits. Cooperatives, driven by values rather than profit alone, adhere to internationally agreed principles and work collectively to build a better world through cooperation.[24]

In 1996, the ICA issued a revised declaration on core values and principles for running cooperatives. These values are 'self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, solidarity, honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. The seven principles are as follows:

1. "Voluntary and Open Membership": This implies anyone can join a cooperative without any kind of "gender, social, racial, political or religious" discrimination.
2. "Democratic Member Control": The decision-making of a cooperative occurs in a bottom-up or participatory fashion. Key decisions regarding the selection of representatives, managers, and board members were made through voting. Each member had equal voting rights.
3. "Member Economic Participation": Each member equitably contributes and owns a share in the cooperative accordingly. A certain percentage of the capital is a "common property of a cooperative." Surplus funds or profits will be utilized for developing the cooperative, setting up reserves of a common pool of funds, and distribution among the members in "proportion to their transactions with the cooperative." "
4. "Autonomy and Independence": Cooperatives are not answerable to anyone, any influence of the third party, let it be a government or a financial institution, will be by the "democratic control by their members" and with an intent to "maintain their cooperative autonomy"
5. "Education, Training, and Information": All members and employees of a cooperative may receive training as and when required. The purpose is to make everyone capable of contributing to the development of the cooperative that they are part of.
6. "Cooperation among Cooperatives": A cooperative cooperates with other cooperatives also and other stakeholders anywhere in the world.

[23] Millán Diaz-Foncea and Carmen Marcuello, 'Entrepreneurs and the Context of Cooperative Organizations: A Definition of Cooperative Entrepreneur', *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences* 30, no. 4 (2013): 238–51.

[24] ICA and Euricse, 'Exploring the Co-Operative Economy', 2015.

7. "Concern for Community": Align with the will of the members a cooperative contributes towards the "sustainable development of their communities."

Globally, cooperatives serve their members in a variety of ways by providing products and services related to the agriculture and food industry, banking and finance, insurance and mutual funds, wholesale and retail trade, utilities, health and social care, and so on.[25] Because the objective of a cooperative is not to maximize profitability for shareholders, the benefits of cooperative activities are equally distributed as per the agreed-upon rules among members. Co-ops have shown resilience even during times of economic crisis, perhaps due to their non-reliance on global financial markets.[26] Globally, cooperatives employ 250 million people and generate revenue of up to 2.2 trillion of dollars.[27]

3.1 Muslim entrepreneurial communities as cooperatives

In Islamic tradition, economic activity is inherently intertwined with social, cultural, and religious life, operating under the auspices of both family and religious institutions.[28] Unlike market-driven individualism, which characterizes modern capitalist economies, Islamic societies historically maintained an economic system subordinate to a broader social order, where the pursuit of material wealth was not the primary objective of existence. This model, which was deeply embedded in both kinship and communal structures, can be traced back to ancient civilizations, such as those in Mesopotamia, Babylon, and China, where production was organized to serve the needs of families and communities rather than markets.[29]

When established by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Islamic society reinforced, rather than disrupted, this natural socio-economic order. Upon the Prophet's migration to Madinah, his first institutional interventions were social and familial, such as arranging marriages between migrants and local inhabitants, followed by the construction of the mosque, which became a center for both religious and social life. After ensuring social cohesion, the next focus was on economic independence through the establishment of markets, which enabled the Muslim community to maintain self-sufficiency.[30] One of the most enduring features of Islamic economic life was the

[25] ICA and Euricse.

[26] Johnston Birchall and Lou Hammond Ketilson, 'Resilience of the Cooperative Business Model in Times of Crisis', *Sustainable Enterprise Programme* (Italy: International Labour Organization, 2009), https://doi.org/Finance.

[27] ICA, 'Cooperative Identity, Values & Principles', 2016.

[28] David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2011).

[29] Wunsch, 'Neo-Babylonian Entrepreneurs'; Hudson, 'Entrepreneurs: From the near Eastern Takeoff to the Roman Collapse'; Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.

[30] Omar Javaid, 'The Original Socio-Cultural and Economic Context for Practicing Shirkat-Ul-Aqd', *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education* 6, no. 4 (2015): 371.

establishment of guilds, which was especially prominent during the Ottoman Empire. These guilds were family driven, egalitarian in structure, and designed to suppress internal competition, focusing instead on communal welfare.[31] This system, which is deeply connected to both religious and social practices, promotes spiritual value over material success.[32] Market actors, known as the bazaaris, emphasized piety and religious participation as markers of social standing rather than wealth accumulation.[33]

The guilds produced goods primarily for domestic consumption, and their members often shared common interests, values, and sociocultural practices. For example, Ottoman guilds are known to organize communal activities, including weddings and funerals, thereby strengthening the social bonds between members.[34] These economic and social structures were underpinned by interfamily unions such as arranged marriages, which reinforced solidarity within and between guilds. The guild apprenticeship system was often hereditary, with sons following their fathers in the same trade, a practice that ensured the continuity of family business across generations.[35] This familial and community-oriented approach to economic organization mirrors the cooperative model, as described by Curl.[36]

In this sense, Muslim guilds can be viewed as naturally occurring cooperatives, functioning not only to meet the economic needs of their members but also to maintain social and spiritual bonds. Guilds, much like the European cooperatives that emerged later, offered a buffer against the disruptions of market forces, providing social and economic stability to their members. This system, characterized by its integration of economic activity within a broader social and cultural framework, persists throughout Islamic history and continues to exist in some form today. The Islamic market system, with its emphasis on family driven guilds and communal welfare, presents an organic cooperative model within the Muslim world in contrast to the market-driven cooperatives of Europe. It possesses a deeply embedded communal ethic that values social responsibility over individual gains, making it a unique alternative to capitalist

[31] Eunjeong Yi, *Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul: Fluidity and Leverage*, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage,* (Leiden, Netherlands, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2004).

[32] Javaid, 'The Original Socio-Cultural and Economic Context for Practicing Shirkat-Ul-Aqd'.

[33] Mohammad Gharipour, 'The Culture and Politics of Commerce: Bazaars in the Islamic World', in *The Bazaar in the Islamic City: Design, Culture and History*, ed. Mohammad Gharipour (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012).

[34] Gharipour.

[35] Yi, *Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul: Fluidity and Leverage*; Amnon Cohen, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage: Politics, Society and Economy*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi and Halil Inalcik, vol. 1 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2001).

[36] *For All the People: The Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America*.

market order. Such family-oriented entrepreneurial communities still exist in Muslim-majority regions today, that shows the continuity of this socio-economic tradition.

Entrepreneurial communities with characteristics similar to those previously discussed are still found across the Muslim world. For instance, in South Asia, ethnic groups such as Memon, Dehliwala, Chinioti, Dawoodi Bohra, and Ismaili communities follow comparable patterns in organizing business, family, and community life. Papanek notes that these communities exhibit a high degree of versatility, with members occupying roles ranging from "street hawkers to company presidents." [37] While certain communities might exhibit a propensity towards specific industries, such as textiles or grains, they are notably ascriptive, allowing for significant social mobility within their ranks. Unlike many business networks that operate under rigid class structures, these entrepreneurial communities generally possess an inclusive environment in which any member, regardless of socioeconomic background, can pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. Entry into these business ecosystems is facilitated by a culture of community support, including access to financial resources, social capital, market information, and connections with suppliers and customers, thus making self-employment an attractive and viable career option. This level of support facilitates continuous creation of opportunities within a community.[38]

3.2.1 The Family-Business Nexus

Strong family ties are not only central to these communities' social organization but are also foundational to their business success. As Levin documents, the members of Pakistan, for example, maintain deep familial bonds that extend into their business ventures.[39] Family members often play key management roles in businesses owned by their relatives, creating an alignment between social and commercial interests. For example, Levine observed that owners of Karachi-based Adamjee and Bawany enterprises have long been connected through familial ties.[40] This overlap between familial and business relationships ensures that the well-being of the family is directly tied to business prosperity. Papanek also notes that traditional customs, such as arranged marriages within a group, significantly influence the ownership and inheritance of assets, often reinforcing conservative views about gender roles and

[37] 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim Separatism, Entrepreneurship, and Partial Modernization'.

[38] Javaid, Shamsi, and Hyder, 'Religious Entrepreneurial Communities as a Solution for Socioeconomic Injustice', 1 January 2020.

[39] 'The Upper Bourgeoisie from the Muslim Commercial Community of Memons in Pakistan, 1947 to 1971'.

[40] Ross Levine, *Financial Development and Economic Growth: Views and Agenda*, Policy Research Working Papers (The World Bank, 1999), https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-1678.

education. [41] Moreover, business ventures in these communities are not solely profit-driven, but deeply embedded within the fabric of their social and religious lives. Levin argues that in communities such as the Memons, a "reputation for being pious Muslims" contributes more to their commercial success than material wealth alone. [42] This observation resonates with Gharipour's study of Ottoman bazaars, where traders were recognized more for their religiosity than their wealth. [43]

3.2.2 Financial Support for Business

Basu emphasizes that the long-term success of entrepreneurial ventures in these communities' hinges on access to informal sources of capital, primarily through personal and family networks. In addition, community members benefit from the informal flow of information, connections, and market intelligence shared among those in the same line of business. Similarly, the Bohra community provides financial support to entrepreneurs, particularly during the early stages of business development. [44] Loans are often offered under extremely favorable conditions, funded by a pool of resources established by successful community entrepreneurs. In some cases, these funds are administered according to directives from the community's religious authorities, further solidifying the ties between economic and social obligations.[45] Papanek reinforces this point by highlighting the importance of community-based credit networks. These networks not only provide entrepreneurs with capital but also help establish their credibility when dealing with external financial institutions.[46] Similarly, Menning describes how entrepreneurial communities in Surat, India favor informal financial and information support networks based on kinship and caste ties over more formal and impersonal systems of external financing and organization.[47]

3.2.3 Employment Generation, Training, and Information Exchange

In many of these communities, younger members are first integrated into the workforce through employment in businesses owned by the wealthier members. Over time, younger individuals acquire the skills and experience necessary to assume

[41] 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim Separatism, Entrepreneurship, and Partial Modernization'.

[42] 'The Upper Bourgeoisie from the Muslim Commercial Community of Memons in Pakistan, 1947 to 1971'.

[43] 'The Culture and Politics of Commerce: Bazaars in the Islamic World'.

[44] Natalie Pang et al., 'Developing Virtual Social Communities: Lessons Drawn from Two Indian Social Communities', in *The Fourth International Conference on Creative Content Technologies,* 2012, 56–62.

[45] Javaid, Shamsi, and Hyder, 'Religious Entrepreneurial Communities as a Solution for Socioeconomic Injustice', 1 January 2020.

[46] 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim Separatism, Entrepreneurship, and Partial Modernization'.

[47] 'Trust, Entrepreneurship and Development in Surat City, India'.

entrepreneurial roles. Papanek emphasizes the significance of this intra-community training system, noting the "continuous supply of manpower for business occupations."[48] This internal development model reflects a broader class inclusivity trend within these entrepreneurial networks. Such systems ensure that wealth and opportunity are not confined to the elite, but extend to various socioeconomic strata within the community. Lewis reported a similar phenomenon occurring centuries earlier within Ottoman guilds, suggesting a continuity of communal spirit inspired by Islamic teachings.[49] Bohra entrepreneurs play a macroeconomic role by creating employment opportunities in the region where they reside, such as India, Pakistan, and other places in the world.[50] Additionally, Sofer and Schnell observed that Arab entrepreneurs in Lower Galilee often rely on family labor, even at reduced wages, as a means of optimizing cash flows and maintaining business stability. [51]

3.2.4 Concern for the Community

A distinguishing feature of these entrepreneurial communities is the sense of obligation felt by wealthier members to support the less-privileged. Papanek argues that this is not merely a voluntary act of charity but a "definite obligation" placed upon the affluent. [52] This community-wide expectation often extends to business leaders, who are not only responsible for their firms but are also expected to preside over community institutions and mediate disputes. For instance, the Ismaili community exemplifies this collective responsibility model. Papanek describes the Jubilee insurance of Aga Khan, where funds collected from followers were invested in community credit cooperatives, thus promoting economic growth within the group.[53] The Bohra community's financial security system provides interest-free loans to community members, allowing them to navigate financial hardships or start new businesses.[54] By avoiding interest-bearing loans and adhering to Islamic principles,

[48] 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim Separatism, Entrepreneurship, and Partial Modernization'.

[49] 'The Islamic Guilds', *The Economic History Review* 8, no. 1 (1937): 20–37.

[50] Edwina Pio, 'Islamic Sisters: Spirituality and Ethnic Entrepreneurship in Sweden', *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* 29, no. 1 (2010): 113–30, https://doi.org/10.1108/02610151011019246.

[51] 'Ethnic Entrepreneurship and Embeddedness: The Case of Lower Galilee', in *Proximity, Distance and Diversity: Issues on Economic Interaction and Local Development*, 2005, 69–88.

[52] 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim Separatism, Entrepreneurship, and Partial Modernization'.

[53] Omar Javaid, Aamir Feroz Shamsi, and Irfan Hyder, 'Religious Entrepreneurial Communities as a Solution for Socioeconomic Injustice', *Journal of Enterprising Communities* 14, no. 3 (January 2020): 415–46, https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-03-2020-0023.

[54] Pang et al., 'Developing Virtual Social Communities: Lessons Drawn from Two Indian Social Communities'.

the community's financial system plays a crucial role in protecting businesses from bankruptcy during economic downturns.

3.2.5 Hierarchy and Social Organization

The organizational structure of these communities tends to be patriarchal, with authority generally flowing from elders to younger members. Afghan and Wiqar observe that Pakistani culture is characterized by a "high power distance" with centralized authority figures such as fathers or eldest sons playing dominant roles in both family and business decisions. [55] This hierarchical structure is not oppressive but rather emphasizes the support that elders provide to the younger generation, ensuring that every family member, regardless of economic contribution, is cared for. In Bohra and Ismaili communities, religious authorities also play a pivotal role in shaping social and business structures.[56] However, in the Memon, Dehliwala, and Chinioti communities, the influence of religious authority is less pronounced, and individual identity tends to be defined more by social bonds than by personal achievement.[57]

3.2.6 Degree of Social Inclusion

While some communities, such as Bohra and Ismaili, operate with a degree of exclusivity based on birth or marriage, this is not universally applicable to all Muslim entrepreneurial communities. [58] For example, factory labor in Memon, Dehliwala, or Chinioti-owned businesses in Pakistan need not belong to the same ethnic or religious group.[59] My personal experience working for United Refrigeration Limited in Karachi, owned by the Memon Dawood Group, further confirms that there is little to no discrimination based on community membership when hiring at the managerial level. However, when it comes to establishing matrimonial or business partnerships, these communities tend to prioritize members from within their group, as noted by Papanek[60] and Levin[61]. Afghan and Wiqar[62] suggest that this tendency is largely cultural, as Islamic teachings do not prohibit trade with people of other faiths. Indeed,

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[55] 'Succession in Family Businesses of Pakistan: Kinship Culture and Islamic Inheritance Law', *CMER Working Paper*, 2007.

[56] Dobbin, *Asian Entrepreneurial Minorities: Conjoint Communities in the Making of the World-Economy, 1570 - 1940*.

[57] Claire Seaman, Richard Bent, and Ashley Unis, 'Family Entrepreneurship Culture, Entrepreneurial Intent, Futures and Foresight in Scottish Pakistani Communities', *Futures* 75 (2016): 83–91.

[58] Javaid, Shamsi, and Hyder, 'Religious Entrepreneurial Communities as a Solution for Socioeconomic Injustice', 1 January 2020.

[59] Papanek, 'Pakistan's Big Businessmen: Muslim Separatism, Entrepreneurship, and Partial Modernization'.

[60] [NO_PRINTED_FORM]

[61] 'The Upper Bourgeoisie from the Muslim Commercial Community of Memons in Pakistan, 1947 to 1971'.

[62] 'Succession in Family Businesses of Pakistan: Kinship Culture and Islamic Inheritance Law'.

Kuran documents how both Christians and Jews were historically incorporated into Ottoman guilds without much difficulty.[63]

4.1 Traditional Entrepreneurial Communities vs. Modern Co-ops: Differences and Similarities

4.1.1 The Differences

4.1.1.1 Cause of Inception

As discussed previously, traditional populations across Europe and America were organized communally, even before modernization. According to Curl, these communities functioned as naturally occurring cooperatives,[64] but were dismantled by the advancing forces of capitalist markets, a phenomenon extensively analyzed by Polanyi.[65] The disintegration of these traditional systems has led to widespread social dislocation, affecting individuals, families, and communities. In response to the disruptions caused by market forces, people in Europe sought to re-establish communal bonds through the formation of formalized cooperatives.[66] This reorganization was intended to mitigate the social and economic challenges brought about by the transition to a market-driven society.

The degree of social transformation experienced in Europe and America was far more radical than in the Eastern world. The changes in the West were largely endogenous, resulting from industrialization and capitalist expansion, whereas in the East, the transformation was often imposed externally by colonial powers.[67] The level of industrialization that characterized Europe, particularly during the second and third industrial revolutions, as well as the profound socioeconomic impact of the two World Wars, was not parallel in many Eastern regions. Instead, the crises faced by regions such as the Indian subcontinent were different and shaped largely by colonial exploitation rather than internal industrial pressures.

Thus, while the traditional social order in the Muslim world has been somewhat preserved, albeit under the shadow of colonial institutions,[68] the same traditional order has been dismantled in the Western world.[69] This may explain why

[63] 'Islamic Influences on the Ottoman Guilds', *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation* 2 (2000): 43–59.

[64] *For All the People: The Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America*.

[65] *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.

[66] Fairbairn, 'History of Cooperatives'.

[67] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.

[68] Ernest Gellner, 'Trust, Cohesion, and the Social Order', in *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, ed. Diago Gambetta (Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, 2000), 142–57.

[69] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.

Western cooperatives were deliberately and formally created, often with the support of international organizations such as the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). By contrast, in many Eastern societies, particularly within the Muslim world, the need for formalized cooperatives was likely not as pressing. The organizational principles guiding these traditional communities are embedded in religious teachings and cultural practices rather than being enforced by external institutions. These principles inform the moral and social codes that sustain the economic and social lives within these communities.

4.1.1.2 Power Structure

Another critical distinction between modern cooperatives and traditional entrepreneurial communities is their power structures. Cooperatives are generally based on democratic principles, whereas traditional communities often follow a hierarchical, patriarchal model. This difference is rooted in the distinct ontological understanding of the self, as informed by modern liberal ideology and Islamic teachings.[70] In Western liberal thought, the self is viewed as autonomous, self-determined, and rational, with individual achievement serving as a key marker of identity and social status.[71] This self-conception is reflected in the democratic organization of cooperatives, where decisions are made collectively, and authority is distributed horizontally among members.

In contrast, Islamic ontology posits that the self is a creation of Allah, whose purpose is to submit to divine will. This understanding of the self gives rise to a different power dynamic, in which authority is derived from religious and social hierarchies.[72] In traditional Muslim communities, authority is vested in elders and religious leaders, whose decisions are informed by the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.[73] This hierarchical structure is reflected in the governance of these communities, where seniority and familial relations play a significant role in the decision-making processes. For instance, decisions regarding marriage, business partnerships, and other significant matters are often influenced by personal relationships rather than by democratic voting procedures.

Moreover, the exclusivity of membership in traditional communities contrasts sharply with the inclusivity of modern cooperatives. In traditional Muslim communities, membership is often restricted to individuals who share the same religious or ethnic background, and certain groups such as LGBTQ individuals may

[70] Omar Javaid and Mehboob ul Hassan, 'A Comparison of Islamic and Capitalist Conception of Economic Justice', *International Journal of Economics, Management and Accounting* 21, no. 1 (2013): 1–31.

[71] Seaman, Bent, and Unis, 'Family Entrepreneurship Culture, Entrepreneurial Intent, Futures and Foresight in Scottish Pakistani Communities'.

[72] Javaid, 'The Original Socio-Cultural and Economic Context for Practicing Shirkat-Ul-Aqd'.

[73] Javaid and Hassan, 'A Comparison of Islamic and Capitalist Conception of Economic Justice'.

not be welcomed. In contrast, in a cooperative, membership is open to anyone who shares the cooperative's objectives, regardless of their background or orientation. For example, an individual with a non-heteronormative sexual orientation may participate fully in a cooperative, enjoying equal voting rights and the same level of influence over decision-making processes.

The democratic structure of cooperatives allows for the removal or disqualification of members who violate agreed-upon rules or who are unable to fulfill their roles due to illness or disability. In contrast, traditional communities, owing to their basis in natural, familial relationships, do not allow for the dissolution of social ties based on disputes or disagreements. Even when tension arises within a family or community, relationships often remain intact.

4.1.1.3 Objectives and Roles

The objectives of modern cooperatives are generally specific and narrowly defined, often focused on economic or professional goals, whereas traditional Muslim communities are organized around more holistic objectives that encompass social, cultural, religious, and economic dimensions. Cooperatives may operate in specific sectors, such as agriculture, finance, or healthcare, with each cooperative serving a distinct function within the broader economy. For instance, agricultural cooperatives may focus on food production and distribution, whereas credit unions provide banking services. The goals of these cooperatives are often driven by market needs and professional specialization, with members working together to achieve a shared economic objective.

In contrast, traditional Muslim communities exist primarily to sustain a comprehensive socio-cultural-religious order, with economic organizations serving as a means to this end. Economic activities within these communities are deeply embedded within social ties guided by religious principles, and a community's well-being is typically considered inseparable from religious observance and cultural practices. This holistic approach is reflected in the gender roles that emerge within traditional Muslim communities, where family life is prioritized over market participation. Women, for instance, often assume a primary role in the psychological, physiological, and spiritual development of the next generation, while men take on the responsibility of providing economic support and security for the family.

Emphasis on the family within these communities' contrasts with the market-oriented focus of modern cooperatives, where professional roles and impersonal relations often take precedence over familial ties. In the Western world, the market has largely supplanted the family as the primary institution through which

individuals pursue their aspirations.[74] This shift has led to the commodification of many aspects of social life, with individuals forming professional relationships based on mutual economic interests rather than personal or familial bonds. Consequently, the roles of modern cooperatives are often defined by market professionalism and characterized by impersonal and contractual relationships between members. In a traditional Muslim community, the market is not an end, but a means of fulfilling religious and familial obligations. The gender roles that emerge in this context are therefore aligned with the community's overarching goal of sustaining a stable and cohesive social order, with the family serving as the primary unit of social organization.

4.1.2 Common Grounds

Traditional communities may form co-ops to provide financial aid, healthcare, or educational opportunities to deserving members. However, their organizational structure may follow a traditional order rather than a democratic one. As Fairbairn [75] asserts, the form of a co-op is secondary to the objectives it seeks to fulfill. Previous discussions have highlighted that traditional entrepreneurial communities in the Muslim world possess characteristics resembling naturally functioning co-ops with a holistic approach. The existing literature, although limited, suggests that further exploratory and empirical research is needed to substantiate these observations. Nevertheless, the analogy provided by Curl supports the notion that traditional entrepreneurial communities in the Muslim world function as naturally occurring co-ops.[76] The following key characteristics have been identified in the available literature that align with the cooperative principles:

1. Family-Business Nexus: Social order is preserved through family run businesses that expand via extended family lines and integrate family members into business ventures. This process strengthens both the family and business in a mutually reinforcing cycle.
2. Financial Support for Business: New entrants into the market receive financial support through interest-free loans in favorable terms, promoting economic participation within the community.
3. Employment Generation and Training: Larger enterprises provide employment opportunities to junior members of the community, offer job training, and

[74] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.
[75] 'History of Cooperatives'.
[76] *For All the People: The Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America*.

subsequently support their entrepreneurial endeavors once they have acquired sufficient skills.

4. Minimizing Information Asymmetry: Trust within kinship networks mitigates the risks associated with information asymmetry, thereby facilitating decision-making processes.
5. Concern for Community: These communities exhibit care for vulnerable, disabled, and marginalized communities, offering financial aid, training, and community support. Their inclusiveness contrasts with the exclusion faced by individuals in modern market systems, particularly those who are unemployable because of temporary or permanent disability. This community support functions similarly to social security systems in the West but with a more personalized approach.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the distinctive characteristics of traditional entrepreneurial communities in the Muslim world, emphasizing their alignment with cooperative principles, while reflecting unique cultural, religious, and social contexts. Unlike modern cooperatives shaped by industrialization and capitalist disruptions in Europe and America, these communities organically integrate economic activities with broader social and religious frameworks. Their reliance on family-based business networks, interest-free financial systems, and community-driven support mechanisms reflects a holistic approach to economic organizations that prioritize social cohesion and distributive justice over profit maximization. Comparative analysis with Western cooperatives underscores the resilience of these traditional structures in preserving socioeconomic stability while adapting to modern challenges.

This research advances theoretical discussions in Islamic economics, economic sociology, and cooperative studies by offering a nuanced understanding of how cultural and religious values shape economic organizations. By situating traditional entrepreneurial communities as naturally occurring cooperatives, this study bridges the gap between formal cooperative models and organic socioeconomic systems rooted in historical and religious traditions. Methodologically, comparative analysis allows for a deeper exploration of similarities and differences, providing a framework for future studies. Practically, the findings offer insights for policymakers and development practitioners aiming to promote sustainable and culturally sensitive economic initiatives in diverse settings. These insights are particularly relevant for fostering economic inclusivity and social cohesion in rapidly modernizing societies.

While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of traditional entrepreneurial communities, its focus on specific regions and limited empirical data highlight opportunities for future research. Broader comparative studies across different cultural and religious contexts could further validate these findings and

uncover additional dynamics. Empirical investigations into the economic contributions, gender roles, and adaptability of these communities in the face of globalization could enhance our understanding of their evolving relevance. Exploring the intersection of traditional values with modern cooperative governance models offers a pathway for innovative solutions to contemporary economic challenges, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity.

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During the preparation of this study, ChatGPT and Paperpal were used to improve readability and reduce the length of the paper. After using these tools, I reviewed and edited the content as required and took full responsibility for the contents of the publication.

Author Bionote

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