COLONIAL MUTATIONS OF CASTE IN TAMIL NADU. AN ESSAY ON SPACE AND UNTOUCHABILITY.

with special reference to Madurai district, *c.1500-1990.*

Christopher Emsden

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This thesis is my own work.
Canberra, 5 September, 1991

Christopher Emsden

All sources used are acknowledged.

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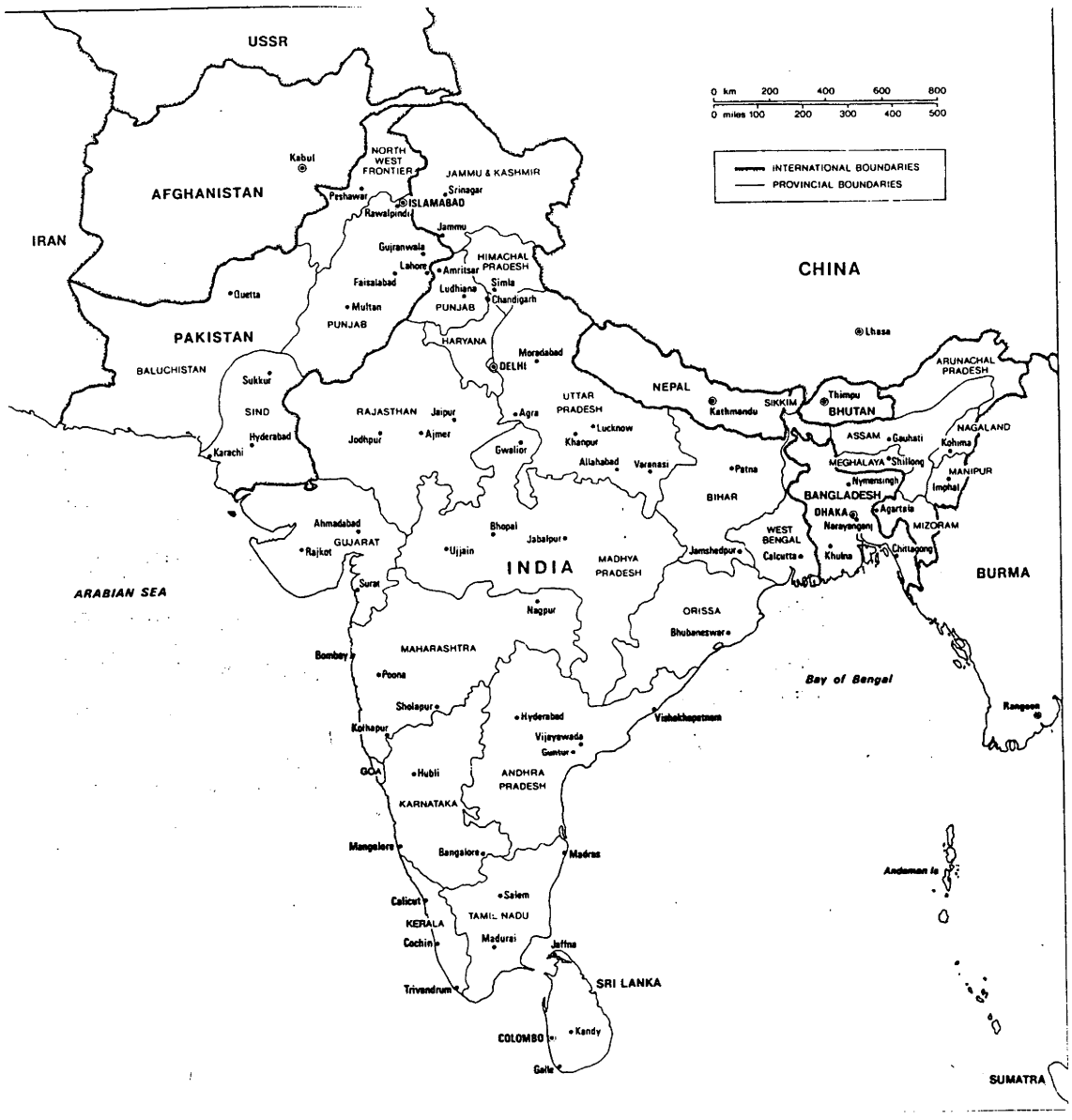
Asterisks (*) signify that italics are my emphases.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Rawalpindi
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Lahore
Amritsar
HIMACHAL PRADESH
Faisalabad
Ludhiana
Simla
Quetta
Multan
PUNJAB
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ANDHRA PRADESH
KARNATAKA
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TAMIL NADU
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SRI LANKA
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Galle
ARABIAN SEA
Bay of Bengal
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Lhasa
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
Kathmandu
SIKKIM
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Kohima
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Shillong
MANIPUR
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Nymensingh
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MIZORAM
WEST BENGAL
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Chittagong
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Rangoon
Vishakhapatnam
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SUMATRA

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Life in Canberra was enhanced by the stellar friendship performance of Jill Thompson as a fantastic housemate, and by Rosemary's fully loaded rhetorical gestures as well as her occasional slips from textuality. Anna provided profligate delight as an ironist and an ex-pat of suburban nihilism, as well as with her defiant immunity to collective representations. Lanny Snyder and Mandy Thomas regularly reminded me why I like universities, Tobey Freeman eloquently declaimed against striation of all sorts. Julia Nielson, Christopher Goscha, Maria Baveas and Kavita Nandan all made life more interesting with their respective *arts de faire*. Of course I would never have survived without Steve and Milka Ujdur who graciously plied me with free coffee.

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In Ammapatti, just about everybody casually demonstrated an ethic of friendliness. Ganesan and his wife were always hospitable, and their son Ramanan was a crucial help as well as a joy to be around. Natarajan the *pista*-thug eventually charmed me. The people living in the colony were always extremely kind and usually hilarious; I especially thank Mariappan for his humour, Shanti for her drawings, and of course Andi and his family - most of all Jumina.

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There is one name missing, and his is another absent presence. One man in Ammapatti was particularly excellent, and also seemed to have an idea - his own, to be sure - of what I was doing. Chinnathevar was known to talk like the poet in the *Thirukkural*, especially when drunk. His suicide transformed Velraj and I both, and we dedicate our efforts in this to the remembrance of his tendency to "over-laugh."

A Note on Nuances.

> "A whole history remains to be written of spaces - which would at the same time be the history of powers (both of these terms in the plural) - from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat."
> - Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge.*

This thesis relentlessly uses the words "space", "locality", and "territoriality". The senses these words have will become clearer as their invocations continue. It is, however, not entirely satisfactory to resort to such a Weberian recipe, wherein a definition awaits the end of an essay. In lieu of providing analytical definitions, I will briefly suggest here how I try to use this lexicon in the course of trying to write about south India.

Firstly, I must note that at no point does this essay try to assume the vantage of an "inside"; it only tries to work from outside and below of what is sometimes called "culture". Instead of returning the "subject" to history, the aim is to return historicity to certain untouchable subjects. Such a methodological stance is not particularly due to any philosophical orientation. Rather, it seems to reflect the topic under discussion, which is the construction of "untouchability" from the outside, a construction which relied on an erasure whose faint traces I try, somewhat discursively, to lure back closer to the surface of a palimpsest that is any place in time. Spaces is not only multiply constructed, but multiply re-occupied. Space "is a product literally filled with ideologies" (Lefebvre, in Soja 1989:80), and it also puts itself *in*to those ideologies.

Given that the "definitions" are painfully abstract, they may perhaps best be read after reading the thesis, by which time I hope they make more sense. Such a re-reading would also be equipped with a memory that may intimate the reason why the presentations here are so brazenly judgemental.

The following glosses roughly signify three different styles of social formation which the Tamil country has known. *Nadu*, now a name of the state itself, Tamil Nadu, has every one of these three senses, although they have not been held in the same place by the same people. They correspond to areas discussed in the thesis: respectively, to the deltaic regions, to the areas directly incorporated into a kingdom, and to the dry zones.

Locality. Given the historical tendency in south India for hierarchy to build its tallest structures in restricted spaces, this word comes to signify closure. The restriction is in fact due to property, and in its *local* formation, it is property held against the prying eyes of the state. Certain compromises are reached, and these micro-geographies - found particularly in amply irrigated areas - do not pretend to an outward ideology of sovereignty. Its dominations are found in its heart, localities are the shape of power's involution. Interaction is concentrated within its enforced

boundaries, which in the Tamil case are often ritually drawn by untouchables, precisely those so subjected to this local closure that, quite literally, they cease officially to exist in the ideology - and space - outside of the locality. One can say that the elite of a locality have exchanged any pretension to sovereignty in exchange for their status as owners of property. As a result of two dominations, that of the state's coming to a treaty with the locality, and that of the internal striations of property, space appears as a neutral de-territorialized category. That, of course, is only the elite representation - the one that gets reproduced.

Territoriality. This appears as a broader term, containing hints of juridical sovereignty. The degree of its boundedness, and therefore of the efficacy of the surveillances and abstractions its spaces undergo, vary widely. There is a paradox of sorts; insofar as there is to be property - insofar as there is to be structural domination - the extensive aspirations of sovereignty are foreclosed. In exchange, the possessors of that sovereignty condense into a smaller group. This elite ruling group, inasmuch as it does seek to extend its sovereignty over a greater space, finds that it must share its power more and more, weakening the iron cage of property. Stability over time - the reproduction of the system, as it were - is a symptom of property growing, of power seeking its sovereignty in the form of a state, and not in the vastness of space. In this scenario, the ambiguities between space and the form of a locality tend to resolve themselves through a structure of territorial dominance, a structure whose elites endeavour to represent their interests in property as consonant with a neutral organization of space - *their* organization, to be sure, and one to which they seek to subject others.

Spatiality. On the other hand, where the reification of property is not the career chosen by the inhabitants of a space, their sovereignty expands diffusely, and is no respecter of boundaries. In such a case, sovereignty is most shared by the people. Complementary to this radical non-closure of space, identity signs are sought for elsewhere, such as in the abstract languages of kinship. "Caste" can be such an idiom, and, insofar as space is open, the rhetoric of caste can acquire a volume which, to all appearances, would seem chauvinistic. Yet insofar as space *is* open, then the rhetoric of caste is full of spatial concerns, and leans back to make room for an idiom of territorial kinship: solidarity. This solidarity, which excludes the possibility of property as something to be lorded over, is the expression of a sovereignty which does not pursue the form of a state. It may be said that this sovereignty is that of space itself: a space that is nowhere, that is central, but has no centre. It is nomadic space - a space whose representations move - and some people have cultivated it, notionally and physically. "Space, vast space, is the friend of being" (Bachelard 1969:208).

Languages of origin or through which transmitted to south India:

T: Tamil. Skt.: Sanskrit. M: Marathi. E: English.

Adi-Dravida	"original Dravidians"; term used in the 20th century to refer to untouchables; used mainly only by government, but some Parariyar around Madras and Chingleput also use it in Census returns.
adimai (T)	slave or tied labourer.
amani	procedure used in wet zone for collecting state revenue in kind.
cadjan (T)	leaf used to write on.
ceeri (T)	untouchable hamlet.
Chakkiliyar	one of three main Scheduled Caste groups in Tamil Nadu today, mainly in the northern and western parts of the state; associated with leather-working as a *thozhile*. They often speak Telugu or Kannada.
Chettiar	large high status caste group known especially for vast trade networks; especially the Natukkottai Chettiars, who spread throughout Southeast Asia.
darkhast (T)	petition; colonial system through which waste land could be claimed by those who cleared and cultivated it.
Gounder	large high status caste group, especially in Coimbatore. The names comes from Kavuntar, meaning leader. (Also: Gowder, usually a Kannada synonym.)
gramam (Skt.)	village.
Harijan	term introduced by Gandhi and Congress, meaning child of God, used to refer to untouchables
inam (M)	a gift from superior to inferior; concessionary or tax-free lands given by king. Also used to denote patrilineal group. (Tamil: *maniam*).
jajmani (E)	term used to represent local economic transactions in India as insulated from market forces, and based on ascribed principles of purity and pollution.
jamabandi	elite party, annual settlement of village revenue accounts.
jati (T)	caste. (also: genus, kind, class, species).
kalavasam (T)	leavings under threshing site claimed by deltaic untouchables as their share of the harvest. Also referred to as *tuntu*.
Kallar	substantial middle-status caste group who were classified as a Criminal Tribe in by the Raj. Their region is from southern Thanjavur to southwestern Madurai. With the Maravar, they now comprise the "Thevar" group.
kambalam (T)	blanket.
kan thudaippu (T)	"eye-wash"; e.g., "Reservations are just an eye-wash" (see Scheduled Castes).
kaniyatchi (T)	Tamil term often replaced in 18th and 19th centuries by *mirasi*. Derived from the root *kani*: to see, and *atchi*: control. Rights of possession or hereditary right in general, especially for land.
karnam	village accountant, often called *kanakka pillai*.
katai, katan (T)	responsibility, obligation, duty, debt.
kaval (T)	protection; efficient insurance scheme used to protect crops, livestock and traders; seen as a "racket" by colonial government, who classified the entire Piramalai Kallar community as a "criminal tribe" because of their frequent occupation as *kavalkarrar* : "watchmen".
kavul (T)	"cowle": agreement, often between a village headman and a cultivator over the terms of lease.

kist (E) land revenue tax.

kovil (T) temple.

kulam (T) lineage, community; also: tank or reservoir.

kuli (T, E) a day's wage, from which: "coolie".

kutumban (T) family. (In the wet zone of Tirunelveli, also the headman of a Pallar caste in a village - Ludden 1985).

maniam (T) Tamil word for inam; privileged land-holding, often construed as given in exchange for the performance of a ritual role or service.

Maravar large middle-status caste group centred in northern Tirunelveli dry zone. Like the Kallar, represented as "criminal".

mirasi (M) Marathi word increasingly used to replace Tamil *kaniyatchi*. Derived from *miras*, "to inherit". Inalienable property, especially in land, often held corporately, leading to joint-village responsibility for revenue. Also used by low castes in deltas as a claim that they had a *mirasi* to work for a particular village or patron. A *mirasi* mania occurred under early colonial rule, spreading term across the countryside. *Mirasidar*: one who holds this right in land in the wet zone.

nadu (T) centre, territory, state; political term used differently: sometimes to denote administrative space, sometimes ethnic territoriality, sometimes a caste-group.

nattanmei (T) headman, either for village or *jati*.

Nayakkar large high status caste group, once from Andhra, who live throughout the dry zones of Tamil Nadu, and provided many polegars and *zamindars*, as well as the king at Madurai in the 17th century.

nazar (M) gaze, honorary gift given in exchange for recognition of subordinate sovereignty.

palai (T) wilderness or dry plains, one of the five *tinai* in classical Tamil poetics.

palaiyakarrar (T) big man, leader, or chief of an area in the dry zone; see *polegar*.

palaiyam (T) war camp, fortress; domain over which palaiyakarrar ruled. Spaces of shifting political influence in the dry zone.

Pallar One of three main Scheduled Castes today in Tamil Nadu; normatively landless in the wet zone. *The Fifth Report* considered them as "slaves of the soil" (App.42). As they do not eat beef, they claim higher status than the Paraiyar. The name seems to come from *pallam*, meaning low pit.

panchayat local court of arbitration or council of administration.

pangali (T) shareholder; also a kinship term meaning classificatory parallel cousins who one may not marry (contrasted to *mappillei*, cross-cousins who one may marry).

pangu (T) share.

Paraiyar The largest of the Scheduled Caste groups in Tamil Nadu. The name's origin is unknown, but may come from *parai* (drum), or, as I prefer, be a product of *para* (another, strange[r]) and *aiyar*, the name of one Brahmin caste in Tamil Nadu; see *pariar*.

parakudi (T) non-resident tenant, or labourer.

pariar (E) "A term used by Europeans in India to designate the outcasts of the Hindu tribes, and the vilest things of their kind" (*The Fifth Report*, Appendix, 40).

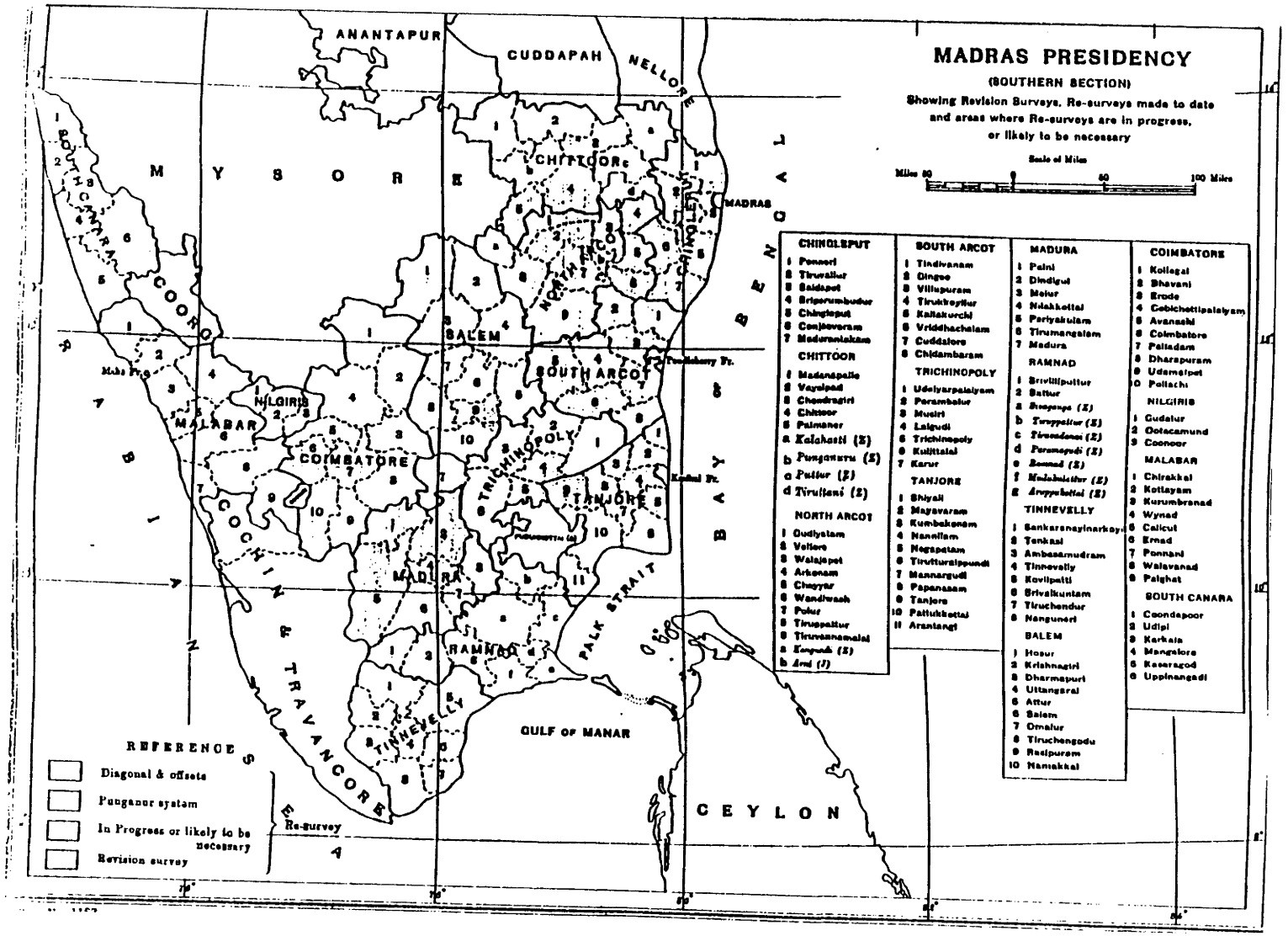
patel village headman, appointed by government.

patta (E) allegedly, a title deed to land in colonial land settlement; in practice, unclear whether it was a title, a promise to pay revenue, or the receipt for having done so.

peshkash land revenue paid by a *zamindar*.

polegar (E) English translation of *palaiyakarrar*, used in the sense of a small breakaway despot.

poromboke (T)	uncultivated common land in village, sometimes including house sites of untouchables.
pulukka (T)	low and polluted lineage within a caste group. (*polikka* [Malayalam]: to measure grain heaps, paying the reapers in kind.)
purohit (Skt.)	ritual preceptor, usually Brahmin domestic priest.
pusari	priest, not necessarily Brahmin; term used for the priest within a *jati* community.
raiyat	in theory, a cultivating farmer; in colonial practice, whoever held the *patta* to a piece of land.
raiyatwari (E)	colonial system used to cover most of Madras Presidency, devised by Thomas Munro and sometimes called the "Munro system". Each *patta*-carrying *raiyat* held their land directly from the state; theoretically intended to circumvent tax-farming and landlordism.
Reddiar	large fairly high status caste group mainly in the northeastern part of Tamil Nadu, particularly Chingleput. The name also means leader.
samsthan (M)	one's own place. Also used in Tamil.
Scheduled Caste	bureaucratic term used to denote ex-untouchable communities entitled to reserved jobs; see *kan thudaippu*.
sirkar	the colonial state.
talaivar (T)	caste headman.
talaiyari (T)	village policeman or revenue peon; one of the "village officers", often from an untouchable caste, but increasingly less so as the colonial government assumed that low castes were likely to steal and were unsuitable for the job as they were increasingly unable to patrol much of the village for reasons of growing pollution beliefs.
taluk	administrative subdivision of a district.
tavasam (T)	customary share given to people who perform a *thozhile*.
thothi (T)	another village officer, also usually untouchable; sometimes message-carrier for village headman, sometimes grave-digger, sometimes irrigation worker.
thozhile (T)	"traditional occupation", usually menial and degrading (e.g., leather-working); rarely engaged in.
tin (T)	root term meaning "stretch of land".
tinai (T)	situation; spatial term referring to one of five regions or social landscapes in classical Tamil poetry. *Tamil Lexicon*: land, place, region, site, house, tribe, caste, race, family, conduct (and a class of nouns in grammar).
tinda (T)	pollution, polluting.
tittu (T)	impurity, especially that of birth, menstruation and death.
tundu (T)	"remnant"; also used to refer to the *kalavasam*.
urimai (T)	prescriptive right; including the right to marry the cross-cousin (the *urimai* girl).
uur (T)	village.
varam (T)	share.
varna (Skt.)	the four-tiered division of social orders in classical Hindu thought: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra ("there is no fifth"); also: colour.
Vellalar	large very high status caste group who dominate the Tamil deltas.
vettiyan (T)	a task or a type of untouchable group usually involved in highly polluting task such as cremation ground attendant or cattle scavenging.
zamindar	estate owner courtesy of the permanent settlement used extensively in the dry zone in the early 19th century.


MADRAS PRESIDENCY
(SOUTHERN SECTION)
Showing Revision Surveys, Re-surveys made to date
and areas where Re-surveys are in progress,
or likely to be necessary
Scale of Miles
Miles 50 0 50 100 Miles
ANANTAPUR
CUDDAPAH
NELLORE
MYSORE
COORG
CHITTOOR
NORTH ARCOT
SALEM
SOUTH ARCOT
NILGIRIS
MALABAR
COIMBATORE
COCHIN
TRICHINOPOLY
TANJORE
MADURA
RAMNAD
TINNEVELLY
TRAVANCORE
PALK STRAIT
GULF OF MANAR
CEYLON
BAY OF BENGAL
MADRAS
Pondicherry Fr.
Karikal Fr.
Mahé Fr.
CHINGLEPUT
1 Ponneri
2 Tiruvallur
3 Saidapet
4 Sriperumbudur
5 Chingleput
6 Conjeeveram
7 Madurantakam
CHITTOOR
1 Madanapalle
2 Vayalpad
3 Chandragiri
4 Chittoor
5 Palmaner
a Kalahasti (Z)
b Punganuru (Z)
c Puttur (Z)
d Tiruttani (Z)
NORTH ARCOT
1 Gudiyatam
2 Vellore
3 Walajapet
4 Arkonam
5 Cheyyar
6 Wandiwash
7 Polur
8 Tiruppattur
9 Tiruvannamalai
a Tirupati (Z)
b Arni (Z)
SOUTH ARCOT
1 Tindivanam
2 Gingee
3 Villupuram
4 Tirukkoyilur
5 Kallakurchi
6 Vriddhachalam
7 Cuddalore
8 Chidambaram
TRICHINOPOLY
1 Udaiyarpalaiyam
2 Perambalur
3 Musiri
4 Lalgudi
5 Trichinopoly
6 Kulittalai
7 Karur
TANJORE
1 Shiyali
2 Mayavaram
3 Kumbakonam
4 Nannilam
5 Negapatam
6 Tiruturaippundi
7 Mannargudi
8 Papanasam
9 Tanjore
10 Pattukkottai
11 Arantangi
MADURA
1 Palni
2 Dindigul
3 Melur
4 Nilakkottai
5 Periyakulam
6 Tirumangalam
7 Madura
RAMNAD
1 Srivilliputtur
2 Sattur
3 Sivaganga (Z)
b Tiruppattur (Z)
c Tirumadoorai (Z)
d Paramagudi (Z)
e Ramnad (Z)
f Mudukulathur (Z)
g Aruppukottai (Z)
TINNEVELLY
1 Sankaranayinarkoyil
2 Tenkasi
3 Ambasamudram
4 Tinnevelly
5 Kovilpatti
6 Srivaikuntam
7 Tiruchendur
8 Nanguneri
SALEM
1 Hosur
2 Krishnagiri
3 Dharmapuri
4 Uttangarai
5 Attur
6 Salem
7 Omalur
8 Tiruchengodu
9 Rasipuram
10 Namakkal
COIMBATORE
1 Kollegal
2 Bhavani
3 Erode
4 Gobichettipalaiyam
5 Avanashi
6 Coimbatore
7 Palladam
8 Dharapuram
9 Udumalpet
0 Pollachi
NILGIRIS
1 Gudalur
2 Ootacamund
3 Coonoor
MALABAR
1 Chirakkal
2 Kottayam
3 Kurumbranad
4 Wynad
5 Calicut
6 Ernad
7 Ponnani
8 Walavanad
9 Palghat
SOUTH CANARA
1 Coondapoor
2 Udipi
3 Karkala
4 Mangalore
5 Kasaragod
6 Uppinangadi
REFERENCE
Diagonal & offsets
Punganur system
In Progress or likely to be necessary
Revision survey
Re-survey

"Perhaps no European has ever seen India at all."
- *The Civilian's South India* (1921:16)

Among the Brahmins and Pariahs, a book published in 1924 by a German traveller named J.A. Sarter, recounts its author's visit to "Songir". Famine was endemic, and one of Sarter's bullocks fell dead:

> "We left the dead bullock on the river-bank, well aware that there was no need to bury the carcase. Dogs and jackals, ravens and vultures, and even the dogs, would dispose of it in a single night. But next morning, when I went to wash at a place where the trickle of water had made a tiny pool, a horrible spectacle awaited me. There was a group of villagers at the spot where we had left the dead bullock. *These were the pariahs,* quarreling over the carcase. By now the sun was high in the heavens, and the stench of putrefaction was already perceptible. Brawling and struggling, the stronger were driving back the weaker with blows and curses, and tearing the flesh from the carcase. Behind them were the dogs, yellow, lean and famished, their tongues hanging from their mouths, trying to snatch a scrap of meat. High in the trees the crows were perched. In less than an hour the bones were stripped bare, and nothing was left on the river-bank but the evil-smelling entrails. The dogs fell upon these, and the vultures now came flocking up, drawn hither from the blue heavens, but whence no one knows, fluttering down upon the carcase and disputing with dogs and crows the malodorous relics, as though following the example of the men and women who even yet were loitering on the bank. During the night the stench attracted the jackals, and we heard the gruesome sound of their hoarse and hungry baying, *and again one seemed to hear the sound of wrangling voices in the dark of the night*" (Sarter 1924:140-41*).

We know little about where Songir is, only that it is a village with a Brahmin quarter ("Here scrupulousness prevailed"), separated by two stone throws from a "Djammar's" [Chamars?] settlement, inhabited by "Tanners" who were not even allowed to live in the pariah village, which lay facing the Brahmin quarter -

> "divided from it by a ditch which is filled with every conceivable kind of filth. For centuries and centuries, in every Hindu village such a ditch has formed the impassable division between the men of caste and the 'Untouchables'..." (*ibid.*, pp.138-40).

It is rather unlikely that any village has both Chamar and Paraiyar settlements, the Chamar are a large set of north Indian Scheduled Caste communities, while Paraiyar names the largest of the south Indian Scheduled Castes. We can infer that Sarter was not an early-riser, or at least that the temporalization of his narrative is licentious. We also learn that Sarter re-visited Songir later, and learned to love it...

The prose is rich with a Hobbesian image of the stronger driving back the weaker amd a nod to "the blue heavens"; also insinuated is the existence of an organic (and even pedagogic) chain of simulated behaviours between the human and animal world, pervaded by the frequent syncopations of an insistence on the central role of

the "carcase." Dealing with corpses, human and bovine, is a major symbol of untouchability and pollution, and the Paraiyar are funerary workers in many parts of Tamil Nadu, so Sarter exploits some of the orthodox imagery of what Europeans find *peculiar* to what they consider "Hindu culture."

I contend that this description is not a testimony to what Sarter witnessed, but is a fictional pastiche, replete with antecedent echoes.[1] As a result the passage becomes all the more valuable as a comprehensive metaphor for colonial discourse in general: incorporating ignorance, cross-referencing, dehumanizing tropes, and even ritual time, while expelling the reality of subalternity - the "voices in the dark of the night" turn out to be only (and "again") what "one *seemed* to hear"... Finally, as discourse the passage reveals a crucial dimension of "practical practice", and does so at only one point: when the bullock died, Sarter left it on the river-bank, "well aware that there was no need" to do anything about it. In this, there are a plethora of possible, unexclusive readings: Sarter is acting like a high-caste villager, expecting the "untouchables" to come and clean up[2]; Sarter is fanatically insensitive to treat bovine life (and death) in such a manner in India; and, that the European attitude to the Indian "environment" rivals (an original is often the best rival to the copy) in cruelty the apogee of the represented attitudes that are imputed to "the other" of enlightened colonialism.

Among the Brahmins and Pariahs was a book "which can be commended unreservedly," according to Arthur Louis Cotton's review, commissioned and published by *The Guardian*, in which Cotton praised the "delightful 'travel book'" for taking us behind the scenes in temples, palaces, Brahmins' homes, outcaste huts, to

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[1] For example, John Shortt's 1869 article "On the Wild Tribes of Southern India", in the *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, vol.7 (n.s.) 1869:186-94. It is not particularly germane whether Sarter read this article, as the European chitchat in hill stations presumably turned much of this sort of "information" into fable. Nonetheless, the correspondences are quite amazing; compare Sarter's long passage (in main text) with Shortt (p.193*): "In some places they ["Chucklers" = *Chakkiliyar*, a Scheduled Caste in Tamil Nadu], like the Pariahs [*Paraiyar*], claim as their *peculiar* perquisite all cows, buffaloes, horses... that have died of disease in their vicinity, over which they frequently quarrel, the quarrel sometimes terminating in murder." Compare also Sarter's claims about a "criminal caste" in Malabar, the "Chatter-Bhand", derived, we are told from a member of this community "whom I had befriended": they always enter a house in "a state of absolute nudity and anoint their bodies with oil so as to make it impossible to hold them" (Sarter, p.227). Shortt (p.191) writes that the Maravars, a southern Tamil caste also considered wont to dacoit, assembled at night to pillage other villages: "If thwarted in their designs on these occasions, they become reckless, and frequently commit murder. To avoid being taken, they divest themselves of clothing and oil their skins freely." Sarter also noted that the "Chatter-Bhand" group (I have been unable to relate this title to anything), acted as a group, boring a hole in the wall of a house. The designated burglar (chosen by lot), is pushed through the opening feet first, by the rest of the gang. If any sound is heard from inhabitants, indicating discovery and alarm, the comrades outside "cut off his [the thief's] head without more ado; for one can never be sure that a man will not betray one unless he is dead" (p.227). Meanwhile, Sarter testified that it was his own experience, once, in the dark, to sense someone in his room, and he awoke and "felt" something *like* "oily skin..." He did not mention that he found a headless corpse in his room upon sunrise...

[2] Actually, Sarter is "well aware" that animals will come to devour the carcass; ironically, he here refers to a type of fact that occurs precisely when "untouchables" *refuse* to handle and remove the carcasses of cows, which the villagers then must drag into the forest by themselves (*cf.* Harper 1961, and in Silverberg, ed. 1968).

holy men and lepers, &c, &c. "The book is altogether different from the book of India impressions to which the reader is accustomed." Sarter's "sympathetic" painting is "entirely engaging"; what's more, the book has this outstanding feature: "It is not concerned with Europeans, it contains no politics."[3] This incredible equation, which polishes the boots of so much of the colonial imaginary, is instructive when compared to the text itself which has so little descriptive value; indeed, it is fortuitous to find such explicitness, as by fabricating sets of oppositions, it gives some impetus to the deconstruction which it calls for -

politics / no politics
realism / sympathy
empirical / "entirely engaging"

- and indeed any leverage that allows for the reconstruction, from the colonial *mise en scene* and its own declared forays behind the scene, of something like speech from those "voices in the dark of the night." Remove Sarter from his relation to his ("dead") bullock, and *voila*: we are "among the Brahmins and Pariahs"; return Sarter to his discarding of the carcase, his awareness, so to speak, and we get closer to the "ditch" - I mean something like Songir, even if filled with "every conceivable kind of filth", including the "already perceptible" stench of Sarter's discourse.

In a letter, Cotton made it clear that personally he thought Sarter's book to be trash. He asked his friend "Bertie" - "How come such books to be published?" This is a vintage comment from someone who reviewed the book and gave his "unreserved" support to its consumption! Cotton was in a relation with the newspaper that had a certain sort of etiquette; Sarter was in a relation with his bullock that also had a certain sort of protocol. There is, it seems, an official gaze which sees (and is kept from seeing much else) what it is disposed to see. Cotton's letter destroys the sanctity of his own review (even as an icon of *English* cultural history); there is no counter-foil or confession from Sarter (he does add, mysteriously, that he later returned to Songir and came to love it), but it may be possible to develop one,

[3] *Cf. The Guardian* (Manchester), April 22, 1924. Cotton lauds Sarter for having a "temperament [that] is not Teutonic." The basic tone of the review is, obviously, positive. In a letter to "Bertie", advising the latter how to go about getting commissions to review books, Cotton's tone is quite different. Cotton could not find Sarter, who claimed to have been stomping around India for 15 years, mostly with his friend, a Bengali Raja named in the book as Prince Arun; he did find "Arun Coomar Sinha of the Paikbara Raj" family, who lived in an almost entirely European ward of Calcutta, and had recently failed to win the municipal election in a bid to represent that ward. "I have very little use for him," mused Cotton, in his letter to "Bertie" (dated April 3, 1924, Calcutta, and noting his prompt removal to Darjeeling "for the season"), as Arun was a member of the "so-called Independent Nationalist Party" and had announced that he was "not a Swarajist" - to which Cotton's retort: "a distinction, as I told him, without a difference." The general tone of the letter is sarcastic and lively, and obviously considers Sarter's book to be pure rot, despite his own review. Cotton wrote also that "Gandhi, in my judgment, is an impossible ass. If Romain Rolland had studied his career, ***he would write very differently***" (*). This is precisely the sort of remark to be made to Sarter, yet Cotton "unreservedly" commended the book - a typical example of the relation between discourse and the "gaze". Cotton had to use a courtier's language to keep up his contracts with the English newspapers - a point about which he is unambiguous in the letter to "Bertie." (This letter is in the copy of Sarter 1924 held by Menzies Library, A.N.U.)

without again carelessly disposing of his text, "well aware" though we are of its bogus nature, like another "carcase."

It is not my bent to claim either that there are no "Brahmins and Pariahs" in India, Tamil Nadu, or even "Songir", or that the discourses and textualities which found their repetitive enunciation in Sarter's text are of European origin; I do opine, however, that *nobody* has *ever* seen anything like what the passage describes. One does not have to look around much to find instances of similar prose, including some from long before the East India Company started as a gang of 'Pedlars'. It is more reasonable to assume that they pertain to an orthodox, more or less normative, discourse of canonical stereotypes, than that they achieve much (at all) descriptively; as discourses, they have effects and sanctions which, on occasion, perhaps simulate their plausibility as descriptions.[4] Sarter's "Pariahs" are depicted as vile, as are many of the Abbe Dubois' "Pariahs" of southern India; the "untouchables" are without culture, without restraint, without anything but nature, somehow conceived of as universal depravity.[5] Obviously this is a rhetorical construct, one quite amenable to the notion of "purity and pollution", but that is not enough - for instance, the Director General of Police in Tamil Nadu today is a "Harijan," and his unofficial instructions to the districts and countryside are widely rumoured to be: "If you want to make a case against the Harijans, then *file* it - try not to *beat* them so much." There is more than "two stone throws" distance between social formations that would operate according to some neat divide across some consensual ditch of pollution, and those that rely more on the stick. Yet this also is not enough; this thesis is not just to judge the relative efficacies of stench and the stick, but also to query just how, where, when, the alleged "ditches" have been dug. Great progress has been made in the past few centuries, and the colonial State distributed many of the shovels.

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[4] A classical statement comes from Said's *Orientalism*: "A book on how to handle a fierce lion might then cause a series of books to be produced on such subjects as the fierceness of lions, the origins of fierceness and so forth. Similarly, as the focus of the text centers more narrowly on the subject - no longer lions but their fierceness - we might expect that the ways by which it is recommended that a lion's fierceness be handled will actually *increase* its fierceness, force it to be fierce since that is what it is, and that is what in essence we know or can *only* know about it." (1985:94)

[5] "They ["Pariahs"] formed a class apart, and having nothing to fear and less to lose, they gave themselves up, without restraint, to their natural tendencies towards vice and excess, in which they continue to live at the present day" (Dubois 1906:52). And, (perhaps another source for Sarter!): "Attracted by the smell, they ["Pariahs"] will collect in crowds round any carrion, and contend for the spoil with other dogs, jackals, crows, and other carnivorous animals. They then divide the semi-putrid flesh, and carry it away to their huts, where they devour it, often without rice or anything else to disguise the flavour..." (*ibid.*, p.55). Or, "We can picture what would become of the Hindus if they were not kept within the bounds of duty by the rules and penalties of caste, by looking at the position of the Pariahs or outcastes of India, who, checked by no moral restraint, abandon themselves to their natural propensities." (*ibid.*, p.29). Further litanizing is boring.

This is a thesis about space and untouchability in the Tamil country: the institutionalization of space induces the idiom of untouchability, the excluded. This relation may be demonstrated on a number of levels, from the body and the house to the famous south Indian temples and the map of the centralizing State. This thesis also offers an argument about colonial change, which was armed with sword and pen and is intrinsically definable as the domination of space. Colonial definitions of, and impacats upon, south Indian spaces organized the relation between colonialism and untouchability. In *some* places this effected a wholesale revolution and inadvertently constructed "the fifth" *varna* - that is the thesis herein prosecuted. In trying to resuscitate spatial difference, I have been inclined perhaps more towards a perspectivist paradigm of political economy than to one of holistic "cultural" analysis; this is not due so much to a methodological predisposition believing in the superiority of the former, as it is to a fear that the "collective" representations of the latter themselves tend to presuppose, under the shibboleth of "integration", a spatial homogeneity which complements - indeed, is created by - the power of centralized states. Aside from any political values, the holistic paradigm contributes to the distortion of the history of the dry zones of south India, an aspect of which this thesis *re*-presents.

"Untouchables" and the good fight.

Arriving in Madras for six months of fieldwork, I emulated the colonial ethnographer Edgar Thurston, whose 1894 anthropometrical research in the Nilgiris hills earned him the unofficial criticism that "anthropological research is eminently indicated when the thermometer registers 100° in Madras" (Thurston 1909:v.1:ix); from the temperate vantage of Kodaikanal, I first saw "the beautiful Kambam [Cumbum] Valley" (Francis 1905:312). This valley west of Madurai, now comprising Uthamapalaiyam and Periyakulam taluks, is surrounded by the western Ghats and the Varishanad range, offering some respite from the summer heat. The Periyar water project, begun in the late 19th century, moves water from the western side of the Ghats to the east; the water joins the river Vaigai and goes through the city of Madurai and on to Ramanatahapuram [Ramnad] district on the coast. As Cumbum Valley is the first to receive this water, great prosperity has been conferred on many farmers there, who now grow copious amounts of rice, as well as coconuts, betel, bananas and table grapes where dry grain millets were once the norm. The valley was also the site of what has become known as the Bodi clash: a violent conflict in 1989 between "Harijans" and "non-Harijans" (to use the language of *The Hindu* newspaper), in which the official death count was twenty-six (by bullets); locals

reported over one hundred dead, and many more injured.[1] In Ammapatti, the village which became the centre of my research, I was told by some locals that their favourite aspect of the village was the casual mingling of castes, of which they were proud: "everybody rushes to put out a house-fire, should it arise." During the clash of September, 1989, however, three Paraiyar had been burned to death in their house, with the apparent approbation of many spectators and, obviously, the incendiary volition of some.[2]

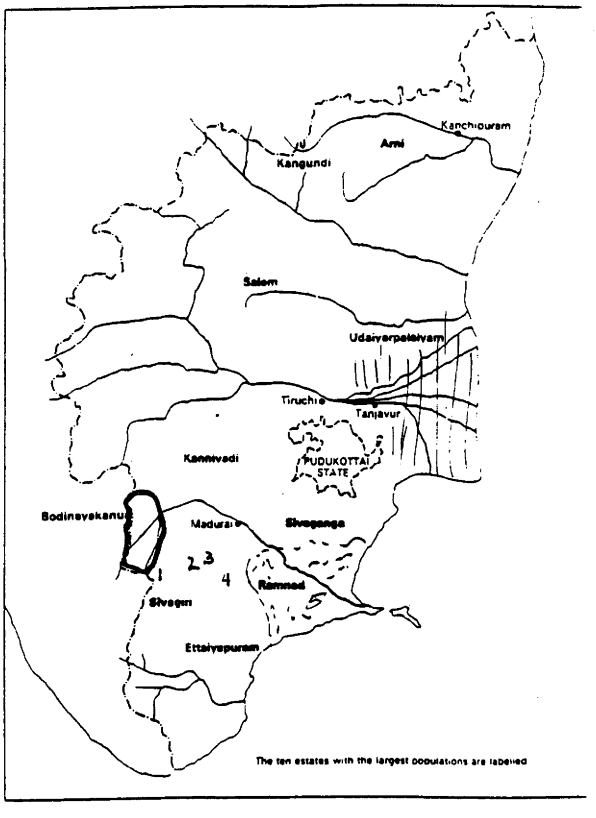
Cumbum Valley is only one of several spaces of the same conflict, popularly seen as a feud between the main participant communities, the Thevars and the Pallars (S.C.); other sites include Rajapalaiyam, Sattur, Virudhanagar, Sivakasi, and much of Ramnad, making a ring of fire around the south and west of Madurai. There are many other violent conflicts under way in Tamil Nadu. On the delta region of Thanjavur, for example, there exists a large literature on the "caste vs. class" debate; there the main dynamic appears to be the opposition of interests between the

Cumbum Valley.

Thanjavur region.
(Kaveri river delta.)

Sites of Recent Violence.

1. Rajapalaiyam
2. Sivakasi
3. Virudhanagar
4. Sattur
5. Ramnad District
   (Ramanathapuram)



Scheduled Castes and the high castes. It transpires that the category "Scheduled Caste" almost rigorously comprises the subjects of an economic exploitation known

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1 The police did not hand over the dead bodies; *cf. The Hindu*, 23 September, 1989:3.

2 The then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M. Karunanidhi (DMK) declared that the Ammapatti incident was unrelated to the valley-wide conflict (*The Hindu*, 20 Sept. 1989:3), a view held by many dominant residents. The clash is known as the "Bodi clash", as it began following several incidents in Bodinayakkanuur. See Appendix for a report on the Bodi clash.

structurally as the class of landless labourers; since the 1930s, the Communist parties of India find most of their limited support in Tamil Nadu from these people.[3]

The existence of struggles by [ex-]"untouchables" against their "masters" might easily be imagined as part of the on-going "transition" to capitalism, as "customary systems of rewards" (Epstein 1967) break down. However, not only is the "*jajmani* system" beginning to disappear under closer inspection,[4] but it is the late 20th century, and invocations of "capitalism" with its ever-deferred (into the future) presence grow tiresome. Their rhetoric of temporality suppresses spatial difference - even Marx called geography an "unnecessary complication" (cited in Soja 1989:32) - and thereby only homogenizes an historicized "social."

Another general approach to the analysis of these conflicts is that of Beteille, who writes:

> "[i]n the past the SCs [Scheduled Castes] had accepted their civic deprivations as a matter of choice. Now that a spirit of challenge has been kindled among them, it is likely that conflict between the Harijans and dominant peasant castes will become more pervasive" (1969:121).

In an essay written with Srinivas, Beteille suggests that a new "politics" is instilling a new "moral culture"; the values of both are percolating into the aspirations of the traditionally downtrodden, mobilizing the spirit of militant revolt (*cf. ibid.*, p.100). This is a part of the "modernization" paradigm, which casts itself in a glorious narrative form as a recipe for emancipation in a pious hope for a happy ending - be it the revolution or the achievement of the putative end of the anthropological object: civil society.

The deferred closure which frames this view is hard to find in the logic of capital. As Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests:

> "[t]here is nothing in the logic of the market of profit that guarantees an automatic transformation of individuals into citizens.... Perhaps we have long overestimated capitalism's need or capacity to homogenize the cultural conditions necessary for its own reproduction" (1989:xi-xiii).[5]

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[3] Béteille submitted that, in east Thanjavur, the majority of agricultural labourers are not divided by caste, but united by the fact of being Harijan (1974:166-7). On the "caste vs. class" debate, see, *inter alia*: Bouton 1985, Sivertsen 1963, Beteille 1969, Gough 1981, 1989, Shivaraman 1973.

[4] *Cf.* Fuller 1977, 1989; Commander 1983. Pocock wrote in 1962: "[m]ost authorities, not least Wiser, leave out of their descriptions any account of the various forms of labour contract for which there are words in most vernaculars.... although every praise is due to Wiser it is fair to say that one learns little from him of the mere field labourers.... It seems clear enough that there are traditional forms of master-servant relationship in India which do not issue from a need for the achievement and maintenance of status but simply from the permanent or occasional need for labour. This is not to say that these relationships are clearly distinguished by the people themselves, still less that they constitute a system" (1962:84-9; also *cf.* Pocock 1972:27).

[5] To this statement, I would add that of Henri Lefebvre, in *The Survival of Capitalism* [1973]: "Capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century, and consequently, in the hundred years since the writing of *Capital*, it has succeeded in achieving 'growth.' We cannot calculate at what price, but we do know the means: *by occupying space, by producing a space*" (cited in Soja 1989:91).

Colonialism as a *presence*, meanwhile, existed antagonistically to just such a closure; however, precisely the despotic structure of its "politics" imagines the social to be *already* homogeneous - in other words, projecting into the past the reasons for the failure of its allegedly attempted "improvements." This imagination is false, at least for the political geography of dry south India; as a result, the narrative of modernization misleads an analysis of today's caste conflicts involving "Harijans", who never called themselves the "sons of God" anyway.

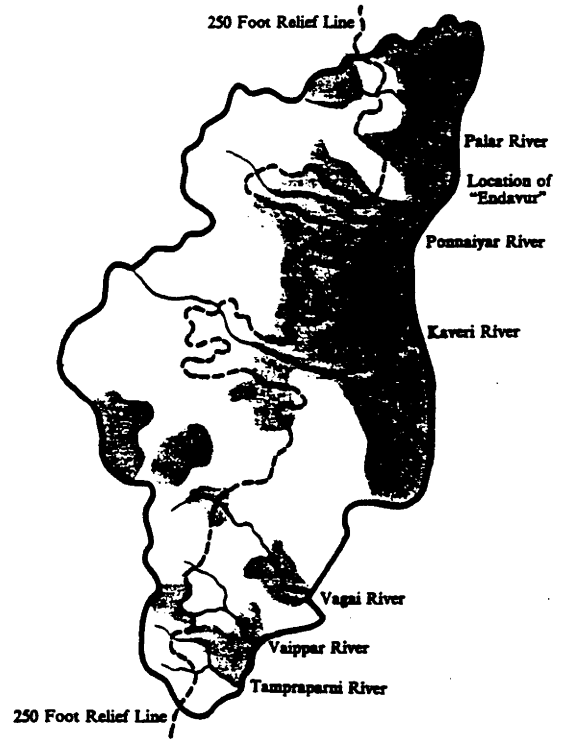
Received Wisdoms, fieldwork goals, re-reading.

The literature written about south India largely represents the "untouchable" castes as obliged and hereditary labourers, spatially excluded from residence in the village, who must also perform tasks considered polluting by the orthodoxy of their high-caste masters. Traditionally, not only were these low castes prohibited from owning land, they were also debarred from selling their labour at the competitive rates of a free market. For some, the history of this tradition traces to allegations of hydraulic states and an "Asiatic" mode of production predicated on "communally owned agricultural slaves" (*cf.* Gough 1981:105-11). The genealogy of the social category of the "untouchables" is supposed to recede into the mists of the distant past, and ancient Arab and Chinese travellers' reports are cited to prove the temporally deep structure of this peculiar tradition. Brahmanical notions of purity rationalized and maintained the degradation of the untouchables, who were excluded from "citizenship" in the public society of villages; in exchange for this, they were guaranteed minimal subsistence needs. Moffatt's study of "an untouchable community in South India" (1979) argued that hierarchical structures based on notions of purity were replicated within untouchable groups in the moments and dimensions of their exclusion from collective life, thus suggesting that the values of the "caste system" were largely consensual from top to bottom. Although low groups often insinuate that they actually should have higher status, it is often cited that no "untouchable" group has crossed above the pollution barrier in the 20th century (Srinivas 1962).

Another popular point is that the lower castes of agricultural labourers have kinship structures requiring only limited territorial extension, thereby incidentally promoting a local corporate sensibility prone to dependency on patron-client relations, and hence mitigating the possibilities of collective revolt. This is an example of a spatial argument used to explain the absence of a "class" revolt; as Miller (1954) argued for the case of Malabar, the evidence from south India does suggest that the smaller the territorial extension of a local "society", the more preponderant are the dominated categories of very low status agrestic labourers. This relation between territory and hierarchy, in which dominance increases as space is reduced space to the point of a locality, is complemented by historians' arguments about epochs of

"integration" (*cf.* Stein 1984:181-227; Bohle 1985). Three of these are usually emphasized: the Chola period (*c.* 9th-13th centuries), the Vijayanagar Empire (*c.* 15th-17th centuries), and British rule (1799 - 1947) - all of these formations are those of centraliz*ing* states. In the administrative paradigm of each, political machinery restricted territorial regions to smaller units of space[6]; colonial rule descended to the "village" for its purposes, suggesting that Miller's argument about caste and territory must be seen in a primary relation to the state.

My "received wisdom", however, comes mostly from irrigated regions such as Thanjavur and Chingleput; Miller's argument is based on material from copiously watered Kerala. The



Shaded areas represent areas where the percentage of Scheduled Caste population is higher than the state-wide average of 18% (from Moffatt 1979:62).

historians' notion of "integration", I suspect, has a similar bias - the *delta bias*. It is in the deltas and coastal Chingleput that untouchable labourers are found in their greatest abundance. Much of the Tamil country, however, is dry. In fact, the "ring of fire" around Madurai, the site of the clashes referred to above, is very dry, save for the innovations of the Periyar water project in Cumbum Valley. For this reason, I

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6 Stein argued that the Vijayanagar Empire made the first step in reducing the "*nadu*", the erstwhile region of "ethnic territoriality" to the village. The earlier *nadu* continued to be a kinship and marriage territory of importance for its agricultural peoples, and it also continued form them as a cult territory, but land management - the unit in which land, labour and capital were combined - had diminished from the *nadu* to the village (*cf.* 1980:415-7). *Nadu* is a variable term in the social history of the Tamil country.

chose the Madurai area for fieldwork, hypothesizing that the social history of "untouchables" would be different in a dry region - a point occasionally made in passing in much of the aforementioned literature.[7] Cumbum Valley became a special interest because (apart from the climate), the Periyar project made it seem an ideal site to study the change from a dry to relatively wet zone in the past 100 years in relation to caste hierarchies and the practices of labour and landowning. The change in landscape and land-use was complemented by large population growth, much of it due to immigration into the area around the turn of the century; as this occurred during the height of colonialism, the site was perhaps over-determined for my thesis.

My original intent was merely to focus on the possibly different modes of social organization represented by the term "caste" and "untouchability" in the dry zone around Madurai. That intention has returned to prevail, although at the time of setting out to do fieldwork, I was inspired by the studies in "ethnohistory" by Appadurai (1981) and Dirks (1987), and had shifted my hopes to writing an "ethnohistory" of an "untouchable" group under colonial rule. For comparative reasons, I wanted to focus on a Paraiyar group, the name of the community in Chingleput analyzed by Moffatt (1979).[8] Engaging in research, however, I found little of what I anticipated.

For example, the occupational ties supposed by the *jajmani* image were extremely marginal: there was one Paraiyar grave-digger [*tothi*], and he told me the story of his lineage's immigration to Ammapatti and acquisition of the hereditary and polluting task [*thozhile*] in historicist and secular terms; there was no story of the failure of a Brahmin to recognize his elder brother, nor of high-caste trickery, as reported from elsewhere. Chinnathambi was the *tothi*, because a few generations before, his family lineage - not *jati* - had made a vow to a god offering to accept the role in exchange for children. Perhaps in 1990 *jajmani* is no more - its *"name disappeared from this place like an image reproduced in water"*[9] - but the collective

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[7] E.g., Moffatt (1979:48-52) notes that the caste hierarchy of dry Ramnad "was far less complex and involuted than that in Tanjore," noting that it is the district with the highest percentage of untouchable landownership. Gough (1981:103-4) makes a similar point, as her work compares taluks within Thanjavur district partly on the basis of access to water, and correlates this to percentage of Scheduled Caste population; the correlation is significant even though the data is all from Thanjavur, which as a whole is vastly more irrigated than the dry zones of Madurai and Dindigul.

[8] In retrospect, I regret this somewhat, since the name "Pallar" is that of the caste-community which is the main "Harijan" participant in the clashes of the area, and there are no ethnographic studies of any of the Pallar *jati*. Gough (1981) discussed the Pallars in Thanjavur, but not in much detail. Pfaffenberger, writing of Tamil Sri Lanka, formulated interesting models of the main two names for untouchable categories there, the usual Pallar and Paraiyar. Referring to Moffatt's study of "consensus", presented as generalizable for any "untouchable community", Pfaffenberger queried whether Moffatt's conclusions "might have differed had he studied the restive and rebellious Pallars" (1982:90-1). Also, upon return I learned of Deliège's (1988) study of some Christian Paraiyar of dry Ramnad. Moffatt did do some fieldwork in mostly dry Pudukkottai, but his monograph is based on the Chingleput data; it would be interesting to know if he sensed any substantive differences in the two areas.

[9] Nazir (1950:34): in the course of a hagiography which chronicles the 1823 expedition of the Nawab of Arcot (in socks!) on a huge pilgrimage through his nominal territories, Nazir described with these words the saintly punishment of the French for failing to respect trading customs at the port of Nakapata, which the French briefly

grain-heap was never a tradition here, which even Dumont recognized in his study of the Kallar of neighbouring Usilampatti taluk.[10]

It may once have had a brief incarnation under colonialism, especially in the *zamindari* tracts, but by and large it did not exist in the dry zone. Something more like *jajmani* existed in the wet zone; there the *amani* system of collecting revenue from the wet zone was based on collection in kind and entailed such a grain heap (*cf.* Ludden 1985:107-115), but the dry tracts were described in 1802 as the space of a "*peculiar disadvantage for Aumany [amani] management.*"[11] Half a century later, reporting from Cumbum Valley, a colonial report was sent to the Collector at Madurai:

> "The regulation for recovery of arrears by zamindars do not at all grapple with the difficulties of the system of 'waram' [*varam*] which obtain in this presidency. The Collectors have no enactment to guide them in the disposal of complaints which are made by Ryots, that the zamindars distress and injure them by delaying to allow cutting and thrashing corn. The Zamindars, on the other hand suffer frequently by the Ryot carrying away the crop before it has been divided."

Parker, the author of the report, suggested various punitive sanctions against both landlord and cultivating parties, and also that the *raiyats* be given the power to demand a coin rent instead of a yearly division of produce.[12] The 1855 report indicates clearly that an *amani* system had migrated to the *zamindari* estates of the dry zone, precisely where they had not existed.

In this thesis, I will argue that much of the dry zone was not "integrated" into a wider state structure, and hence when anything at all was paid to such a power, it was *tribute*. The colonial settlement crushed this independence and integrated the dry zone into a subordinate relation which the centralizing colonial state defined by the relative *doxa* of the tax/rent debate. This innovation, distasteful to the people in these

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held. See C.Bayly 1986 for suggestions that "*jajmani*"-like phenomena have to do with the integration of diverse spaces under the sign of kingship, rather than local distributive systems.

[10] *Cf.* Dumont 1986:46n; Ludden makes the same point (1985:168). Polly Hill laments that "[t]he whole ideology of this issue has suffered from 'delta bias'... and from a failure to realise that there were simply not enough rich households in impoverished dry grain areas, with their low crop yields, who could afford to play a significant part in maintaining a large body of Harijans in partial idleness." There were no real patron-client ties for Harijans, she claims, except for a very few "village servants", and so the Harijans could *not* count on any guaranteed "maintence" for their basic livelihood, and had to fight for themselves. She refers to "the *jajmani* system of ideas" and notes its main weakness as "its imprecision on the position of non-specialist, non-owner-cultivators like the general run of Harijans" (*cf.* Hill 1982:242-66). Buchanan's report on his journey through the south Indian drylands in 1800 is very clear that *cash* circulated freely in the villages there, that land was sold without much anxiety about Indian "tradition", and that the economy was far from being dominated by the cultivation of fields (*cf.* in *ibid.*, p.268).

[11] Lushington, 30 September, 1802, on "Sapatoor" [Saptur, a dry region just east of the Varushanad range], in *Correspondence*, 1873:48-50).

[12] Parker, on special duty to Stokes. 17 Sept. 1855; *MCB*, v.5351:642-3*. *Varam* is a term used in designating shares in the produce of a field, from the cultivator's share (*kudivaram*) to the state's share (*melvaram*). *Varam* implies *amani*; its categories implement the distribution of the *amani's* grain heap, which may or may not be literally assembled at one spot.

erstwhile independent chiefly formations, took shape on the ground in the form of the grain heap, replete with the *amani* system. Interestingly, the colonial document refers to a "system" which "obtains in this presidency," presumably implying the whole of Madras. This is an example of the rhetorical homogenization of its subjected territories by colonial rule; in this case - as in so many others - deltaic models rushed to the drylands. The distribution of shares in the harvest thereby assumed the language of hierarchy, and modes of property "ownership" were duly revolutionized - as the document just cited attests, the *raiyats* were not pleased.[13] The later colonial government fought against this system, as did the cultivating tenants, and the resulting hybrid included the "*jajmani* system of ideas" without the "guarantees" of subsistence for which it has been on occasion lauded; in other words, there emerged caste "hierarchy" *without the "values" of the system* as enunciated by Dumont.

This untoward hybrid was not merely induced by colonial midwifery; it was positively sanctioned by the foreigners' state. When the Company officially abolished agrestic servitude in 1843 (*cf.* Cassels 1988), it was launching an attack on the labour system popular in the irrigated areas. Here low caste labourers had claims to certain rights and security of income in exchange for servitude, which one colonial judge in 1845 declared as violating the very principles of free exchange (*cf.* Ludden 1985:175); abolishing the system, the courts concurred with the interests of the delta property owners (*mirasidars*), as labour costs were lowered. This may seem to be part of a move towards freeing worker movement, but in 1855 the Company government was still citing a public right to the coerced labour of the low castes: a general right derived precisely from the local rhetoric of the deltaic *mirasidars* - in other words, the same right they had abolished (*ibid.*, p.174).[14] This customary right applied, in the consideration of the colonial government, to all "slave castes", such as the Pallar and Paraiyar of the deltas and Chingleput. There was no room for the variations of political space; according to colonial sociology, translating the ideology of the elites of the delta, community names were enough to indicate the social and economic status appropriate to their bearers.

When the Company officers applied this traditional prerogative to the dry zone, they found that Pallar and Paraiyar people there were only available for road

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[13] The colonial government became unhappy as well. In 1885, the *Manual* of Madras administration observed that *amani, peculiar to Hindus*, was "a favourite system between Zamindars and their tenants." As estates came under the Court of Wards, they often brought this "system" with them, and the government did not like it: "[i]t would be impossible at the present day to keep in hand the large establishment that would be necessary" (*cf.* MacLean 1885:136). The Saptur *zamindari* mentioned before was temporarily in the Court of Wards from 1908-22, while the successor came of age; during this time the *amani* system was dismantled by the *raj* and all "rents" converted into cash rents (*cf. Madura*, 1930:155).

[14] This is an early case of the colonial institutionalization of the "delta bias"; for the detested polegars, the political powers of the dry zone, there were no colonial favours. In 1797, colonial officers forbade the *raiyats* of the southern peninsula from cultivating the fields of the polegar chieftains - and directed them to *confine their work to their own villages* (*cf.* Rajayyan 1971:58). Here both the mobility of labour and the rights of the dry zone elite were forcibly abrogated.

gangs when Company force was used against them; they were chained to the gang. Until then working and cultivating in relative independence, these people were not aware of the time-honoured tradition in which some were at the command of other "high-caste" villagers, a command now taken over by the Company (*cf. ibid.*, p.82). The villagers, meanwhile, learned of their "traditional" prerogatives of caste-based domination directly from the spatially disseminated scholarship of the colonial state; ironically, this occured simultaenously with the official project of the legal abolition of these prerogatives.[15] What was taken away was thereby given. In 1853, Marx made his prediction that

> "[m]odern industry, resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labour, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power" (Marx 1959:29).

In fact, at just this time a design for "the Establishment of a Permanent Corps of Coolies" was the subject of a colonial report on financing the construction of that railway system (*cf.* Ludden 1985:273). In the dry zone of the Tamil country, this establishment helped create and render permanent precisely the labours of the "untouchable" castes, now hierarchically cut off - as normative labourers - from the reformation of the village elites, who didn't need to discard customary notions of reciprocity of which they were unaware.

Another "lack" in my fieldwork occurred in the collection of myths and legends held by the Paraiyar to account for their cursed status. These abound in the ethnographies of the delta and coastal regions: stories of accidental injuries to cows and of mistaken identity and ensuing falls from some primeval kingship. The Paraiyar of Cumbum Valley were aware that, *elsewhere*, there were such stories, different traditions, and so on; the only such "story" they gave me was this:

> *Adhiyilum Paraiyanillai.*
> *Sathiyilum Paraiyianillai.*
> *Pathiyile Paraiyanandi.*
>
> In the beginning, there were no Paraiyar.
> As a caste, there are no Paraiyar.
> But in the middle, we became Paraiyar.

Applying to the "untouchables" of Cumbum Valley, to those of the "ring of fire" around Madurai, and perhaps even to more of those in the dry zones, that statement -

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[15] Ludden, referring back to the deltas, notes that one judge "argued that labor contracts, like all others, had to be documented to prove the rights enjoyed by parties on both sides, whereas in service mirasi cases [hereditary rights to labour] the truth of the contract lay utterly obscured by conflicting claims of contending parties. As a result, mirasidars enjoyed both bonded labor and legal freedom from claims by laborers to a share of the village grain heap" (1985:175). Gyan Prakash (1990) discusses the construct of the category "bonded labour" as a transformation made to fit the utopian discourse of colonial legalisms.

their own - is the thesis of this long essay. There is no Brahmin, there is no myth of leather or carrion; there is, however, "the havoc occasioned by the sword"[16]: colonial rule.

Spatiality and Political Systems.

> "Space calls for action, and before action, the imagination is at work. It mows and ploughs."
> - Bachelard.

Classical Tamil poetry elaborated a five-part spatial topography through which to enunciate its form. The five categories were territorial segments called *tinai*.[17] In formulating a poetic grammar for the narrative representation of love affairs and wars, each *tinai* was associated with a particular landscape, season, time, musical instrument, god, as well as particular foods, birds, animals, flowers, water resources, pastimes and occupations, and inhabitants. As Stein notes, these categories suggest a ranking postulate comparable to the *varna* concept elsewhere in India. It is clear that the classical poets, themselves expressing "delta bias", were particularly fond of the *tinai* representing the well-watered tracts inhabited by thriving, rice-eating agriculturalists (*cf.* 1980:55-6). Although a hierarchy can be seen in the categories of space, the millet-eating people of the mountains and dry plains are described as independent. Tolkappiyam, the early grammarian, observes that for heroic poetry (*akam*), "servants and workmen are outside the five *akam* types, for they do not have the necessary strength of character" (in Ramanujan 1967:104); this trope of exclusion suggests the existence of untouchable labourers.

He adds, however, that the names of regions belong to their respective chieftains, too, indicating the independence of the peoples of the dry zone - described as fighters and robbers. The names "*maravar*" and "*kuravar*" are associated with the dry and hilly zones; both of these come to connote low-status caste groups in the 19th century, and were "criminal tribes" according to the colonial *raj*.[18] Regardless of the riverine elites' denigration of the dry zone, the chiefdoms of the area were constantly recognized as operating according to different social codes - they were called "low",

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16 Lushington'w words; he can be trusted in his claim to having seen it... (*The Fifth Report*, v.3:407).

17 The *Tamil Lexicon* (U.Madras, v.6:3721) defines *tinai* as: land, place, region, site, house, tribe, caste, race, family, conduct (as well as a class of nouns in grammar); *cf.* Kailasapathy 1968: 249-50. Analyses of the poetics of the *tinai* can be found in Stein 1980, Ramanujan 1967 & 1985, Hart 1979, and Zvelebil 1973 (esp. pp.100-4). *Tinai* is derived from the root *tin*, "stretch of land" (Singaravelu 1966:18).

18 Early commentators on Tolkappiyam seemed eager to divide the equation of names made by Tolkappiyam. "The persons with such [regional] names are of two kinds; those who rule the region and those who live in that region." A later commentator adds: "[t]he names of heroes are of two kinds; those connoting regions and those signifying sovereignty" (*cf.* Kailasapathy 1968:12-3). However, the poems continue to emphasize the sovereignty of the peoples in the dry and hilly zones (*cf.* Ramanujan 1985).

but their subjugation was not possible.[19] At the height of the Vijayanagar Empire's power, the Emperor Krishnadeva Raya observed that controlling them was "*like trying to clean a mud wall by pouring water over it*" (cited in Stein 1989c:94*).

Did the people of the dry zone care about these frustrated defamations? With less water resources, they drank more toddy - they had different political values. Stein, noting the duration of antagonism between the types of political space, observes:

> "[a] somewhat ironic factor accounting for the existence of tension between peasants and those of hills and dry plains in South India was that most of the latter shared to a greater extent than similar peoples elsewhere the culture of the peasantry. They were never a people apart - to be ignored or massacred - as in parts of South-east Asia. A measure of this shared culture has been the ease with which non- or partially-peasantized warriors of hills and dry plains were able to establish themselves as masters over peasant peoples until the nineteenth century" (1980:75-76).

In *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Leach argued that the same linguistic categories can be used to motivate different kinship and political systems. What for the Kachin was a *temporally* oscillating cycle between hierarchical *gumsa* and egalitarian *gumlao* formations, was structurally figured in the Tamil country around a *spatial* axis. The deltaic and the dry Tamils spoke the same language, yet used it for different ends. Analogously to Burma, and contrary to "orthodox" representations (of the Shan princes or the elites of the Tamil deltas), the political formations of the dry zone in south India were able to impose their overlordship over much of the affluent peasants of the valleys (*cf.* Leach 1964:21,187). Like the Kachin, the dryland Tamils were able to inflect kinship rules to suit them: while the Kachin *gumlao* formation exhibited a "tendency" to develop arrangements for "marrying in a circle" within groups of localised *gumlao* lineages to maintain the abolition of ranking (*ibid.*, p.203), dryland Tamils did not demand Brahmins at their marriages and often opted for FZD marriages, perfectly legitimate within the rules of "Dravidian kinship".[20]

In a later study, Stein modified his remarks on the "tensions" between the two socio-spatial formations; where he first noted a shared culture, he came to think that, even during the heyday of the Vijayanagar Empire, *"there were really two countrysides, wholly different rural structures, that conditioned all of the politics"* of south India (Stein 1989c:44*). The decline of Vijayanagar and its integrationist state could only have magnified the difference. The agrarian routine of the two zones involved different crops and different irrigation (and therefore labour) inputs, and the

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[19] *The Laws of Manu* represent south Indians in much the same way; the Dravida is said to spring from some fallen Kshatriya genre (X.22), and, by omitting sacred rites and not consulting Brahmins, are said to have gradually sunk in this world to the condition of Sudras (X.44).

[20] Dumont (1957) showed that, in the Dravidian system, the domain of kinship was not intrinsically married to *hierarchical* modes of "caste"; as Trautmann shows (1981:201-3), it is only MBD marriage that is even compatible with the north Indian ideal of hypergamy and sacrifice: the gift of a virgin (*kanyadana*).

dry and hilly zones had access to jackfruit and honey, important prestige items for lowland Tamils in general. Whether or not there was a difference in the "modes of production" of the two zones is perhaps not a central question; the riverine peasants' vitriol against the "robbers" of the plains suggests that their topological perceptions of the political style of the dry zone formations observed a difference that made a difference, one that transgressed both their own spatial domains ("plunder") and their ritual values ("impurity"). Etienne Balibar suggests that there is an

> "indispensability of other histories than those of the modes of production, histories whose objects remain to be constituted. Not all histories are possible... The determination of the objects of these histories must await that of the relatively autonomous instances of the social formation, and the production of concepts which will define each of them by the structure of a combination, like the mode of production. We can predict that these definitions, too, will always be *polemical* definitions, i.e., they will only be able to constitute their objects by destroying ideological classifications or divisions which benefit from the obviousness of the 'facts'."[21]

Applied to south India, this passage suggests that, in the moments of their political "tension", the dry zone polemically rebutted the sanskritizing sociology of the orthodoxy of the "citizens" of the valleys - early authors of the "delta bias" and devotees of the *varnas*.[22] This need not even be construed as "resistance"; recent historical research (*cf.* Dirks 1987, S.Bayly 1989) has intimated that the political culture of the dry zone was *expanding* until the advent of a colonialism which crushed it as a spurious and, in Thomas Munro's optical metaphor, "refractory" anarchy. Indeed, this was recognized, ironically, by Tipu Sultan, who told his main rival in the aspiration for south Indian hegemony, the East India Company: "[w]hat you call anarchy appears to me to be a just cry for liberty" (in Kausar, ed. 1980:305).

Dry Zone "untouchables" as colonized writing.

> And even I can remember
> A day when the historians left blanks
> . in their writings,
> I mean for the things they didn't know,
> But that time seems to be passing.
> - Ezra Pound *Canto XIII.*

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21 Althusser and Balibar 1970:250-51; the passage continues: "Attempts like those of Foucault give us a good example of this." In citing this, I am not signalling allegiance to an Althusserian paradigm; rather, lifted out of its "school", the passage approximates a sketch of how the political style of the dry zone formed itself - i.e., polemically defining its social values in a manner antagonistic to the hierarchical *varna* categories. The historical valence of the "mode of production" in determining social structure is in fact limited by political culture; see the "Preface" in Chatterjee 1984:xi-lvi.

22 The *Itankai Valaikai Catiyar Varalaru*, in the Oriental Manuscript Library in Madras, exemplifies the orthodox view of the delta-dwellers: the Kallan is defined as the offspring of a Pallar man and an Itaiva woman (*cf.* Hanumanthan 1979:51). In other words, the independent dry zone Kallar are defined as lower than the untouchable Pallars of the delta; the lowest of the delta are higher than anyone in the dry zone. This not very polite fiction was like torn currency when exchanged in the dry zone itself.

After the lengthy war of conquest, the British installed the Permanent Settlement on much of the dry zone of south India. This was part of an original pacification plan designed to be temporary; however, colonial interests later decided that it was politically convenient to maintain some of the "native rank" in the country. These *zamindari* estates became precisely the area where caste-inducing pseudo-*jajmani* systems enjoyed a colonized efflorescence. These changes occurred in the nineteenth century; not all of the peculiar traditions of the south Indian social world pre-date the colonial *kali yuga.*

There is a story, "still" sung and performed in the southern district of Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu:

> Muttuppattan, the eighth son of a Brahmin family, left his family in dissent and entered the service of the minor *zamindar* of Cinkampatti. His brothers sought him out to tell him that he must marry a particular Brahmin girl, in order that the family acquire certain property rights. Muttuppattan, consenting, set out for home with his brothers; on the way, he heard singing and saw two lovely girls - he fell in love and asked them to marry him. They refused, commenting on the Brahmanical signifier of his sacred ash. The girls were Chakkiliyars - now a Scheduled Caste - and ran off into the forest. Their father was angry when he heard that a Brahmin had been molesting his daughters and set out to hack the Brahmin to pieces - hardly a sign of reverence for the "orthodox" representation of sacrality. He found Muttuppattan, who told him that he wanted to marry the two girls. The father, not wishing to marry his daughters to a Brahmin, resorted to listing the terrible deeds, the drinking, the fighting of his community : "our tribe is indeed like dogs."[23] Muttuppattan continued in his implorations, and the girls' father finally agreed on the condition that the Brahmin cut off his Brahmanical forelock (the "diagnostic" *kutumi*), throw away his sacred thread (*punul*), and remain for 40 days in the Chakkiliyar hamlet, specifically working with leather. Muttuppattan unexpectedly agreed, cut off his *kutumi*, cast off his *punul*, and married the girls. On the first night, however, he had bad dreams that some thieves from Utumalai, a neighbouring *zamin*, had stolen his father-in-law's cattle; he set out with only his weapon and a dog, found the thieves, killed ten of them, but fell at the hands of the eleventh and last. The *zamindar* of Cinkampatti made a funeral pyre and Muttuppattan and his two wives were burned.

Today these three figures are worshipped, and the story sung at their temple. However, the story appears differently to the temple-goers in Ambasamudram taluk, undergoing a pre-emptive amendment:

> A Brahmin's cow had fallen into a well and died, prompting the Brahmin to go to Varanasi in order to atone for the event. While away, courtesy of her prayers to Siva, his wife has two daughters;

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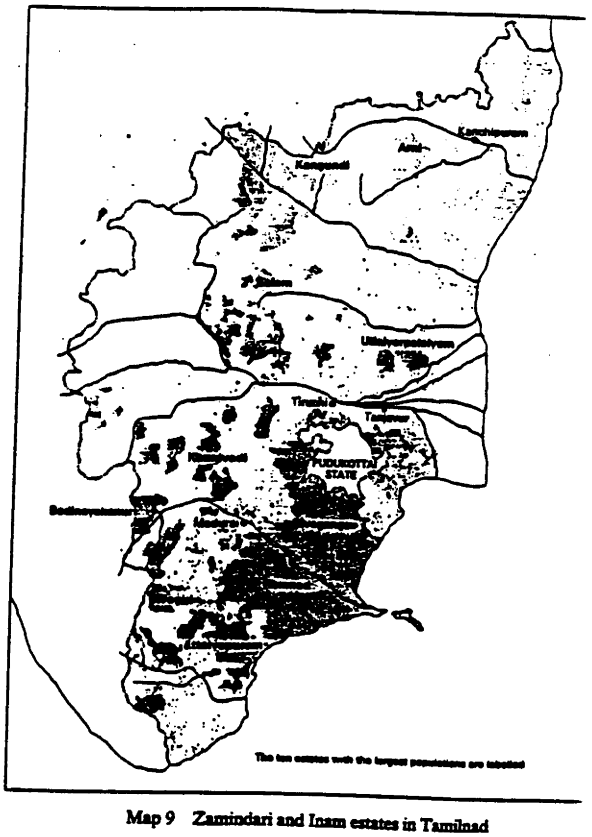
[23] Thus the Chakkiliyar man, in exaggerating the abominable attributes of his people ("tribe": referred to as *kulam*, not *jati*), strategically appropriates the orthodox representations of the deltaic culture - in order to enact his *own desire* which had no interest in the prospects of a relation with a Brahmin. The discourses practised by the people of the dry zone often adopt this idiom, masking their mockery.

> fearing the village will assume illicit sex, she abandons the babies in a forest. A snake protects them and eventually a Chakkiliyar couple finds them and raises them at their home. It is these two girls whom Muttuppattan marries - thus eliminating the crucial motif of cross-caste sex.

This late addition, encompassing the original by preserving the integrity of the kinship domain, suits the tastes of the Brahmins and high-caste Vellalars who began to worship at the temple - which, for them, is that of a Sanskritic deity installed to complement the subordination of Muttupattam in the place of his own memory. How did the additions, of god and text, happen? The singer at the temple, the last in a line of singers who had a grant of land from the *zamindar* of Cinkampatti for singing the song at festivals, conceded that pressure from high caste patrons of the temple festival had forced him to change the original version. When? In the 1930s.[24]

It is interesting that the conflict occurring between ex-"untouchable" Pallars and Thevars throughout the "ring of fire" to the south and west of Madurai - of which the Bodi clash was one instantiation - is located on a map which, like a palimpsest, traces the colonial mapping of *zamindaris* onto the once sovereign space of the dry zone.



Map 9 Zamindari and Inam estates in Tamilnad

The correlation between the map of political history and contemporary violence conducted according to an idiom of caste-based prerogatives of dominance suggests a

[24] The story is recorded in Zvelebil 1989, which also reports on N. Vanamalai's interview of the temple singer.

delayed reaction of the peasantry to the transformative presence of the colonial state. This delay might be said to be due to "the gradual penetration of rural India by British rule" (Rothermund 1978:50), especially given that *zamindari* abolition did not take place until after Independence. A "pure" economism might conclude in this way, but, as Appadurai (1981:227) proposes, a cultural point of view must ask "[h]ow did the ideology and institutional structure of colonial rule affect the perception and construction of authority in the smaller domains that were of no vital symbolic concern to the colonial power?"

History, however, was of great importance to the colonial state; certain domains deemed untouchable, such as "untouchability" itself, were placed in its perennially emergent textuality, thus disguising the spatial proliferation of their particular styles as the always already generalized traditional form. This strategic history relied heavily on a "culture" represented as universally native to south India, and written with insistent pedagogy onto the dusty soils of the dry interior. Colonial rule in south India performed its function not only through its "penetrations", but also, to steal Dumont's fire, through its "encompassing" structures. For the arid geographies of the dry zone, the hierarchical mode of caste ideology cannot "feed" its own exploitations; the history which colonial rule imported to such areas is being contested, as "ex-'untouchable'" communities re-read their own past and note that their resistances to domination are not part of the emancipatory motifs of "modern" ideology, but simply a matter of "honour" - the suppressed ethic of the *tinai* itself.

I set out to examine whether there existed different organizational forms of the "society of castes" in the dry zone, and how "untouchable" castes had been affected by the colonial state. However, accruing evidence promotes the suspicion that such a question misses, like colonial totalizations of a subjected society, the extensive point of spatial differences in south Indian political formations. It is not a matter of innovative "affect," but rather of inventive "effect": in the Madurai dry zone before colonialism, *there were no "untouchables."*

I do not intend to qualify that statement with a rush of scholarly trepidation; the "facts" are not obvious and do not speak for themselves. The thesis as a whole will try to pry through the screen of orientalized representations of the structure of events among the people of the Tamil country, and see the eventful structure of the colonial gaze whose projections participated in ruling the place.

> "And this, by the way, is a strange thing that demands some explanation - the utter and sustained failure of India to appear as it is supposed to be."
> - *The Civilian's South India.* (1921:35)

In his influential book *Orientalism*, Edward Said suggests that most European accounts of the Orient were embedded in the paradigm of "our" will and representation, the pronoun being European, as was the will, while a representation stood in for the Orient (Said 1985:115). Concomitant with this is his question whether "any other than a political master-slave relation [could have] produce[d] the Orientalized Orient" (*ibid.*, p.96). Ronald Inden has pursued this critique with reference to India, citing Hegel's remark that "India as a *Land of Desire* forms an essential element in General History," the desire referred to being "the desire of outsiders to possess the wealth and wisdom of India."[1] Inden argues that "[h]uman agency in India is displaced by Indological discourse not onto a reified State or Market but onto a substantialized Caste," entailing the elision of Indian political institutions, particularly kingship; this "natural" rhetorical move indicates the motivation of European scholars and administrators "to appropriate the power of Indians (not only the 'masses', but also the 'elite') to act for themselves" (Inden 1986:402-3). Inden's critique warns all away from "the siren of caste" (*ibid.*, p.440), and against the *epistème* which relies on a "representational view of knowledge."[2] Finally, Inden exposes an Occidental idea underlying much of the discursive assumptions of Orientalism: that a "rational civilization" is one that sustains a "healthy dialectic" between the state and civil society, whereas in India, "Hindoo political existence presents us with a people, but no State."[3] The upshot is that to continue to speak of "Caste" is further to beget the *epistème* that seeks to reduce, essentialize, and totalize the representation, and then join it to the agency of the power/knowledge discourse which would continue to subject (the representation of) Indians' agencies.

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1 Inden 1986:401-446. The first citation is from Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, the second from Inden; both appear on p.425. Hegel continues to note that "[t]hese wishes have been realized; this Land of Desire had been attained; there is scarcely any great nation of the East, nor of the Modern European West, that has not gained for itself a smaller or larger portion of it."

2 Inden 1986:401-3, and *passim*. At the end of his essay, Inden argues against any sort of essentialism; Inden's ideal scholar would "assume instead that all humans are constrained by the *same indeterminate reality*", and would also assume "that the societies of the world are not more or less 'correct' images of a *single* reality but are themselves *differing realities*, constructed again and again in relation to those around them, by human thought and action" (p.446).

3 Inden, 1986:427. The citation is again from Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, following shortly after Hegel's typical claim that it is "the principle of freedom" ("the proper basis of the State") which is "altogether absent". Instead of the organic relation between Differences, which are defined as properly subordinate to Unity, in India it is the "distinctions... of castes" which are "referred to Nature" (cited in Inden, pp.427-8), and thus allow for the "cohesion of society" to be nothing but "wild arbitrariness" (*cf.* Hegel 1988:65-6).

Both Said and Inden claim that Orientalist discourse has been efficacious in producing the "Orient" it proposes.[4] This claim would have to be specifically argued for a given case, unless one harboured an *a priori* notion of the relation between "representation" and "agency" - a position which, as it aspires to considerable hegemony (see footnote 4), would again require particular demonstration. Largely in cahoots with this sort of critique, I hope to demonstrate some of the vulgar institutional, material processes through which this production was staged in colonial south India. In looking at the conditions for the efficacy of discourse as creative, it is necessary to place agency where it belongs, in political economy, and mediate this with an eye to the "cultural" banks of dominance. For to assume that agency *can* be so patly "appropriated" may be, to return to Hegel's Orientalism, to think "in the ecstatic state of a dreaming condition."[5] This may seem to the very profound as a dogmatic clinging to a reality-principle, but I feel it more akin to the Tamil slogan "Give respect, take respect"...[6] Besides which, it is not my intent here to muse on about the *epistème* of "representational view[s] of knowledge"[7]; the reader

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[4] "In many respects the intellectual activities of the Orientalist have even produced in India the very Orient which it [*sic*] constructed in its discourse" (Inden 1986:408). Inden does qualify his statement, but without specification; also the accidental use of the singular to represent the pluralities denoted by "Orientalism" shows both how difficult it is to write of the very issue Inden lambastes - and Inden's own equivocations within that difficulty. Note also the rhetoric of "production"; for a critique of this concept when used in semiotic analysis (and even social theory), see Baudrillard *The* (1975), an important argument about the language of political economy and a critique of Marx, to the effect that the concept itself (the "productivist" paradigm, complemented by the labour theory of value as a cosmology) is the most extreme form of "appropriating human agency" through representation of all.

[5] Cited in Inden 1986:401. See Ranajit Guha's "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency", *SAS*: v.2, and "Dominance without Hegemony", *SAS*:v.6, as well as Tanika Sarkar's "Jitu Santal's Movement in Malda", *SAS*:v.4, esp. pp.152-3, for a reminder that the layering of relations of domination and submission (as well as resistance) are not restricted to the colonizer/colonized relation; rightly, the implication of the "subaltern" theme contains a striving to avoid reference to such entities as "Indians" - vs. Inden (*op.cit.*, p.445): "...Indians are, for perhaps the first time since colonization, showing sustained signs of reappropriating the capacity to represent [!] themselves..." (This is meant as a compliment to *SAS*:v.1).

[6] It is as a form of exchange relationship that the relation between the representation and the material might be best construed in the pursuit of historiography. I am most attracted to Walter Benjamin's method: "Sundering truth from falsehood is the goal of the materialist method, not its point of departure. In other words, its point of departure is the object riddled with error, with δοξα [conjecture]. The distinctions with which the materialist method, discriminative from the outset, starts are distinctions within this highly mixed object, and it cannot present this object as mixed or uncritical enough. If it claimed to approach the object the way it is 'in truth', it would only greatly reduce its chances. These chances, however, are considerably augmented if the materialist method increasingly abandons such a claim, thus preparing for the insight that 'the matter in itself' is not 'in truth'" (1973:103).

[7] Regarding the troubled word "representation", there seems to be some cheap shots going around. Said gives as an opening quote the following, from Marx: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." This stands as a sort of formulaic (metaphor) for the thesis he propounds. In context, Marx was talking about the peasantry in France, localized and "unorganized" in terms of the formal political structures of the nation-state; in this case, while it might be argued that he sought to appropriate the position of "their party" to the Communist Party, he was not quite making an ontological statement! One might even suggest that he was acknowledging a "fact" (whether one appreciates his manner of doing so is another matter) which did not exist entirely within the structure of a self-contained discourse based on a will and *its* representation; *cf.* Marx 1852.

participates in de-stabilizing some of the "authority" which is supposed to emanate from such a genre, unless "Orientalism" is a *fait accompli.*[8]

What aggravates me about some of the contemporary language of profundity is that *if* the discourse of Orientalism on, say, the issue of "Caste" has produced its own image, then surely a paradigm which focuses on "Caste" *is* the appropriate interpretive framework. The archaeology of this appropriateness may be revised, but the present would remain. Is this what Inden would call for? I doubt it. It would seem that a significant motive behind criticism today is opposition to totalization and essentialism.[9] In the Indian case, the diachronic dimension of history, and the foreign presence of the colonial raj both suggest such resistances within the material itself. It is likewise possible to speak of caste without totalizing or "substantializing" one's referent; in the same way, it is possible to speak of state formation without being a Hegelian. The point is to relate things, including nominalities and fragments.

Caste as Obsession.

The word "caste", it is often recited, entered the vocabulary of the West via Portuguese ("casta"), and has been an earsore ever since. Perhaps one of the first usages of the term in relation to India was Barbossa's mention in the 16th century of the "eleven sects" of low and excluded castes of Malabar, including a group of Paraiyar. Barbosa stresses the role of force, mentioning that the Nayar, when contaminated by the touch of one of these polluted groups, "immediately kill them...: and they kill so many of these *pulers* until they are weary of it, without any penalty."[10] The existence of such documents is a bit of a problem for those who take

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[8] See Declan Quigley (1988:20-36) for a refreshing query, examining two questions: " [1] has the European preoccupation with caste been justified or is it, as alleged [by Inden, etc.], a distortion of Indian history and society? ...[2] if it is in some sense possible to isolate caste as a distinct principle of social organization, how is this principle manifested in actual or historical groups? The two questions can be re-phrased as follows: (1) does caste exist? (2) do castes exist?" Quigley "unfashionably" suggests that "the unequivocal answer to both questions is yes" (p.21). Interestingly, the article participates in an increasing trend to re-consider the work of Hocart, which Inden also proposes (*cf.* Inden, pp.436-7).

Inden writes that it is "[s]ocietalism, the reduction of political, religious, and economic practices to *the social, that is, caste,* is deeply embedded in Indological discourse" (p.429, emphasis mine), which sustains this Orientalism. While the critique of "societalism" is cogent, especially after Hegel's remark, what Inden also seems compelled to equate is "the social" with "caste." (Is this a concession to Dumont, only to disagree with his method of analysis?) Hocart, however, in his work on kingship, includes (intrinsically) the reality of "castes," and by so doing "shows that it is perfectly possible to have a theory of caste which is simultaneously a theory of power" (Quigley, p.33).

[9] The differences from within this motivation are substantial: for instance, Foucault operates from the intuition that "the subject" can be defined as that which exists to be subjected, whereas Bourdieu, in his usual (Weberian?) tone, argues that sociology "offers perhaps the only means of contributing, if only through awareness of determinations, to the construction, otherwise abandoned to the forces of the world, of something like a subject" (Bourdieu 1990a:21).

[10] From Duarte Barbossa's 1516 Portuguese manuscript, cited in Moffatt (1979:42); see also Deliège (1988:49-55). The "*puler*" referred to in the cited text may be the Pulaiyar, historically one of the "lowest" communities in Kerala. Both Moffatt and Deliege consider this evidence as generalizable. Two points: it is interesting that the Hakluyt Society in London chose to translate Barbossa's text in 1866, by which time the Imperial *raj* had every

the hard line for Orientalism and argue for the European colonial "invention" of certain social formations. "Caste" is an obsessive trope, and is perhaps over-stressed, but do we think Barbossa was "wrong"? What is perhaps more interesting is that it wasn't just "castes" that Barbossa came, saw, and wrote about, but particularly Malabar's "excluded" communities, including some Paraiyar. Perhaps "*casta*" came very quickly with another loan word, "Pariah", whose future itinerary has been extremely arbitrary, as Sarter's text testifies. And indeed, surely it is the representations of "Pariahs" and "Untouchables" which has propelled much of the Western obsession with "caste." This, I think, is a major reason for the validity of the critique by Inden and Said, and plays a major role in the colonial mutation of south India: this veritable synonymy of "caste" with "out-caste", "untouchability" and "Pariah." Sarter's text bespeaks the potency of the metaphor to the colonialist mind.

Is "metaphor" what is at stake in what Inden calls the "representational" *episteme*? Perhaps the problem is that "caste" (and "Untouchability") have come to be privileged metaphors (part standing for whole) in the orientalizing discourse. Complementary to metaphor is metonymy, which is related to desire (and force).[11] And, of course, not only Orientalists desire. *Identifying* desire would seem to be a crucial problematic in historiography, a subjectivist analogue to causal forces. Hegel excluded legends, folksongs, "traditions" (!) from his category of "original history", which is concerned "with peoples *who knew what they were and what they wanted*," as signified in their leaving a written "historic" record of their achievement of "a firm individuality" (1988:4*). This makes clearer the structure, as Said sketches it, of Orientalist representations: the Western subject (which is a State[12]) desires, an activity

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interest in consolidating, in as innocuous a manner as possible, the image of a barbaric Indian past. Second, by most accounts, the states of SW India (Travancore, Cochin, Malabar) were home to the most vertical caste-stratification of all (*cf.* Marriott 1965; Miller 1952).

11 Thus according to Lacan: "... desire is only that which I have called the metonymy of signification," and "... in general, force is used to designate a locus of opacity" (*Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*).

12 Hegel (1988:64) notes that "[i]t is the state... which first presents a subject matter that is entirely appropriate to the prose of history; indeed, the state creates it as it creates itself." Because Hegel distinguishes between the "prose of history" (as a genre for which only some subjects are "appropriate") and the subject of history, he must understand a necessity of "a consciousness of the past" produced by "an intelligent and definite record of (and interest in) actions and events whose results are *lasting*". This befits "the *permanent* purposes that are characteristic of the state as it forms" (emphases mine). India has "no object there for Mnemosyne. And although there is a deeper fantasy, it is still wild; but to be capable of having a history this fantasy would have to have a purpose that relates both to the actual world and to substantial freedom" (*ibid.*, pp.65-6). Having thoroughly essentialized the State, it is no surprise that his version of "essence", in all of its inflexibility, relies on the assumptions that records (texts) are transparent, unproblematic, in short, *sincere* (written by those "who knew what they were and what they wanted..."). Hence Hegel disparages what he calls "critical history" (a *jati* of the "reflective" *varna*...): "[w]hat is meant to be exceptional, here, consists in the ingenuity of the author in extorting something new from the historical accounts, not in the things themselves" - he notes that the French have contributed much to this field (*ibid.*, pp.7-9)! This is indeed an everpresent problem, but the pomposity of Hegel's simple (hypostasized) division between subject and representation (the State and the Prose of History) is not only overbearing, it is extreme avoidance behaviour, mandating metaphor while making it impossible (i.e., a matter of domination). It is precisely due to this that "critical"/"reflective" history will continue to dissent - and will risk seeming insincere...

of *being*, whereas India is a *topos*, the "Land" of desire - self-consciousness versus "transient soil."

There can be many reactions to the structure of implicit domination which is the imaginary speaker behind Orientalist discourse. One is to throw it all away and pretend to (re?)turn to some mirage of "empiricism." Another is to eschew "representation" and follow the deconstructive method of simulating acceptance of much of the discourse (as Inden does in accepting the equation of "the (Indian) social" with "caste") only to level a critique closer to the epicentre of the *epistème*. At the risk of yet again Orientalizing, I can accept some of the "heuristic" conventions of historiographical "representation," even such Hegelian categories as "State" and "Society"; they are useful in casting shadows - albeit shadows of doubt - on the geneaology of some of the Orientalized topography. This is not at all to join the now archaic chorus singing that India had no history before it was desired by Europe, but is based rather on the cautionary inkling that history is not only about getting what you want - for some more than others.

After the early colonial period when the European ideology of "Oriental Despotism" held the most prominent sway, the obsession turned to "Caste as social evil"; this seems to have gathered pace after the formalization of empire in 1858. Epitomizing this was Henry Sumner Maine's ponderously typical claim that "caste" was "the most disastrous and blighting of all human institutions."[13] More frantic was an anonymous writer to the *Edinburgh Review* in 1877, who progressed from a condemnation of peasant apathy to condemning the Hindu caste system as obscurantist, intransigent, "the great ally of famine" (which was devastating in south India from 1876-8), and the "minister of death" because, according to our anonymous author, it prevented people from leaving their homes and quitting hereditary occupations to seek for work, and from eating food provided in relief camps by a benevolent administration![14] Ultimately, we learn, "caste" is the main *obstruction* to "progress and reform."(cited in Arnold 1988b:132). Caste became social evil as the Desiring Subject felt resistance in getting what it wanted. The "friction"[15] felt by the penetrating power became the sign of "native" identity, the locus of alterity's being - called culture, or nature, or the social, or whatever: its systematization will be sought

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[13] Cited in Madan et. al., *CIS* (n.s.) vol.5 1971:8.

[14] Sarter himself claims his visit to Songir was in famine times, and noted that many died of exhaustion on the way "to the nearest relief-station, where grain was meted out to the starving people" (1924:136). So, to qualify Cotton's remark that the book "is not concerned with Europeans," we see that the colonial state did exist, on the margins, to help people. Otherwise, the Orient is the Orient...

[15] Perhaps it is this "friction" which lurks in the shadows of the "culture" concept; consider H.S. Maine's polemic against political economy (especially when applied to "the East"): "they [the 'bigots' of political economy] greatly underrate the value, power, and interest of that great body of custom and inherited idea which, according to the metaphor which they have borrowed from the mechanicians, they throw aside as friction. The best corrective which could be given to this disposition would be a demonstration that this 'friction' is capable of scientific analysis and scientific measurement; that that it will be shown to be capable of it I myself firmly believe" (from "The Effects of Observation of India on Modern European Thought", cited in Dumont 1966:81n25).

by imperial power, whose epistemology does not have a place for intentional resistance (desire is blinding).

"Desire," wrote Roland Barthes, "has an epistemic dignity, Pleasure does not" (1975:57). Orientalism has tended to promote its "Orient" as the "Land" of Pleasure (to be desired). Encountering friction (an awkward image), the colonizers strove to learn from their experiences. "Non-interference" became an "article of faith" to the Company and the "friction" was relegated to something volatilely innate in the subjected land. This policy cast a new angle on the sexual imaginary of colonial discourses, for the outstanding features commonly included in the colonial list of the features of "caste" criteria related to strict marriage rules and/or community endogamy. In the more classical phase of the European Enlightenment, this was understood as one of the foundations of the *"superiorité naturelle"* of eastern civilizations, a cornerstone of the superior system.[16] By the 19th century, whose utterances equivocated between Romanticism and Utilitarianism, the resistances that "castes" gave to "Pleasure" were doubly interpreted: the Romanticist motifs reacted with degradation, claiming the East was full of nature (but without a subject); the utilitarian urgencies disparaged the situation of "the Indians" as backward, stagnant and immobilized (due to what was attributed to the intransigence mandated by "distinctions of caste"), they also resigned themselves to accepting the situation (as they perceived it) as their own political expedient. Thus the "Land of Desire" turned out to be a metaphor, and the desire, unrequited, sank back onto its utilitarian calculus and the "epistemic dignity" of its Orientalism. Distinguishing representation from figuration (the image as it appears to [erotic] pleasure), Barthes wrote, "[r]epresentation, on the other hand, is *embarrassed figuration*, encumbered with *other meanings* than that of desire: *a space of alibis* (reality, morality, likelihood, readability, truth, etc.)" (1975:55-56*). In a power relation, all those alibis need to be constantly asserted; and that drone echoes back into bodies. The alibis behind some of the obsessed and frustrated colonialists, at last in the "Land of Desire," can ramify into a set of simulations - and again, particularly in a colonial regime, based on force and inevitably ignorant, simulations[17] can take on real relevance.

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16 This paragraph is indebted in parts to Ranajit Guha. See 1963:23-4 for Guha's remarks on Voltaire's play on the invasions of the "barbaric" Gengis-Kan, which makes much of the relation between sexuality as part of "the granite tradition" of the superior system to which the Chinese remain loyal. In the end, Gengis asks the conquered mandarin to govern the country according to its own laws, musing: *"Je fis un conquerant, vous m'avez fait un roi."* Guha notes that the implicit thesis of the story guided English interpretations of why the Portuguese lost their power (because they tried to "abolish the customs" of the Hindus), and, of course, ensuing policy. Crucial in the resilience of the *superiorité naturelle* is the mandarin's wife, Idame, and her *rejection* of Gengis-Kan's implorings for love.

17 The word "simulation" finds its theoretician in Baudrillard. The role of ignorance is important, and in a colonial situation, is contagious, and enhances the quasi-relevance of simulations. Surely that has to do with some of the "targets" of rebellions, which otherwise seem to be fetishized objects. The role of ignorance and the consequent production of simulations (as forms of language learning and novel political analysis on the part of

Caste as Pervasive Totality

Hegel, as usual, provides a mock beginning. Writing of the differences "The European" observes when "he" crosses the Indus (from Persia, a nation of "the Caucasian, i.e., the European Stock"), Hegel conjectured the existence of "repellent characteristics, *pervading every single feature of society*" (in Inden 1986:405-6*). In speaking of "caste", it is remarkable how much this all-pervasiveness trope emerges in discourse, including in today's Indian newspapers. It is in this discursive dimension that the issue of metaphors and the representational *epistème* are particularly dubious; often one senses enormous condensation occurring, with myriad diffuse aspects of life argued into one symbol, which becomes a cause. A short review here may be of use to trace some of the ways this itinerary has developed.

In 1814, the Board of Control in Madras recommended a revised reprint of the Abbe Dubois' *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (1906) with the following rationale:

> "[T]here is nothing perhaps of more importance *to* the Hindoo community than that their distinctions of caste should be well understood by the civil officers of the government *in the interior of the country*, yet there is no subject at present on which it is *so difficult to procure information*" (cited in Dirks 1989:50*).

Dubois wrote his book in response to an advertisement in the public papers calling for authentic documents for the use of Company historiographers; Lord Bentinck, who purchased the manuscript for the Company at Madras, had despaired of the fact that, in his view, Europeans generally knew very little, or nothing, of Hindu manners, and then mostly from reading. Dubois certainly had "field experience," and, of course, a commission. Bentinck was happy with the manuscript, claiming his opinion to be that

> "in a *political* point of view, the information which the Abbe Dubois has to impart might be of the greatest *benefit in aiding the servants of the Government* in conducting themselves more in unison with the customs and prejudices of the natives" (in Dubois 1906:xv*).

The vector of benefit that the distribution of the book would have was construed equivocally, but seemed to be *for* "the Hindoo community" defined as consummately

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subaltern groups who do not share the "culture" of their dominators) permits a more viable analysis than those which would make "fetishism" yet another case of irrationality.

Secondly, Stokes once wrote that "Colonial rule is peculiarly subject to the distortions of bureaucratic structures, which mistake the report for the bullet, the plan for action, and what one clerk says to another for history" (1978:30). That is precisely correct - and the historiography of colonialism must take just that into account. Such a "phonocentric" (*sic*) approach to a colonized history is often appropriate; David Arnold has shown that there were often exploratory rehearsals or experiments to test whether a *fituri* could come off. If "practice" is going to be made part of a critique, then these "plans" are important as well as the possibly ensuing "actions." (*cf.* "Rebellious Hillmen: the Gudem-Rampa Risings, 1839-1924" in *SAS*, v.1:88-143, esp. pp. 125-28.)

sensitive to their distinctions of caste; this sensitivity, of course, was to be accomodated and understood by the British, for "political" reasons. Oddly, it was felt that it was difficult to know about (let alone understand) these distinctions of caste which were so important to the Hindus; at least, this was so in the inland region. Better acquainted with the Jagir they had held for some time already [now in Chingleput District], the British knew about "Brahmins and Pariahs" and the gradiations in between. Clearly the same thing must apply in the interior, but the details were not forthcoming. Interestingly, Colin Mackenzie also reported great difficulties in educing "caste" histories when he was in the interior country at the same time.[18] Mackenzie (and his often Marathi Brahmin assistants), perhaps utilised the "questionnaire" method in sociology, wherein "informants" are told that they must answer questions posed in arbitrary categories. Many of the "caste-histories" which Mackenzie, difficulties aside, nonetheless acquired, were command performances that he himself noted were given not ony after persuasion, but also after his explanation of what it was that he wanted. His research helped to form a genre, a genre whose epochal substance simultaneously set the stage and drew the curtain closed for the play of pre-colonial history; meanwhile, the labours of colonial history began.

By 1901, apparently, the colonial imaginary had begun to have some pedagogic effect. As a complement to the Census of that year, the journal *Man* announced the ethnographic survey of India:

> "It is unnecessary to dwell at length upon the obvious *advantages to many branches of the administration* in this country of an accurate and well-arranged record of the customs and the domestic and social relations of the various castes and tribes. *The entire framework of native life in India is made up of groups of this kind*, and the status and conduct of individuals are largely determined by the rules of the group to which they belong. For the purposes of legislation, of judicial procedure, of famine relief, of sanitation and dealings with epidemic disease, and of *almost every form of executive action*, an ethnographic survey of India, and a record of the customs of the people is as necessary an incident of good administration as a cadastral survey of the land and a record of the rights of its tenants. The census provides the necessary statistics; it remains *to bring out* and interpret the facts which lie behind the statistics."[19]

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[18] Buchanan found the same in southeastern Mysore: "I found the people very unwilling to give me information, and I am clearly convinced, from what I have already seen, that without authority to demand it, very little useful information on statistical subjects could be procured by a mere traveller." In 1800, when enquiring as to who had constructed a temple at Tayculum, he was sneered at and told that "it had built itself" (*cf.* Vicziany 1986:650).

[19] *Man*, vol. 1 (1901): No.113*. An ethnographic survey had been conducted in Bengal in the 1880s. In 1899, it was the British Association for the Advancement of Science that wanted a more extensive ethnographic survey, comprising ethnography, anthropometry (which "yields *peculiarly* good results in India by reason of the caste system..."), and photographs. The "scientific importance" of this was seen thusly: "It has come to be recognised of late years that India is a vast store-house of social and physical data *which only need to be recorded* in order to contribute to the solution of the problems which are being approached in Europe with the aid of material much of which is inferior in quality to the facts *readily accessible* in India, and rests upon less trustworthy evidence" (*ibid.*, p.138*). Despite the "obvious advantages" to the Imperial administration, there were limits, intimated as follows: "Experience has shown that ... nothing can be done on a large scale in India without the active assistance

In this round, there is no question of the vector of benefit promised by the study of "castes" - there is no equivocation, this time it is *for* the administration which, with its penchant for "executive action", which will derive the "obvious advantages." It is no longer difficult to procure information, the entrenched state has the statistics, it is now only necessary to "bring out and interpret the facts." Revealingly, recording and "knowing" the people as an incident of control is seen to equal (in declared importance) the technology of the revenue system (the fields) - this was one of the most monumental changes in the colonial tenure in south India, which by the late 19th century was being forced to look elsewhere for income, as land revenue was not keeping pace with expenses.

Even within the continuity of the reference to "caste", important shifts occur; the slide of rhetoric from the relevance of the "distinctions of caste" (to the Hindu "community"), to the insistence that "groups of this kind" make up "the entire framework of native life", does not only trace what will one day be called "the substantialization of castes". It also denotes a shift from the importance of distinctions (*hinges*) to the arrangement of solid groups from which members can scarcely deviate (the "*framework* of native life") - in the first, "community" is construed as living and moving; in the second, it is inert, and furniture needs merely to be "arranged" to place them in the colonial estate. The real optical shift, *vis-a-vis* the threshold or doorway, seems to reflect the increase in "purposes" of the mature colonial state, its executive distance ("the entire framework of native life" is proposed as some separate being) in its heyday as a state without citizens. Concomitant with this is the issue of revenue; it is a trope of modernity to pull the rug out - to marginalize the official relevance of territoriality (except at certain borders). The colonial context dramatizes even more the shift from territorial domination (the collection of tribute, or "rent" as it was often called in the *raiyatwari* areas of Madras) to human domination (the enforcement of control).

On the colonized side of the relation, these colonial texts propose that an erstwhile difficulty in getting "information" on caste rights, or, rather, customs and manners, has become a negative icon for the progress of colonial scholarship. Now (1901) techniques make it possible to "know"; what is elided is that perhaps now there is perhaps "more to know" about "caste."[20]

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of Government. That assistance, however, can only be given under certain conditions, the chief of which seem to the Government of India to be the following: - (i.) The scheme must not cost much...." Finally, the Imperial purse was not impressed by the "scientific value" of photography (at least as compared to anthropometry!), which was expensive, redundant (there were already large collections), and only served to make the volumes "more popular and attractive." Photography was arranged by other funding sources; see Pinney 1990.

[20] All documents are voices; all voices get hoarse after shouting. That is one medium to interpret a saga. Another, far more preferable, is to elucidate the strategies of deafness used by the voices defined by colonial documentation as unclear, autistic, or even mute. I have not yet managed to work out how to guess at this, alas.

In a fantastic display of excess regarding the "pervasive totality" trope, a recent Supreme Court Justice spoke on the dynamics of the Reservation policy:

> "In India, the matter [of poverty and state programs] is further aggravated, complicated and pitilessly tyrannised by the ubiquitous caste system. A unique and devastating system of gradation and degradation which has divided the entire Indian and particularly Hindu society, horizontally into such distinct layers as to be destructive of mobility, a *system which has penetrated and corrupted the mind and soul of every Indian citizen*" (cited in Iyer 1990:116*).

This might be a bit of evidence to support Inden's contention that the "Orientalist construction[s] of India" as based on a societalist model centred on "caste" has in fact created the very reality its representations proposed. It is not my concern to make or unmake that argument; rather, it is to assess whether or not, and how, the colonial presence in south India "invented" or inflected the present "reality" of "the ditch" and its dread icons, "caste" and "untouchability." "[S]eparation is the form of naturalness," wrote Hegel (1988:83); but then, dominance is, for its subjects, a presence, a relation, however denied by the "deeper fantasy, ... still wild" that colonial rule had about itself: that is, to be all metaphor, with a bit of 'good administration.' "The divisions," I was told by a man of moderate means in Cumbum, "are made to make alliances."

Representing Humanism.

> "Every art of fortification has its own art of siege."
>
> - Lichtenberg.

It is difficult to assess the degree of "indigenous" internalization of Orientalist discourse. Contemporary "public" discourse has problematicized "caste"[21], as seen above, and of course there are strains in rural society which often express themselves through communalist rhetoric and action. During my fieldwork in western Madurai district, I asked Chinnathevar about what he thought I should learn from the region and its people. He responded from a comparative perspective: "It is better for an individual to be in the USA society than here. Here are six people, all relatives. Any outsider would see us as co-operative, but still, while everybody seems to talk, it is nothing; we *learn* nothing."[22] Even though western people "live in units", Chinnathevar felt that there was more chance for them to learn, and "to have *real experiences*." In this comment from his own imaginary, I feel, Chinnathevar went to a very deep structure of the Western self-image, even a Hegelian one. What does it

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[21] Dubois reckoned that "caste" included within its functionality a powerful check on despotism (1906:33). In this light, one may query the structural disposition of some discourses to constantly harp on against "caste".

[22] Another man once told me: "Nobody thinks, except maybe to say 'My uncle is great'." (Compare to R. Reagan: "Where would we be without this great country of ours?...")

mean *not* to have "real experiences"? The "Orient" was often set up as a place where a "Western Man" could go to have "experiences" (including sexual ones). The senses that constricted Chinnathevar's feeling of "real experience" were, in the context of his conversation, articulated through the lens of the pressures of kinship, caste, and neighbourhood - in short, much of what has usually been described as "prescriptive" and hence another inflexible brick in the Oriental stasis. The communicative context of this interaction involved, of course, a researcher there very much out of a preference (made viable by the legacy of colonial domination) and a landless labourer in a Tamil village who was aware of the strictures that political economy[23] puts on his [in this case] access to the world of "preferential" behaviour, particularly when talking to a typification from that world. Obviously, Chinnathevar's comments within his circle of friends and neighbours would be different.[24]

I had asked him about the world he lived in, not his images of the Occident; when I pressed this again, he went into quite an outburst, frequently mentioning "*jati*" (the word usually translated as meaning "caste") in declaring that "here the poor can ask from the rich." Significantly, it was this that he thought was drastically eroding on the local front. One may query the nature and extent of its "past" vitality, but one might begin to wonder whether there is some style which the Orientalist *epistème*, at least, cannot see: that of "caste" as a humanism.[25]

As befits the ignorance inherent in a cross-cultural relation which "desires" something (from "India"), I occasionally asked people to give me their definition of or gloss on "*jati*"? On one of these instances, I had been cornered to give the answer to the question of how far the universe extended; after giving a hack gloss on Heisenberg, I parried in kind: "What is *jati*?", asking my interrogator to give an account of the "caste system" howsoever he wished. He did: "What is a human?" A

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23 Ganesan, a farmer rising to considerable dominance in the village, understood perfectly; he told me that the reason I was given money to do research was because, so to speak, I "already had money" - a dynamic with which he personally was very familiar. Here he subverted Chinnathevar's rather optimistic representation of the "West" as a particular form of *"society"*.

24 Chinnathevar himself was more or less an exponent of "modernism" and the nation-state. Those discourses which construct the subject (the being which is to be made "healthy") as the State, will tend to deride what the State claims to be frictions resistant to "real experiences" - i.e., the "real experience" of the State.

25 Obviously one is left to declare one's own "verdict" on "humanism," a term which post-structuralism seems to revile. One of Derrida's students makes the claim that "Nazism is a humanism" (*cf.* Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La Fiction du politique: Heidegger, l'art et la politique*. Paris, 1987:81). The argument is briefed as follows: "Nazism is a humanism in that it rests on a determination of *humanitas*, which is, in its eyes, more powerful, i.e., more effective than any other. The subject of absolute self-creation... sets itself up as the subject, absolutely speaking... Quite simply, it fits Nazism into the logic, of which there are many other examples, of the realization and concretization of 'abstractions'." (See Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut for a polemic against what they make of the Heideggerian indictment of modernity and this peculiar definition of "humanism"; *Heidegger and Modernity*. Chicago:1990.) One notes immediately that "*jati*" often evokes a relational idea, and *not* an absolute ("self-creation"); this is vaguely implicit in Chinnathevar's remark - a key aspect is that "the poor" can *ask* from "the rich". Such a movement would imply a dialectic of petition and recognition (or refusal) which differs from the "absolutely speaking" subject. Is it the "asking" which makes for the relative absence of so-called "real experiences"? (And is it substituted for by "un-real" experiences, or "real"... dreams?)

question for a question; in some way this is utterly appropriate, suggesting a certain sort of indeterminacy and non-closure, highlighting the role of rhetoric, and fundamentally undermininng my urge for a definition embedded in "the other's" own voice (that is, the positivity into which it seems now I had tried to cajole and coerce him).[26] This seems an odd "exchange" scenario: two questions without answers. There are various possible responses, including to consider the reciprocity of the questions as indicating synonymy, or to consider whether analogy is a viable form. In the first, one would presume that "*jati*" and "human" were manifestations of the same intuition, i.e., essentially metaphors; the thought that "caste" might be a "humanism" has the value of breaking with the dubious tradition of assuming caste as the root of all "social evil."[27] In the second, one would work with the idea that "*jati*" is to Tamil people as "human" is to some others, both as central principles of social discourse and "integration" in their respective worlds.[28] The struggle for comparison (or even "translation") then turns quickly to metonymy, due both to the *desire* to compare the different contexts, and to the form of one's production of the comparison, by reflecting the difference off of domains considered more similar, e.g., "economic", "political", etc.[29] If (since?) the end "product" is going to be a representation, this is rather problematic, and would seem to be exactly why Inden polemicizes against the "representational *epistème*": the occulting of one's (own) desire into a representation (of an "other").

While Inden eschews the work of the "Orientalists" for this, I wonder where else the same political semiology occurs. In the nationalist movement(s), for instance, there were many calls for "Harijan work." On this issue, Eugene Irschick writes: "Work on behalf of untouchables had little or no effect on the lives of the untouchables. However, it had a dramatic effect on the fortunes of those who participated in the movements as leaders" (1987:164). This seems a cogent warning

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[26] The person I was talking to is from Kundalanayakkanpatti [K.N.P.], a "mono-caste" village (as the people living there emphasize). He continued to tell me that, when in school, he read about the basis of caste being the professions; now, however, he feels that "a caste" is a group with its own rituals, traditions, and god(s). For the record, it may be noted that the community living in K.N.P. is a branch of the Raja Kambalam (Tottiyar) Nayakkar caste: this community provided a great number of the later *zamindars* of Madurai district, and also the great Tamil "polegar" Kattabomman (the latter claim was made by some people in K.N.P., and seems to be contested; the ex-*zamindari* families of Bodinayakkanur and Tevaram are both in fairly close contact with the community in K.N.P.)

[27] Or, for those inclined more towards Lacoue-Labarthe et. al. (see note 25), *jati is* the root of all social evil, but *not* due to its "lack" *vis-a-vis* the West's "plenitude" - rather, due to qualities *shared* with "humanism."

[28] On another occasion, asked what was the important thing about Cumbum Valley today, I was told by the same person of K.N.P., *"I can only talk about my community?"* (Then? - We don't have the dowry system.)

[29] Max Weber is an exponent of this technique; in *The Religion of India*, he argues, through a variety of arguments ("economic" : payments in grain to artisans, "political" : absence of a speech community), that the "caste system" is the basic reason "why" India did not develop capitalism. The entire framework of Weber's capitalism is already predicated on the lack/achievement axis.

against simply assuming that what seem like good intentions, even one's own, provide a gravity that might anchor one's own representations to their unspeaking subjects.[30]

Things change. Raymond Firth wrote: "In attempting to cope with the vast problems of rural India it may not be true that knowledge is power" (preface to Mayer 1952:vii). That this was written in 1952, five years after the Imperial *raj* quit, makes one somewhat suspicious. Yet things do change; the indication, noted earlier, of the increasing facility with which colonial ethnographers had of listing a who's who in the "interior of the country", suggest that this is not merely a case of increasing methodological accuracy (which is still inadequate, as Firth speculates, to bring about the truth of an Occidental truism). Rather, a colonially induced reification of "castes" may have created more knowledges as well; with more knowers, sometimes, comes less power.[31] Or, perhaps: different knowledges, and different powers. It seems clear that the model Firth relied on, that knowledge could simply *be* power, is imperial and misconstrued. The power/knowledge relation encompasses technologies as well as epistemologies, a tedious truism for colonial subjects: I had my camera out in Kombai, and a man across the street started calling it a revolver - "you can shoot anyone, *chumma* [just like that]!" When I told him (as he was firing away with his imaginary) that I was out of film, he said: "Oh, a *cold* revolver."[32]

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30 "What is tragic is not the impossibility but the necessity of representation.... To think the closure of representation is to think the tragic: not as the representation of fate, but as the fate of representation. Its gratuitous and baseless necessity.... And it is to think why it is *fatal* that, in its closure, representation continues." (Derrida 1978:248-50).

Compare to Gandhi, who also understood that "[t]he devil has always quoted scriptures," and was happy to report (in 1926) that many Brahmins, and growingly so, were *leading* the reform movement! (*cf.* Gandhi 1954:17, 26-27). As is well known, the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the main "service to Harijans" institution initiated by Gandhi, was not to include "Untouchables" themselves in the managing; it was a venue of penance for "caste-Hindus."

One more note: the "fate of representation" remains open; Pinney's (1990) essay, on photography and classification in colonial India, concludes that "alongside the enforced visibility induced by photography lay a parallel process of making the Orient unknowable which, far from reinforcing the hegemony of colonial discourse, helped create an area of secrecy and power in which the 'Other' could assert its own autonomy, and which was ultimately necessary for the establishment of the nation state."

31 As Marx wrote about the regime of exchange proper to private property: "The increase in the quantity of objects is therefore accompanied by an extension of the realm of the alien powers to which man is subjected and every new products represents a new *potentiality* of mutual swindling and mutual plundering. Man becomes ever poorer as man, his need for *money* becomes ever greater if he wants to master the hostile power. *The power of his money declines in inverse proportion to the increase in the volume of production:* that is, his neediness grows as the *power* of money increases" (1844). Analogized to the proliferation of possible knowledges, whose index is the number of subject-positions, it seems the value of subjectivity declines insofar as it is attainable within a given political economy.

32 Andre Wink, in proposing an engrossing new interpretation of pre-colonial revenue systems contrasted to the stale stereotype of "Oriental Despotism", reckoned that the attempt itself - to analyze the Maratha political system in terms other than those used by hitherto normative texts (Mughal, Marathi, Company, Imperial British) - "may itself be seen as due to the passing of Western dominance in the East" (1986:378).

> "I know so well all the causes why it cannot be done and yet if it cannot be done cannot it be done it would be so very much more interesting than anything if it could be done even if it cannot be done."
>
> - Gertrude Stein, on the writing of history.

The questions in this section are, first, is it possible to write a history of those of the "fifth" *varna* in south India? and second, if one is going to do so (anyway), how might one go about it? The problem of the "lack" of data itself provides hope that one can specify some of the conditions "productive" of that lack.[1] And, as for the (lack of) production of "own-voice" records, that is not so much a product of a sort of spontaneous forgetfulness, but of an active erasure as well. Bernard Cohn, writing on the difficulties of analyzing social mobility in India, noted the problem of rationalization in oral traditions:

> "There is one big problem in looking for instances of caste mobility. When it has been successful, you don't see it, it's not apparent. When it has failed, you don't of course, see it either, though generally when you know about it, it has failed" (in Silverberg, ed. 1968:122).

Testimony in Tamil Nadu on this theme comes from the Nadars, who do not merely object to being asked about (or hearing about) "Shanars", but often claim no knowledge of what is being talked about[2]. In parts of what is now Andhra Pradesh, the lowest castes were obliged to recite their patrons' high-caste genealogies; erasure as an active process permeates both those who manage to produce "histories" as well as those who suppress those who, perhaps as a result, do not.[3] There is, then, perhaps some optimism for an essay; at least the second question can be addressed, while the first must remain in brackets.

"The history of Hinduism constitutes also its sociology." So wrote Trikoli N. Madan (1987:164), mocking the tendency to assume the inverse, which is the method underlying much of what historians have tried to do when faced with what they identified as a relative lack of positive data and an abundance of ethnographic

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1 See, for example, Chakrabarty 1989:65: the paucity of sources constitutes an important problem in the history we are trying to understand; and p. 114: "[a]n attempt to write a history of the conditions of the jute-milll workers of Calcutta on the basis of documents coming from the state and the owners of capital invariably reveals certain gaps in our knowledge of these conditions. Insofar as that knowledge has a history, the gaps have a history too. It was the same history that produced both the knowledge - enshrined in the archival documents - and the gaps, which the same documents reveal."

2 Thus I found in my fieldwork in western Madurai, anyway. The "Shanars" were a community very near if not below the pollution line in the 18th century, but made great progress in colonial times, both economically and in terms of caste rank (*cf.* Hardgrave 1969.

3 Classical Tamil poetry had an awareness of erasure as an effect of the gift. "Bless you, bless you, Nalli. Now our minstrels play morning pastorals in the still drone of evening, and in the morning they play on their lutes evening's seaside songs: all because you, in your bounty, have taken on this business of giving and caring, *our men have forgotten our traditions*" (*Purananuru* 149, translated as "The Price of Giving Too Much" in Ramanujan 1985:132).

"survivals". "Persistence" might be said to be the primary quality attributed to Indian social formations by their exogeneous representations; sociological investigation was seen as a sort of Oriental synonym for historiography.[4] Madan, I think, had a different agenda, as he cited Bankimchandra Chatterji: "[t]here is no Hindu conception answering to the question 'Hinduism'; and the question... 'What is Hinduism?' can only be answered by defining what it is that the foreigners who use the word mean by the term."[5] The sentence may be re-written: The "history" of "Hinduism" has been constituted *as* a colonial sociology. In this structural trope, "persistences" have been seen as testimony to the limited efficacy of the *raj*.[6] This in turn has facilitated the framing of the whole discussion of the degree of 'modernization' induced by colonial rule[7], and thereby mandated a reification (de-narrativization) of "tradition".[8]

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[4] Exemplar of this tradition, Henry Sumner Maine wrote: "We take a number of contemporary facts, ideas and customs, and we infer the past form of these facts, ideas and customs, not only from historical records of that past form, but from examples of it which have not yet died out of the world, and are still to be found in it. When... we have learned not to exclude from our view of the earth and man those great and unexplored regions which we vaguely term the East, we find it to be not wholly a conceit or a paradox to say that the distinction between the Present and the Past disappears. Sometimes the Past is the Present.... Direct observation comes thus to the aid of historical enquiry, and historical enquiry to the help of direct observation" (cited in Dewey 1972:307). Maine was speaking of the comparative study of the "village community", and few would really contest the heuristic value of this sort of comparison. However, when the results of the comparative/historical work are refracted back on one cultural history in itself - when the comparative framework is forgotten - the consequence is usually to essentialize what has already shown itself to be eminently "sociologizable": i.e., historicizable, but *vis-a-vis* the present, not necessarily as a portal into the "past". An example of the unsound ramifications of the sort of extemporizing that (ambiguously) neglects this is found in Hardgrave's method, defended in 1969: "No community *today*, even the most isolated, can be taken to represent 'tradition' unaffected by innovation and change. Mass communications... have *opened* the village... [and then...] Though not impervious to change, the relatively isolated village may be taken as approximating to some degree the conditions of the past. Structural and behavioral differences between variant situations at the synchronic level cannot be taken as congruent with the spectrum of 'stages' in a time sequence. The village-city polarity does not represent a strict parallel to the tradition-modernity continuum. *For our purposes*, however, it is useful to accept a rough congruence between the diachronic and synchronic models" (Hardgrave 1969:x; emphases mine). Why not see today's "isolated village" as a *falling-away* from, rather than the *residue* of... "tradition"?

[5] Cited in Madan 1987; Madan follows Bankimchandra with his own sentence: "If our quest for Hinduism in the modern world takes us to a home of the people called Hindus, or to one of their temples, we would be unlikely to find it there. We may receive some intimation of it in an Indian university; but it is in places such as the British Museum that we are sure to encounter it." I am reading Madan as an ironist asserting the *reality* of inner-worldly specificity over and against the essence of an *-ism*.

[6] The terms parody Anand Yang's title, *The Limited Raj*, a book which is part of a genre which considers that the colonial state dissolved before it reached the local level - a view that this thesis will find incredulous. For an argument amenable to the view of Bankimchandra and Madan, and devoted to *colonial* history (not "behind the scenes"), see R.E. Frykenberg 1987.

[7] The study of "modernization" is generally seen through some combination of a jaded set of criteria: 1) that it is a relevant issue (not ethnocentric); 2) it has more or less failed, or is in some way mutant or deficient (as compared to "successful" modernization); 3) while the colonial state's extractions may have mitigated the structural changes it allegedly attempted to bring about, at least these attempts were made; and 4) it is the "persistence" of Indian tradition was the "friction", grit to the machine of the (politically) neutral modernization motives of the imperial state, which is the key collaborator in this failure...

[8] Consider the early colonial commission for the codification of "Hindoo" law. Whereas to the British of the late 18th century, this seemed like the natural and sensible thing, now it is generally seen to have been a widely aberrant innovation. At first it was an administrative goal, to respect native usage, and later it became a wholesale re-structuring of "tradition", which ultimately did not have much leverage "on the (ever-recalcitrant)

"Only from a superior position," wrote Hegel (meaning "high social standing"), "can one truly see things for what they are and see everything, not when one has to peer upward from below, through a narrow opening" (1988:5-6). The stereotype of India as having, in Bougle's words, "no rudiment of the state," has been shared lately by Dumont, who speaks of the ancient texts as "having no interest" in dynastic stability. It is widely felt that Dumont followed Hegel's maxim anyway, and distilled a "Brahmanical view of caste."[9] For Hegel, the *image* of India as State-less ("Oriental despotism" notwithstanding!) placed the country outside of history; Dumont's relational model of hierarchy, stripped of what he considers the normative foundations of the "gradual eschatology" implicit in the Western notion of historicity as a value, permits him to imagine a properly Indian dynamic of perpetual "emergence": of caste(s) as states of mind, and of variations on the renunciant theme. This does not, of course, shed much light on a project for an Untouchable historiography.[10] Bougle agrees with Hegel on the absence of a State, but has at least the sense to point out that he means that "India... has always lacked a *central* history," which is of course to leave the book wide open; Bougle suggests that "[t]he present exclusiveness of castes is but the ancient memory of the isolation of clans" (1971:54,42*). Bougle is not cited here as the source of all light, but only as a differently nuanced beacon whose shadows do suggest that things can be looked at sideways. The centre *need* not hold.

As noted before, early colonial officers such as Mackenzie actually had a very difficult time procuring "caste-histories" in some parts of the Tamilnad countryside. Notably, those parts were the drylands of the interior, which were sources of the inconvenience of 'savage independence' to the English, who fought, and fought repeatedly, an exhausting (and no doubt expensive) series of "polegar wars" to subdue

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ground"! In the two views, each the other's shadow, there is no consideration of the reality of the distortions of the act of "writing." (Like gift-exchange, the social structure of "writing" is predicated on difference and deferral; note that the royal gifts, particularly land grants, were inscribed on stone, copper plates, or, later on *cadjan* leaves; the "gift"-like nature was echoed in the inscription, and writing did not disavow the dynamism it related.)

[9] The chief accuser is Berreman (1971). South India presents a strange setting; 1) Brahmins compose less than 3% of the populaton there; 2) nonetheless, political ideology in the 20th century has tended generally to ride on the symbols first expounded in 1916 in the "Non-Brahman manifesto"; 3) Dumont's own ethnography (1957 [1986]) of the Piramalai Kallar of Madurai District, Tamil Nadu is quite different than the ideas proposed in *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966 [1980]). It is not at all clear that Dumont was "speaking with Brahmans," so to say - the thought that Dumont was driving at the idea that *"culture" is itself an elite category* seems to escape Berreman's vitriol.

[10] For a methodological treatise on Marx and the problem of Indian history, see Dumont 1964 (quote from p.32). As for Dumont and the question of Untouchables, *cf.* Dumont 1986 [1957]:128, and 1964:65. In the latter he asks of the image of the "independence" of India as seen in Vivekananda, Tilak, Gandhi, Bankimchandra et. al.: "[b]ut to which India does this pertain? Essentially that of caste-Hindus with European education. Not that of the Untouchables who would, logically, to cease to be such before being able to participate in any such independence." One of the frameworks, however invisible, of Dumont's comparative sociology as it bears on history, is that "untouchable" historiography is, by the logic of "history" - seen as the valorization of time [*"valorise comme le complice de notre volonte"*], of becoming, and thus, in some sense, of symbolic or real capital, or its potentiality (which would be possession of land, generally a proscription intrinsic to "untouchability") - in its very concept is an oxymoron.

them. When I set out to do fieldwork, after toying with various goals, I really wanted to compose an "ethnohistory" of a Paraiyar community in a dryland area.[11] Regardless of any allegations of the importance (or lack of it) of such a project, I wanted simply to hear their version of "what happened." For an undeterminable number of reasons, not the least of which was my incompetence, I found this impossible. (Thus the torturously indirect approach of this thesis.) Even "mythologies" were scarce, and more narrative speculations were simply not forthcoming.[12] Communities of greater means tended to have histories of illustrious antiquity, as did certain individual families of particularly enormous holdings. The relation between property and "history" seemed insurmountable. The Scheduled Castes, of which were present in the region all three of the major Tamil groupings, were said (by others[13]) only to have been the "original inhabitants," while the dominant groups were nonetheless "the first to come here."[14]

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11 Moffatt's fine ethnography (1979) was done in Chingleput district, a well-irrigated paddy-growing area where the Paraiyar have a long experience (regardless of "history") of normative landlessness (now slightly improved). I thought a counter-study in a region which my hypotheses led me to think would exhibit a different political ecology and hence a different colonial inscription. Since I went to the field, I learned of Robert Deliège's (1988) study of a village of mostly Christian Paraiyar in Ramnad District, another very dry zone.

12 I take this "lack" seriously - not merely to "protect" myself from thinking that I just couldn't "make them talk", but because I interpret it as indicating another, far more important situation: why, after all, should a group of "Paraiyar" in the southwest of Tamilnad be presumed to share the community myths and notions of identity as another group of "Paraiyar" in northeast Tamil Nadu?

13 Others would say this; they themselves had seriously very little to say. I remember one Chakkiliyar couple realizing that, as they spoke Telugu: "maybe we're from Andhra!" Tracing individual family lineage shrines turns out to be less than very helpful, as without property (for the most part), regionally extensive ties are not kept up. Lineages are not stressed amongst the Scheduled Castes, due to which they "merge" with their immediate locality - i.e., the "village" - very quickly; some Ammapatti Paraiyar told me it takes about 50 years for a place to become "native". This, coupled with the extreme "patronage" relations which they tend to find inevitable as a ticket to "immigration", must make them seem "without religion" to the affluent residents. Interestingly, Gough claims that Thanjavur Brahmins also put little stress on their lineages (1981:313).

14 The two ex-*zamindari* families of Cumbum Valley, for example, had extended stories (and genealogies) of their early forays into the area; by consequence, this entailed their larger 'caste' community: the Tottiyan Nayakkars (Raja Kambalam). In the early 19th century, there were several other "polegars" in the area who either refused to agree to the terms of the Permanent Settlement, were not offered those terms, or fell into unredeemable arrears by 1840 with their "unsettled" *peshkash* (e.g., Kombai). The Gowder community in general had claims of great antiquity (and often had some sort of relation to those erstwhile polegars). P.T. Rajan, a powerful figure in the Justice Party in the 1920s, had his land base in Uthamapalaiyam; the farm still owes hundreds of acres (and still has its eldest member as the "king-maker" of the D.M.K. party, in power in 1990). This family, the sole "Mudaliyar" family in the immediate region, also claims to have been there for ages; from a few off-hand remarks of one of their members I have the sense that they came from near Trichy and perhaps acquired most of their lands just prior to the building of the Periyar Dam, which revolutionized the value of land in the Valley, and of which they may have had insider knowledge. After this, the field thins. The Thevars (mostly Piramalai Kallar) do not have strong historical claims, probably came after 1880, and have a *very* strong sense of the heart of Kallarnad being in Usilampatti (and as a result of their pride often include Cumbum Valley as the western section of Kallarnad, which it is not - but then again, with the Kallars, it is if they say it is); the Kallars are numerous and powerful, but are not as well-endowed with lands as the Gowders. Finally, there is a substantial (for Tamil Nadu) community of Muslims in the Valley, most especially in Cumbum and Uthamapalaiyam towns. Some few of these families are spectacularly wealthy, and ultimately they control the biggest share of the patronage in Uthamapalaiyam taluk.

As for the time-frames proposed by these people, there is considerable variation, of course. The Kannada-speaking Gowders have figures ranging from 220 to 500 years ago; the former makes more sense due to some of their stories and due to the fact that they might have then fled Haidar Ali's regime in Mysore in the late

The Amnesia of History's Property.

> "... secret history is the history of... landed property. On the other hand, Don Quixote long ago paid the penalty for wrongly imagining that knight errantry was compatible with all economic forms of society."
> - Marx. *Capital.*

The first, tentative move when faced with such proclamations about space and time - here "ownership" and "history" - is to try to effect a salvage move by switching the axes of the apparently ready-made narrative *function* according to the formal conditions for its use: i.e., the *labour* necessary to make those discourses of ownership *worth* speaking. "History," then, as Kojeve wrote in his effort to read Hegel, "is the history of the working slave" (1969:22-3); when I was in K.G. Patti a Paraiyar woman smiled at a Kallar man and said, "throughout the generations, we [my *jati*] have been ploughing, ploughing, ploughing..." It is widely felt that coastal Paraiyar were "slaves" (*adimai*), and the Fifth Report is full of the observation, based on the Chingleput and Thanjavur rice-bowls. Of course, the Paraiyar today are not "slaves", and becoming a bonded labourer is a fate that many would willingly accept[15], if they were offered the position. It is curious that, as landed families stretch their melodies to well before colonialism, the Paraiyar now speak the harmonic language of agricultural labour.

18th century. The Nayakkars generally claimed a vintage of 500 years (again, fleeing from Gooty District in modern Andhra, where the Deccani sultanates were growing). The Muslims prefer those figures greater than 250 years, presumably to separate them from any idea that they might have either come with Haidar Ali or, worse, been "converts" at that time; they have always been Muslims.

it is very likely that the Paraiyar (at least those in the two villages I knew best) came from Ramnad, Virudhanagar, and Rajapalaiyam, all to the east, and all dry regions; they dimly recollect temples there. My guess is that they came only in the late 19th century, sped along by the severe famines and the opening up of the Valley after the Periyar water project. The Pallars are a more mysterious lot; there is good reason to think that they are quite close kin to their arch-enemies, the Thevars. The Chakkiliyar are impossible for me to think; they seem to have historical links of sorts with either the Tottiyans or the Gowder - I found them rather grovelling in exchange for the patronage of the Gowders.

15 While some noted that one needed "the mentality" to be a *kothu adimai* (contract slave), most Paraiyar I talked to would have taken the job. The implications are regular work (of all and any sort for the employer), and daily pay - *every day*. The pay is less than the *kuli* (daily wage) made by a casual coolie, especially at harvest times, when the wages go up for a few weeks. "What's the use?" asked another Paraiyar, "you don't get any more money in the end." Most landowners preferred only daily coolies, especially as the convenient labour-contractor system in the region managed the problems of supervision quite neatly. Big landowners might, however, agree to take on one "permanent" labourer; perhaps there were 30 in K.G.Patti - "There's not enough big shots [*mothalaali*] anyway." Very relevantly, in K.G. Patti, the 30 *kothu adimai* were not specifically of any caste. (As a rule, one does not labour for a person of "labour" caste, which can cause considerable difficulty for a landless member of a corporately affluent and "high" status group; poor caste-kin might in theory be taken on as *kothu-adimai*, provided there was adequate kinship distance.) The fact that "bonded labour" is illegal is quite irrelevant, except that as a form of patronage it is perhaps now more skewed to the landowner's favour; i.e., one may refuse to hire anyone except on strictly casual terms, and one can use the "conspiracy" relation (against the "law") as a component of the affinity which is exchanged, thereby getting a better "economic" deal. (For Polly Hill's cogent comments on the over-stressed image of the "bonded labourer", see Hill 1986:114-5; see also Prakash 1990.)

Although this strikes me as the social formation of coastal Tamilnad historically, to extend it to the drylands (as "history") may be misleading; it may be that Madan's proviso is *becoming* true in Cumbum Valley (or other erstwhile dry zones), but it is premature to claim from a recognizable social form the idea that so it has always been. Apart from those few families with such wealth that they need not work[16], and the general *desire* on the part of any farmer to work less if possible[17], landholdings are too small to warrant significant cleavage based on "the working slave." Besides which, most labourers today expressed concern about underemployment. There is another feature as well. The Paraiyar woman who recited her kin-group's "history" was talking to the Kallar farmer, whose grandfather's same fields she said that her grandfather had also ploughed.

Her grandfather, meanwhile, had owned land in his own name. K.G. Patti was the site of a colonial village, designed originally as a reformatory village for the "Criminal Tribe" Piramalai Kallar. Malaria struck in the first year (1919), and the European custodian left the area; the land was then given on *darkhast*[18] to some Kallar and to some needy Adi-Dravida families. Many Paraiyar lacked the capital to invest in bullocks or ploughs, and only marginally cultivated the land, preferring to be coolies - for which the rates of daily pay (in kind) were considered acceptable. Viewed retrospectively, they seem to have made a mistake, but two things need to be spelled out. First, it must have been viable to make that mistake; i.e., *wage*-rates were considered attractive; second, the eventual loss of the land came due to the

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16 Land Reform laws make it very difficult to have tenants, although some tenancy relations continue. Thus many of the sons of these elite families were occupied with "supervision."

17 Many people told me that their crop preferences were determined as much on the anticipated amount of work necessary to their success, and not merely the potential for absolute profitability. Some of this is based on the prestige of not working, or of having as few of one's family work as possible. Landless labourers, meanwhile, preferred even the scratching and itching crops (*cholam*: sorghum) since they required more days of weeding work.

18 *Darkhast* refers to the gifts of government land to those who could not buy them outright. It assumed various forms in different places and periods; in K.G. Patti it entailed that the receiver obliged himself to cultivated the lands for 12 years, and was not allowed to sell the lands; the buyer would not be allowed to *cultivate* them. This is precisely the opposite of the tradition of Tamil royal gifts, in which rights were given not to cultivate, but to collect the *melvaram* ("upper share") which otherwise went to the King (and therefore was the King's to give). The receiver of this sort of gift did not thereby gain control over the cultivator (and often was powerless to enforce the full receipt of the *melvaram*), and seems always to have been given the right to sell the rights to this share. Note that as long as the Paraiyar went on doing the actual cultivating work, any invisible sale need not be noticed by the State. The Depression in the 1930s made selling a necessity, and doubtless there were both desires to sell and coercive measures to force them to sell the lands; very few of them seem to have lasted long beyond the 12 year mark. Interestingly, the land sales in K.G. Patti at that time were *not* to the Kallars or to local Gowders, but mostly to Natukkottai Chettiars based in Periyakulam town - big financiers of Tamilnad who were able to buy up land at a great rate (they even cornered the market on Pudukkottai ex-*agraharams* when, after the Inam Settlement of 1888, they were put to market and revenue pressure; *cf.* Dirks 1987:370). They were non-local, which suggests that the Paraiyar knew they did not want to sell them to their neighbours.

Incidentally, the Chingleput Paraiyar studied by Moffatt owned some poor dry lands which they referred to as the *Dargos*, in honour of the British official who they said arranged that they receive the title for this waste land. "Dargos", as Moffatt indicates, is clearly *darkhast* (*cf.* Moffatt 1979:73), meaning the wastelands were acquired on petition.

mutual coercions of high revenue demands in the Depression, and, although this did not seem relevant at the time, lack of access to capital for the technology of farming - i.e., they were not included in the circuit of local lending. This is no surprise as the key sources in that circuit were precisely those who wanted to buy the land. As many Kallars also lost lands in the same manner, it is only partly an issue of being "untouchable."

There is a need to break up the Orientalist wholes which would read the "history of the working slave" even when, as was the case of dryland Tamil peasants, working was not (yet) slavery - and would soon become a desired boon anyway. On the other hand, and as a complement, it is problematic to *assume* that there is a relevant history of a particularized group such as "*the* Paraiyar."[19] Hardgrave did this with the Nadars, who are famous for their tremendous rise in Tamilnad society, through marketing networks, efforts at "Sanskritization", and the production of "caste-histories" claiming fallen greatness. As the (colonial) state grew, so grew the prose of "histories", as Hegel suggested. Yet the subject, in this case, of a "history" was that of the "Nadars" - as Cohn insinuated, Hardgrave could refer to the "Nadars" precisely because, on all objective accounts, they were successful. The final chapter of their rise was the direct lobbying of a state ever more receptive to ratifying the historicity of communal groups. One would like to ask: Whose state is history's? Yet it seems that in this case the final arbiter of the Nadar "history" was the colonial State. Is this because the idea of a "Nadar" caste-*group* had itself become an artefact (and foundation) of that State?[20] If so, why would one presume that there was a "Paraiyar 'history'" in western Madurai? I propose that insofar as one can be written at all, it is a tale of a *fall*, (through and) into "history."[21]

A rise to power seems the necessary pre-condition for the production of an historical narrative. Yet, the rhetoric of the Nadars centred on their *previous* (pre-

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[19] The feature of endogamy might be proposed as proferring and signifying a caste-group to be a distinct entity, therefore a subject for history. Although I think that endogamy was strict in dry Tamilnad, I resist this - for 2 reasons: a) there are many examples of "groups" who practice endogamy and yet are not called "castes" and are not construed as a subject-group bounded by the actual circulation of spouses (neither are the Nadars, for example); and b) Tamil *jati*-endogamy is an index of distinction, and not, *of itself*, determining of any particular *relation* to the rest of the population (such a relation being a handle for historical baggage).

[20] The "Nadar" movement was led by those who had risen in wealth due to their success in marketing. The poorer sections, in particular the still toddy-tapping ex-"Shanar" communities in southern Tamilnad, have benefitted little from the rise of the Nadar Sangam. In the 1930s and '40s, the Sangam expressed distaste at the idea of a communal electorate, as this would cause strife internal to their organization and its shadowy constituents; they preferred direct nomination (i.e., the Sangam as "the Nadars"!). In the 1950s, after years of struggling for official recognition of their rise in status, the Sangam clamoured for access to the benefits made available to those with OBC status. The Government suggested that this would be made available to those families who were actually in the toddy-tapping occupation, whereupon the Sangam (rightly) argued that "no other community" was subject to the criterion of actual (as opposed to "traditional") occupation. Thus the "history" of "the Nadars" could be written, as the narrative of the rise to power of a subject (the Sangam). See Hardgrave 1969, esp. 129-144, and 176-183.

[21] In this sense, and in this area, a "history of the Tamil Paraiyar" is a history that it would be better *not to have to write*.

Nayakkar) kingship; theirs was not a discourse of "achievement." This resembles those now dominant landed communities of Cumbum Valley, who, as *owners*, now propose that the ancestry of the *fields* is consubstantial with their own. Yet they relate the *land* in some way to the Adi-Dravida, the "original inhabitants" who were somehow (always) already there.[22] Manu recognized only the rights to land of the king and the "right of the first clearer" (*cf.* Wink 1986:18-9), a value which here seems to shine through the weave of collective and/or corporate rights. Yet, of contemporaneous development with this pioneerist rhetoric is the merging of the Scheduled Castes into what was already there. This belies a fundamental human relation as prior to and imposed upon the space. The strict division between the territory and the model of human relations corresponds to the sufficient condition for a theory of "the social." The "Untouchables", related and tied to the site, the land, are thus outside of this "social"[23], which iterates its positive model through allowing the *narrative* (and "communal") discourses of "history".[24]

The idea of the social may be an a priori category, for use in observer-oriented comparative sociology, but forms which achieve their being through the positive norm must be related to other structures. The idea of the social in France, for example, seems to have emerged and developed in the tenure of the absolute monarchy and its rise to power. Tocqueville proposed that the real legacy of 1789 (and all that) was the *continuity* of the formation of "administrative despotism" in the centralizing state with its dissimulation of "administrative" and "executive" functions.[25] Relating the idea of "the social" to the intensity of centralization of the State is, to me, crucial; contrary to the Orientalist view of India as a land with a problematically surfeitous "social", and contrary to the Dumontian view of the social as the ideal "encompassing" structure of the hazardous play of "the political", the strictness of a divide between *dharma* and *artha*, or society and the state, must be seen as a *representation* capacitated by a domination "structured *like* a despotism" (Guha, SAS

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22 This structure is a common feature in all of the south Indian states and also of the Punjab. The Ad Dharm movement in Punjab is an example of "Untouchables" themselves asserting this logic of identity (*cf.* Juergensmeyer 1982). The Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha, founded in the 1890s, also began, ostensibly, as an "uplift" organization directed by Paraiyar elite.

23 And, increasingly, the "Untouchables" of Tamil Nadu are seen as a separate "racial" group than the ("ethnic") castes; *cf.* M. & S.Barnett 1974. The notions of space, territory, and untouchability are elaborated in the next two chapters.

24 Perhaps the symbolic apogee of this model of the social rests with the archetypical representation of the "Brahmin", whose proper activity is devoted to iteration (of the Vedas and sacred texts), but not, it seems, to narrativity. The very control they were to have, in the orthodox picture, over the means of writing, and thus of historical writing as well, promotes their necessity, and their own ideality as receivers of food in exchange for the gifts of speech.

25 Furet develops Tocqueville's thesis: "what is called 'the French Revolution,' an event later inventoried, dated, and magnified as a new dawn, was but the acceleration of a prior political and social trend... [T]he Revolution put an end to the legitimacy of *social* resistance against the central State. But it was Richelieu who set the example, and so did Louis XIV" (1981:15*).

v.6:274).[26] As the colonial state grew, so grew its sociology - and for this reason the history of its subjects was re-constituted.[27] Territoriality[28] as a *relation* permeating and permeated by *political* formations of sovereignty[29] became the repressed of the powerful colonial imaginary, whose return in historiography might suggest that some "voices in the dark of the night" belonged to Paraiyar who would not have recognized a "Pariah."

Tamil Paraiyar.

> "Only he who is oppressed by a present need, and who wants to throw off this burden at any cost, has need of critical history, that is to say a history that judges and condemns."
> - Nietzsche. *The Use and Abuse of History.*

One myth common to many of Tamil Paraiyar is given in proverbial form: *Parppanukku muttan Paraiyan ketparillammal kil catiyanan* : the Paraiyar is the elder brother of the Brahmin and was degraded because there was nobody to question his pedigree (in Hanumanthan 1975:218). Here is the problem of verification and evidence spelled out by the subjugated echoes of the absent figure itself; will a historiography today only repeat this - i.e., pretend to be "nobody"? Must a historiography end up like those low castes of Andhra who must recite the geneaologies of their high-caste "patrons"? In both the proverb and the Andhra case there seems a clear intimation of the active erasure of any direct presentation of an "Untouchable pedigree." The aspect of suppression (erasure: either active [recitation] or passive and logical [no re-cognition]) is one axis for a study of "Untouchability", and another is to query the extension of the encompassing norm of a certain form of having a "pedigree" : the form which must relate itself to the principle of the Brahmin.

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26 Horkheimer and Adorno offer the reminder that "... the capacity of representation is the measure of domination, and domination is the most powerful thing that can be represented" (1973:34-5). The context of English colonialism in India, I suggest, is distinguished by an emphatic lack of interest in any form of consubstantiality between ruler and ruled - a racial divide. Hence one of its most powerful things to represent was the *Land* itself; i.e., the despot's ability to define and control the official terms of territoriality. Surely one of the most monotonous colonial tropes is that the English managed to "unify" India!

27 Part of this colonial sociology was not merely that Paraiyar were normatively landless, but that they were labourers. Just as land "owning" (but not "holding") was forced on the dry zone by the colonial state, so was "labour" invented as a discrete category. This makes Kojeve's inversion unviable, subject to the *amnesia of property*. "For there to be work, there must be a capture of activity by the State apparatus, and a semiotization of activity by writing" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986:85).

28 Even Hegel musingly conceded the political potentiality of spatial relations of difference: "if there had still been great forests in Germany, the French Revolution would certainly not have flared up" (1988:89). He seems herein to stress only an aspect of empty or extra space, revealing his disembodied motifs of space as "just a place" (when it is an extra space a place to *hide* disowned internalities).

29 "In the place of a 'sociology,' a doctrine of *formations of sovereignty*." (Nietzsche, cited in Weiss 1989:27).

Instantly it must be said that "the Brahmin," regardless of the phenomenal reification allotted to this symbolic persona, is not always present. In the two villages of my fieldwork, for example, there were no Brahmins[30] Paraiyar there made no mention of this proverb, and did not, when I recited it, express much interest in it as their own. The productive site for that enunciation seems to be, again, the coastal rice-growing areas: Chingleput and Thanjavur districts.[31] Without a stressed position for "the Brahmin" as a structural principle, is there a uniform (suppressed) structural history for "the Paraiyar"? Again, I submit that the "sociology of Hinduism" will not function as a metaphor for its history.[32]

There are reasons for the tendency to conceive of Paraiyar communities as partaking of a common essential position; however, these tendencies belie a perspective that is either centralizing or objectivizing (i.e., externalized). Sarter's text gave a typical example of the contagious symbol of "the Pariahs." In the Glossary of the *Fifth Report*, we read that "*Pariar*" is a "term *used by Europeans* in India to designate the outcasts of the Hindu tribes, *and the vilest things of their kind*" (v.3:App.40*). As a contentious synonym for any "untouchables", it represents an *[a]varna* category. Invocations of the *varna* classification system are indices of an urge to perceive Indian "society" as a *totality*[33]; such an urge would not be foreign to rule-hungry foreigners. Still, despite the resonance this had for a colonial epistemology, why the Paraiyar? Or - again - which Paraiyar, and *where*?

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30 The proportion of Brahmins in Tamilnad has always been very low, on average about 3% of the total population. In Madurai district it was even lower (@ 1.8% in Madurai, in the 1871 Census), and most of these were based in the city and/or in the orbit of Minaksi temple (and its *inam* holdings). As will be argued later, there was a rise in the influence of Brahmins from 1800-1947 (including importation), due to the innovations in kingship allowed by the *zamindari* settlement. Nowadays, Brahmins tend to find land-holding rather difficult in Cumbum Valley, as they tend not to touch the plough and have to deal with tenancy laws that are disfavourable to their "needs" for indirect cultivation; frequently I heard complaints that these Land Reforms were specifically directed to damage the Brahmins. Their migration to urban centres seems high. In a sense, the region has come full circle, with Brahmanization stressed in the colonial period.

31 Deliege reports a related story from dry Ramnad (1988:126), possibly borrowing it from other sources, including Moffatt's work in Chingleput, and David's work in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, incorporating it in a pastiche which would stand in for the objectification of "the" Paraiyar. On the other hand, such pastiches do operate in communication and transmission, perhaps especially in a colonial situation; anyway, Ramnad has had a longer history of "high Hindu kingship" (the Setupati, Raja of Ramnad) than the interior polegar chiefdoms.

32 One might, I suppose, "solve" the problem through nominalism: dry Tamilnad was not "Hindu"! Is the "caste"/"tribe" distinction not a relative product of a State (as it is today)? That distinction has often been made according to the primacy of the "Brahmin"; viz. "Traditionally, in cultural terms, the main criterion for differentiating Hindu from tribal has been to establish whether the group grants to the Brahman (the priest), rather than to its own members, primacy as a religious interpreter and instructor" (Cohn 1971:19). On that account, very few *jatis* present in the Cumbum region are not "tribes" (including those who now own most of the land!). This tendency to declare Hinduism as irrevocably bound to the presence of the Brahmanical principle is, I think, itself the artefact of (centralizing) state formation. See Paul Hockings' work on the perpetuation of the difference between castes and tribes [SC/ST]: "The confusion of Feringis has become the law of the land!" (in Frykenberg and Kolenda, eds. 1985:232).

33 Baechler (1988:50) asks who could have the need to perceive Indian society as a totality; his answers: Brahmins, travellers, and the British (who asked Brahmins about customs, etc.), and, lately, ethnologists and sociologists *eclaires* by the Sanskritized.

In 1799, reporting on land tenures in the Jaghire[34] (now in Chingleput district), Lionel Place observed:

> "There is yet another description of pyacarry, or rather perhaps of servants... They are found in fertile and *well-watered* villages, the meerassee whereof belongs to Bramins [*sic*], who being forbid to cultivate the lands themselves, must employ servants for the purpose. The labouring servants are for the most part *pariars*, who can by no means acquire property in land; and I have not yet met with an instance of their having done so."[35]

In two excellent articles, Eugene Irschick (1982,1989) has analyzed the politics of early English efforts to collect land revenue from the Jaghire. One response to Company exploitation of villagers by demanding that they serve (e.g., as horsekeepers and grass cutters) in the cavalry camp was the mass obstruction of these demands by what one Collector saw as a "mob of *parriars* assembled to prevent them [the *corvee* labourers] from being taken away" (in 1982:221). Unaware, apparently, of the vertical patron-client relations between groups (land-owning *mirasidars* and landless "pariars"), the British were convinced that *each* of these communities were widely organized and conspiring against them. As closed circles of kinship appeared to be an accented feature common to all, both the main landowning Vellala and the labouring Paraiyar *jatis* were supposed to have their own (communal) head authorities; unsurprisingly, the Company even thought the Paraiyar leadership was based in Madras! In fact, this perception was prompted by the *mirasidar* leaders forging letters attributing their own organization of Paraiyar "mobs" to fabricated Paraiyar leaders in the city, some of whom upon closer inspection turned out to be long dead (*ibid.*, p.234-5). The main point is that the British so identified the "other" (all south Indians) as caste-ridden and kinship-driven, that they did not perceive that property assets might inflect the degree of supposed community.[36]

The normative landlessness of Chingleput Paraiyar communities indicates clearly enough that the "caste-class" debate was unnecessary; the oversight of this by

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[34] The Jaghire comprised 2,241 villages. Previously held by the Nawab of Arcot, who held it through the Mughal representative in Hyderabad, the Nawab gave it to the East India Company in 1763. Typically,the Company leased this area back to the Nawab until 1782, when it was taken over for good. During that period of lease, the British were not called upon to operate the revenue machinery, and consequently did not learn about land and labour relations (See Irschick 1982:216-7,239n8).

[35] Place (6 June 1799), in *The Fifth Report*, v.3:153. "Pyacarry" [*parakudi*] usually meant an alien tenant, i.e., one who was not native to the village (and often came to work from a neighbouring one). Note, however, that Place refers to "yet another" type of *parakudi*, which he considers best termed "servants" ("who also may be compared with a copyholder [in England]"). "Meerassee" [*mirasi*] referred to the style of "ownership" of land in which shares were held by members of a corporate body. *Mirasi*, however, was a very contested subject of enormous colonial scholarship and discourse. The *mirasi/pariar* condition was found, as Place observed, in irrigated villages (devoted mostly to paddy). On the other hand, some doubt must be expressed as Brahmins rarely interact with Paraiyar, and took their cultivating servants from other communities. In Thanjavur, this mostly involved Pallars, today the other main S.C. group in Tamil Nadu; in Chingleput, according to Irschick (1989:462-3; 1982:217), they had Palli servants, while the Vellalar *mirasidars* had Paraiyar labourers.

[36] A widely corroborated empirical fact is that "lower" castes have more restricted kinship networks; this is obviously a function of their lack of real property, and also can be a case of political control.

the Company, who saw only social groups, meant that all patron-client relations were obscure, unnecessary, and, to boot, a conspiracy of "friction." The Paraiyar of the area, abstracted (substantialized) out of these ties, became icons of fear and derision: they *terrified* the English. In 1791, one of the latter, a Mr. Moore, tried to purchase land near Madras; after then *enclosing* it, he experienced the local Paraiyar "rabble... pursue and beat me.... At last they surrounded and seized me behind my back. Then they cut me with Bamboos and bruised me unmercifully" (in *ibid.*,p.234). There is no doubt that in Chingleput there was, as there is, extreme stratification; nonetheless, the Paraiyar had some investment in co-operating with their dominant caste patrons[37], such as those who set them on Moore, especially when confronted with a property regime that they sensed would leave them out completely. The English, on their part, learned to appropriate an understanding of the Paraiyar through *mirasidari* representations of hierarchy and exclusion, convenient genres which served other purposes than patronage and local domination for the Company.

The two representations, the Company's and the coastal *mirasidars'*, coded the colonial state's understanding of "orthodoxy" during a century in which the rhetoric of non-interference in matters of "religion" assumed paramountcy; consequently, into the dry lands spread a virus hitherto unstressed, and against which the peasants and warrior-chiefs had no immunity.[38] In 1990, 150 years after the Company had forced its revenue conditions on the "unsettled *palaiyams*" of Cumbum Valley[39], Andi, a local Paraiyar, told me :

> "We are not educated. We cannot define 'caste'. I do not even understand what caste is, how it operates. The word 'caste' is meaningless. Only if professional differentiation is there, can we speak of caste. And that isn't the case."

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37 See Robinson (1989) for a demonstration that this is the case today in Medak district, Andhra Pradesh. That the Medak area is a dry one again suggests that the property regime has conditioned the importation of a previous wetland model to the dry zone.

38 "No steps were taken to collect evidence of local or caste custom, and this is sometimes regarded as a mistake. Perhaps something should be said on the Company's side: the peasants of the regions in question may have cared little enough for the *sastra*; but they were made to pay for having harboured great traditions of *sastric* learning" (Derrett 1968:235).

39 Cumbum Valley, part of the original Dindigul territories, was rather remote to early colonial centres; as a result, the British proposed the terms of the Permanent Settlement there in the early 1800s. The local "polegar" chiefs, however, did not accept the agreement, and so were classified as "unsettled palaiyams", owing annual tribute. By 1840, the plan in Madras was to phase these out, and as most were in arrears it was hoped that they could be assumed under the *raiyatwari* plan, i.e., as *Sirkar* land directly under the Government. The Kannivadi *polegar* managed to pay back his arrears, and was thus able to sign the *sanad* which turned his *palaiyam* into a *zamin*. This prompted the Company to demand such payments immediately or forfeit the opportunity to agree to the Permanent Settlement. Only 3 *zamindars* emerged from Cumbum Valley; various other *polegars* (and their contenders) either disappeared or were pensioned off. Some maintained significant local influence, especially in Kombai. *Raiyats* today, meanwhile, often refer to "the *zamindar(s)*" even when there were not *zamindars*; this is because, to them, "*zamindar*" meant anyone whose title and powers amounted to control over them and their lands; the *zamindars* were seen unambiguously to be appointed by the British.

There remains with them a sense of bewilderment at their situation, now as "[ex]-Untouchables"; in their own reflections, their exclusion was a product of those "*zamindars*" who were "appointed by the British" - a reference to a form of the state (and kingship), not to the principle of the Brahmin. And so, again:

> *Adhiyilum Paraiyanillai.*
> *Sathiyilum Paraiyanillai.*
> *Pathiyile Paraiyanandi.*
>
> In the beginning, there were no Paraiyar.
> As a caste, there are no Paraiyar.
> But in the middle, we became Paraiyar.[40]

No. 21. *Travelling in a Palankeen.*

[40] This is also reported from (dry) Ramnad (Deliège 1988:132).

> "I am Stubb, and Stubb has his history; but here Stubb takes oaths that he has always been jolly!" [said by Stubb with the whale in sight...]
> - Herman Melville, *Moby Dick.*

In Dharma Kumar's study, subtitled *Agricultural Labour in the Madras Presidency During the Nineteenth Century,* Kumar sets herself the task of assessing whether or not the large numbers of landless labourers in contemporary south India came into being as a sort of rural proletariat under British rule, or whether there has always been such a class in Tamil agrarian society. Her sources include Censuses, colonial revenue reports, the discussions on "slavery" in India, and other miscellaneous government documentations; well aware that these sources, especially the Censuses, are notoriously inaccurate, she attempts to critically reconstruct them to extract some sense and value out of them anyway. The thesis that emerges in her study is a skeptical one, as indicated in her final paragraph:

> "[t]hus it was not the case that a class of landless agricultural labourers was wholly created during the British period by the impoverishment of the peasant proprietor and the village craftsman. Even before British rule, there was a sizeable group of landless labourers at the lowest rung, both economically and socially, of the village hierarchy. Whether the economic conditions of this group deteriorated over the nineteenth century is still uncertain, and when the facts themselves are so uncertain causal relationships can hardly be established" (1965:193).

Her careful argument traces the constancy of agricultural *labour* as a component in south Indian economies both before and during the 19th century; to do this, Kumar personifies the quantum of labour in the body of the untouchable or the low caste person - this inscriptional bondage virtually *is* the delta bias.

Caste, which is grafted onto the title, functions in her argument as an index of class membership; this provokes my filibuster. Kumar wants to query the assumption that imperial rule simply shatters the structures of subject societies; she chose the Madras presidency as her region of study for the following reasons (*ibid.*, p.4): 1) the *raiyatwari* system of collecting land revenue from the individual cultivator was installed there, "a system said to be directly destructive of the old village community"; 2) the rates of tax paid by Madrasi were much higher than elsewhere in India[1]; and 3) as of 1957, South India had the highest proportion of landless labourers (to total population) in India. For these reasons, she considered that the processes by which such a class was created should be particularly evident in Madras presidency. The real rationale for the choice of south India, however, comes in this methodological claim:

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[1] Kumar 1965:98: "Madras was by far the most heavily taxed Presidency in India; it was computed in 1854 that for every 100,000 of the population, the land revenue was Rs.10,05,455 in Bengal, Rs.16,71,965 in Bombay and Rs.23,12,465 in Madras, and this difference almost certainly continued throughout the century."

> "And finally, it is in South India that the caste system was *peculiarly rigid*; so that the role of indigenous societies in *resisting* changes projected from outside is best seen here. *In fact, the strength of the caste system provides one method of estimating the number of agricultural labourers*" (*ibid.*, p.4*).

It would be crude merely to emphasize that there is a tautology implicit in that claim. Kumar has argued from various sources for such a caste-based measure of the agrarian labour force and, at any rate, the idea is certainly close to many views today. The main issue is not merely one of a tautology, but rather of the algebraic function which, linking the domain of the social - "caste" - to that of the economic, or "class", or the economic, serves to striate across all the land as a geometric equation.

The logical strategy enacted in constructing a domain called "social" which can reproduce itself in relative autonomy *vis-a-vis* forms of economy and, as is implicitly obvious in 19th century colonialism, independently of access to governmental position, can parallel the formal manoeuvres of Orientalism. I am not going to press that case here; more germane is the testing of the model of that domain on the various types of human territory to which it is being applied. Talking of such institutions as servitude and untouchable castes in the language of the resilient "social" can easily mask far more than the tensions and contestations that ghost domination; this may not only be the case in terms of class or sectional conflicts within a polity, it can also lead to the mistaken assumption that certain social forms exist where in fact they do not. Kumar, discussing the conditions of "serfdom" in the 18th and 19th century, notes the frequency of the burden of indebtedness as one cause, which, as she writes, "was reinforced by the tenacious traditions of serfdom" (*ibid.*, p.75). Eschewing any notion that servitude was economically justified in an economy which was not driven by huge cash-cropping estates or based on plantation-style labour[2], Kumar returns again to her argument:

> "Whatever the origin of the system, its *durability* must be explained in *social* rather than economic terms, *in terms of the caste system* rather than market needs. *And these institutions were deeply rooted in South Indian society.* British administration did not fundamentally alter this state of affairs."[3]

Yet how many states of affairs were there? The Collectors of the dry districts frequently noted the relative absence of "slavery" in their areas, although there were occasional cases of "debt slavery". Surely this means that the "tenacious traditions" were not quite in full flower? Kumar asserts that "the absence of slavery pointed to

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[2] Gough, however, claims that "*Pannaiyals* among the Adi Dravidas occupied a similar status to indentured laborers on the plantations of South and Southeast Asia, the relationship being a modification of the open slavery (*adimai*) under which their ancestors had lived until the 1860s" (1981:50).

[3] The passage continues to the end of the chapter: "[m]oved sometimes by human kindness, sometimes by pressures from home, the administrators did try to change the relation between master and serf. But in reality these were minor adjustments - a far more fundamental attack on the social and economic position of the agricultural labourer was necessary if he was to be emancipated in fact" (Kumar 1965:75-6*).

social and political changes rather than to differences in the mode of production" (*ibid.*, p.53). Did "the social" sometimes change so quickly, while at other times prove so "deeply rooted" that alteration did not occur? Or, as I would suggest, were there different social modalities, territorially articulated according to more local forces of history, economy, and ecology? It is worrisome that Kumar bases her argument on Collectors' reports, which often noted the existence of agricultural labourers free from servitude, to which she protectively adds, "but... these labourers belonged to the *agricultural labour castes*" (*ibid.*, p.53*). It is here, in the dry zone, that the "tautology" becomes especially worrisome, since it is extending beyond the frontiers which do indeed strongly vindicate the empirical plausibility of the thesis.[4]

Many of the difficulties of interpreting the records and documents hinge on vocabulary; I think this is due to the various idioms used by people themselves to describe the various statuses they might occupy, and this was dramatically exacerbated by the foreign-ness of the English, who found the question of terminology very confusing. One outcome of this was the increasing reliance on caste-names over and above the various categories of labour or servants. This point Kumar illustrates cogently, although only to point her interpretation of this British resolve as "further proof, if any be required, of the functional role of caste in these districts" (*ibid.*, p.41). Other idioms, including a spectrum of farm labouring roles, were based on type of attachment and payment: *pannaiyal* [permanently attached farm servant], *padiyal* [hired farm servant receiving wages in kind], *adimai* ["slave"], to list but a few. The administrative tendency to refer to caste names, by which they understood certain fixed designations such as slave, agricultural labourer or cultivator, was and is a chronic problem - "untouchables" in the 20th century were still not listened to in their request to the government to end regarding "Scheduled Castes" as "castes" rather than "the labouring class."[5]

This is most problematically exemplified in the question of slavery, which by all accounts was more or less entrenched in the coastal irrigated districts, as indicated by Place's previously cited report. Moving away from Thanjavur, Chingleput, and

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[4] Early on Kumar (1965:8) announces that it is more convenient for her to follow linguistic rather than geographic groupings of the population of Madras Presidency, "particularly since the two overlap to some extent". Briefly, the Telugu areas were seen as relatively dry, the Tamil areas as mixed (with significant variation), and the Malayalam areas as ultra-wet; verticality in labour and servitude relations rise with the degree of rainfall or irrigation. Placing linguistic considerations above territorial forms is, I believe in this case, a bias of the present, and somewhat distorting; the Kaveri (Tamil Nadu) and the Kistna (Andhra) deltas had more in common with each other, the same applying for Anantapur (Andhra) and Madurai (Tamil Nadu). Besides which, many of the people in the dry tract of Tamilnad were Telugu-speaking people who had fled the Muslim advance in the Deccan some centuries earlier. Kumar suggested that the Telugu labourer had *already* won his freedom by 1800.

[5] See Juergensmeyer (1982:135 and *passim*) on the Ad Dharm movement in the Punjab. Ambedkar also made this request, and protested about the Congress selection of the term "Harijan" (*cf.* Mahar, ed. 1972:387). The colonial process proved difficult to reverse in this respect, and of course any definition of "the labouring class" would include members of many "clean castes."

the deltaic part of South Arcot (the 2 taluks bordering Thanjavur), the reports of "slavery" begin to change. The Collector of North Arcot wrote in 1819, "[t]he Slaves, though universally I believe pariahs [by which he meant untouchables] cannot be said to be of any particular caste." The writer himself had an idea of the regionalized importance of this, attesting as he did that the above fact distinguished them from the slaves of Malabar, where caste definitions were more precise, as they also were in the Tamil deltas (cited in *ibid.*, p.61-2,fn3). From Madurai came a report in 1843, re-iterating prior ones, that "slaves of all kinds" were "a trifling proportion" of the population. Nonetheless, Kumar reads the Census return of 1841, showing 16% of the population as Paraiyans and Pallans, to provide the accurate data regarding landless labourers (*ibid.*, p.52). Why? Even Kumar notes that in Tamil districts other than Tanjore, Tinnevelly and Trichinopoly - i.e., the paddy delta districts where servitude was widespread - "the caste figures are of less utility" (*ibid.*, p.63).[6] What remains untought is that "caste" does not necessarily have the same functional meaning in different polities.

Despite reports from 1785 that Pallans could and did own land around Madurai, the Collector in 1819 spoke of "slavery" in his district as "gradually disappearing" after a heyday in the Nawab's time[7], a heyday of perhaps speculative origin. In 1819, he found some Paraiyar as "slaves", but regularly as a result of their having sold *themselves* into bondage. By all appearances this referred to a form of indentureship - in short, a very different image than that reported from Thanjavur as hereditary servitude! The latter relation, however, was taken as the de-regionalized sign of native tradition, and exploited as a paradigm for colonial sociology. This representational efficiency is demonstrated in the selection of caste names as a short-hand grammar for socio-economic class, a grammar whose syntax spanned across the spaces of the Company's Madras Presidency. As a colonial translation, this relied on such equations as found in two of the bottom categories: "slave castes" (Pallars and Paraiyars), and "Agricultural Labour Castes" (e.g., the Palli, Vanniyar). One result of the practice of this "reliance" was, as witnessed in the introduction, the novel establishment of *permanence* in the body of the low caste "Corps of Coolies".

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[6] The paragraph on p.52 of Kumar's book is instructive. Wildly variant estimates of the slave population of various districts are given by Collectors, which bewilder the government at Madras, who settle on the 1841 census enumerations, in which caste and servitude were equated for Paraiyar and Pallar communities. The Tinnevelly case from 1821-41 is vintage: the Collector in 1832 estimated that 38% of the population were "slaves", a figure so drastically high as to prompt the 1841 Commission (on slavery) to enquire again. Their next estimate was based on the 1821-2 Census (!), which showed the numbers of Pallans and Paraiyans to be about 16% of the population. Kumar notes: "In other words, he *assumed* that 'slaves' were identical with members of these castes, or at least could not exceed them in number" (*). Kumar decides to agree with his intuition in this respect, but I think it is more an issue of the sense of "the normal" based on the delta districts.

[7] The nominal suzerain of the Carnatic before the Company was the Nawab of Arcot; the Nawab was the ruler in 1785, but the extent of his actual control over the southern regions was minimal.

Kumar, however, takes the existence of large populations under such names to attest to the existence of landless labourers, according to the caste-labour tautology.

In accepting this colonial formula for the dry lands, history learns a new profession. In the *1871 Census Report*, it was noted that less than 20% of the Palli were actually agricultural labourers, while 70% of them were "cultivators", a phenomenon quickly harnessed to apologetics:

> "a large proportion of the *Vunnies* (i.e., Vanniyans or Pallis [an "Agricultural Labour Caste"]) were abject slaves before the period of British administration, incapable of owning property, or of cultivating on their own account. Others were thieves and robbers by profession, and existed on plunder. A wonderful change must have taken place in the last century to bring more than two-thirds of them into the class of small farmers, or peasant proprietors" (Cornish, p.158).[8]

The auto-theodicy of a colonial narrative is spun here, emerging to redeem the While the "agricultural labour castes" were thus so lucky, the "untouchable" castes were not, as they were seen, due to "tenacious traditions" being somehow more stringent regarding them, as subject to normative landlessness.

There is one more point on which Kumar lets her argument rest: the existence of Brahmins, forbidden to touch the plough, proves that there was a need for agricultural labourers before the advent of Company Raj (1965:189-90). This is true, but the incidence of Brahmins thins as the drier soils were reached in the early 19th century. What is more, Brahmins need protection in order to enforce collection of their shares of the produce of their land[9], and the power of their support varied according to their means of coercion, which was usually provided by the degree of their access to the State. In early colonial times, this was very much the case; as Kumar writes, "local servitudes were sometimes given official blessing" (*ibid.*, p.67). The Collector in Kanara [wet] urged that the untouchable Holeyas be prevented from joining the army, which was serving them as a means of shirking their more local duties. More draconian measures were proposed by the Collectors of Tanjore in 1800, upon hearing that the Pallans and Paraiyans were absconding from the district, and Collectors frequently co-operated in returning "runaway" labourers to their proper "masters."[10] The Collector of Trichinopoly noted that insofar as there was caste, and

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8 This is also cited by Kumar, who takes it as a positive suggestion that it "would probably be safer to exclude the Pallis from the agricultural labour castes" (1965:58-9). Note that the claim that they were "incapable of owning property" is not attested to by any of the reports; only in the delta zones were there proscriptions against owning land, and these against the "untouchables." The "wonderful change" would seem to be a change in the empirical habits of the government rather than anything substantive.

9 See Robinson 1989 for various accounts of the Brahmin priest claiming the *melvaram* [upper share: the part of the produce which is gifted] at all in a dry Andhra village. See also Murton 1973:174, notes that Gaudas held shares in Brahmin *agraharams*, given them by Brahmins to secure their interest in maintaining cultivation, as if such good terms were not offered by the Brahmins, their *inam* fields were often left fallow; and Wink (1986:234-7, 286n37) found that in reality,*patels* controlled who were the Brahmin *inamdars'* tenants.

10 The draconian idea was for the police to be empowered to force the slaves back into labouring for the Government and for the landholders (Kumar 1965:67-9).

Brahmins were prohibited from cultivating, the "Puller system" with its agrestic Pallan servants would be necessary. The extent to which this was a "social" institution rather than a revenue fact is perhaps intimated by the Trichy Collector's remark:

> "There is something so revolting and abhorrent to an Englishman in the Idea of Slavery that the advocates of its continuance in any shape must ever labour under the disadvantage of prejudgement. Notwithstanding this, I shall endeavour to show that so far as it relates to the Revenue of the district (and I trust my opinion will not be supposed to extend further) any abolition of the Puller System would be attended with the most serious and ruinous consequences."[11]

Not only did the financial needs of the Company require the categorical priority of "Revenue", but the revenue in turn required unambiguous payers, and in their post as landholders, the Brahmins' disdain for the plough would be accepted as a social fact.[12] The classic centres of the old States of Tamilnad were centred on the Tambraparni and the Kaveri rivers, homes respectively to the Pandyan and Chola dynasties. Brahmins thrived here, benefitting from untouchable labourers, where the presence of water made their livelihood appropriate to their status. The story of a whole space, however, is not told by such a point.

The Delta Bias.

"Our words are like servants to us." - Plato.

For long I have wondered about the image I had of Tamilnad "society", based as it was on reading the dense literature about the paddy districts (see appendix: list of districts, wet/dry, and where fieldwork, etc. has been done). The work of Kumar broadcast seeds of doubt in my mind, which were cultivated by the accounts of "little kings" which have gained prominence in the last decade.[13] The subordination of kingship to Brahmanical ideas is most clearly articulated in Dumont's theses, which were corroborated by Moffatt (1979) in a study of a Paraiyar community in Chingleput district. Moffatt did some fieldwork in dry Pudukkottai as well, but his study is based on the data of irrigated Chingleput. Two works most especially run

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11 Cited in Kumar 1965:69. Note the unfelicitous irony of the phrase "labour[ing] under the disadvantage of prejudgement"! Surely that is what the Pallars were doing, with the full support of the colonial regime.

12 Alice and Daniel Thorner railed against the continuity of this: the U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee observed that in some parts of the State high-caste people do not plough, and to require them to do so would offend their customs, which draw sanction from their religion. The Thorner's asked how this reflected the notion of a "secular state." As of 1962, not even Kerala had passed a land reform or agrarian relations Act requiring the cultivators to till (*cf.* 1962:3-13).

13 See, *inter alia*, Dirks (all), Fuller (1977), Rajayyan (1971) and, albeit somewhat indirectly, Washbrook (1976). It is not so much the "kingship" motif that is important as the fact that these studies concentrated more energy than usual on the dry areas.

against the usual grain of purity and hierarchy: Dirks' (1987) study of the Kallar dynasty's kingship in Pudukkottai, and Dumont's (1957 [1986]) own ethnography of the Piramalai Kallar of western Madurai. Likewise, the early colonial documentation exhibits a contrast, for example between the accounts of Lionel Place and those of Thomas Munro, two authors who had their experiences in the wet and the dry zones, respectively. A bit late in learning of the term "delta bias" from Polly Hill's book (1982:51, *passim*), I was at any rate set to agree that there was one.[14] Delta bias, I believe, not only has its own organization of hierarchy, and has not merely prevailed in academic discourse, but has also proved a powerful idiom in south Indian political history - and never more so than during the nineteenth century; the delta was a cipher which colonialism turned into political rain.

Colonial understandings of south Indian society were largely founded in the paddy fields of the delta. Firstly, the coastal districts were the sites of a sort of "first contact" in south India for the Company, which possessed the Jaghire in Chingleput well before other areas, and was in communication with the Raja of Thanjavur, then a Marathi kingdom. Rich and deltaic soils there, worked by subordinated labour, gave the greatest surplus, thereby providing the most attractive revenue base for states throughout Tamil history. For obvious pecuniary reasons, sorting out the administration of revenue in these areas was hence of paramount importance, and hardly less so for the Company. Since the Company was foreign, its opportunistic impressions of the deltaic zones provided an exaggeratedly originary template on which to build their representation of south Indian society as a whole. One other point of substantial import: it seems that the Marathi polity bore heavily on cultivators, and imposed revenue assessments that were altogether too high.[15] The colonial regime, also famous for having done this, found the guise of continuity favourable.[16] The austere effects of this on the distribution of access to rural

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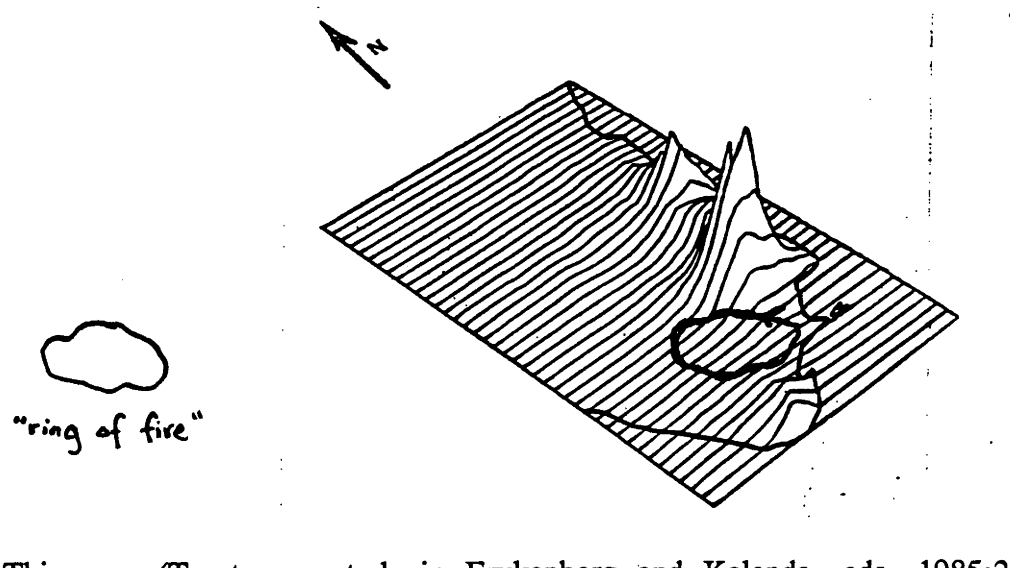
14 Hill finds the term used in B.H. Farmer, ed., *Green Revolution? Technology and Change in Rice-Growing Areas of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka,* Macmillan, London, 1977:2. The authors of these studies set out to avoid the "delta bias"; Hill credits the influential essay by Gough, "Caste in a Tanjore Village" (1960), with having a particularly disadvantageous effect of re-inforcing "delta bias" (*cf.* Hill 1982:245-46).

15 John de Britto wrote of Tanjore under the Marathas in 1683: "Ekoji [the Maratha raja] levies four-fifths of all the produce. As if that were not enough, instead of accepting this share in kind he makes the ryots pay in money. And since he is careful to fix the price himself a figure much above that which the cultivator can get, the proceeds of the sale of the whole of the crop are insufficient to meet the land assessment. Thus the ryots linger under the weight of a crushing debt and are often put to cruel tortures to prove their inability to pay. You will hardly be able to realize such oppression, and yet I must add that the tyranny in the Gingee [Jinji, another Maratha centre] is even more frightful and revolting. But I will say no more on the matter, for words fail me to express its horrors" (cited in Francis 1905:181). The wars in the Deccan doubtless made for a high revenue demand, although this report is doubtless a bit fanatical.

16 Or, more likely, the Company lowered the revenue in Thanjavur from its Marathi heights. However, this lowering might not have been adequate, and anyway, the Company did not "re-distribute" proper proportions of its revenue collections. Another point: with revenue assessments so high, the burdens were successively passed off as much as possible on the next lower level of the landed hierarchy. As a result, much of the confusion about tenurial categories, and the ambiguous difference between a servant or "labourer" and a "tenant" have been due to the impoverishment of both (*cf.* Kumar 1965:29; Murton 1973:179-80).

livelihoods must have been quite severe, a situation which the British found normal, duly explained by the peculiarities of the caste system and the prevalence of servitude - as they perceived them.

Regarding the history of the delta type of Tamil social morphology, some insight into the distribution of lands is allowed by the density of inscriptions recording official grants of land, much of which was given at concessionary rates to various personages and corporate groups, not the least common of which were Brahmin communities. In these concentrated polities of high kingship, the orthodox norm was to give to Brahmins as a meritorious act. "Giving lands" in this sense meant to give the *melvaram* or "upper share": the share of the land's produce known as the King's share, which was otherwise due to the state. By and large, the land grants did not include occupancy rights; tenants retained these, and, theoretically at least, were not disadvantaged by the difference in their "landlord" - whether the State, a temple, a priest, or a military retainer, the cultivator's share was supposed to have remained constant. As the map indicates, the geography of inscriptions, reflecting the social topography of gifted lands, follows the deltaic presence of the main rivers and their tributary channels remarkably.



This map (Trautmann et.al, in Frykenberg and Kolenda, eds. 1985:23; modified), plots the density of land-grants recorded during the reign of the Cholas, 849-1279 C.E.

Along the contour lines of the map one may trace or assume the degree of such principles as Brahmanical purity and Untouchable pollution, articulated in laminated hierarchies legislating rights in land and its produce.

In terms of agrarian practices, paddy cultivation with river and canal irrigation was intensively routinized, and followed a regular calendar. The division of labour was also routinized and divided up, according to the symbolic capital and roles defined by access to tenure. One English visitor wrote of the "thriving paddy-growing villages" as places "whose past is so long that they have forgotten it and

whose future is so insignificant - and so certain - that it is not worth speculation" ("Civilian" 1921:39). Land being valuable, and the population necessary to work it being relatively large, corporate ownership [*mirasidar* communities] seems to have been the norm, with a restricted scope for land-sales, a scope which would have been mostly secured through kinship networks, as the *mirasidar* group needed fairly high degrees of co-ordination for its monopoly control over the local means of production. The ecological conditions proving fairly stable, crop failure was less of a problem than in the drier areas, where the monsoon was unreliable. Labour was of course a necessity, and efforts to guarantee its supply were couched in the proscription against Paraiyar or Pallar people holding land. With Brahmins and their normative emphasis on purity, the reverse symbol also existed in permanent pollution for some. The network of tenurial relations and rights constituted a community of discourse, over which the possession of *mirasi* ruled; "untouchability" was its symbolic inversion, allotted to normatively landless labourers. This isomorphic definition of *mirasi's* opposite was embodied in the specific activity of labour in the paddy fields, which were, quite physically, very dirty - standing all day more than ankle deep in the mud.[17]

As for the inculcation of the "delta bias" into the early colonialist model of Tamil "society", another combination of points may be made. Bentinck, in his praise for the Abbe Dubois' manuscript, noted that it would be of the "greatest benefit" from "a political point of view" since:

> "[w]e do not, we cannot, associate with the natives. We cannot see them in their houses and with their families. We are necessarily very much confined to our houses by the heat; all our wants and business which would create a greater intercourse with the natives is done for us, and we are in fact strangers in the land..." (cited in Dubois 1906:xv).

The British, in learning about the people they were set on ruling, were highly mediated; this platitude is again witnessed in Bentinck's disclosure. The frequent remark that the British talked to too many Brahmins has a strong degree of truth, but its truth is largely a diagnostic of politics, and not of the values of purity; many of the functionaries in the government's revenue settlement machinery, from the levels of village to districts, were Brahmins, partly no doubt because of their traditional literacy. The style or mode of perception was per force a highly mediated one; Lionel Place used to visit the revenue depots with elephants, and distribute gifts of cloth to various members of local society, not the least of them dancing girls, or so claimed a missionary critic.[18] In such dramatic scenarios, the stylized presentations

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17 Beteille (1974:191) made this point, and added that skin ailments frequently resulted.

18 The missionary was Alexander Duff, apparently especially miffed since Place would use the elephants attached to the temples of Chingleput, and even offered "a lace garment of considerable value to the god" (at Conjeevaram [Kanchipuram]). Place himself "considered the religious ceremonies of the Jagheer so intrinsically

were likely not to be forums for voices of dissent, apart from any collective effort to minimize the tax burden. In the dry Baramahal, meanwhile, Thomas Munro's first boss, Alexander Read wrote in 1793 that he did strive to be attentive to the complaints of all the inhabitants of the villages whose revenue he was settling: "for all my evenings are entirely dedicated to this very necessary function, and the open street is my place of audience that the meanest may not meet with any difficulty of access" (cited in Irschick 1989:471). Nonetheless, Read managed to bring home the largest amount of tax ever returned by a single Company servant (*ibid.*, p.471). The British officers who effected the settlements in the dry zones, most notably Thomas Munro, did not experience the same reception as the deltaic collectors. Munro found such

> "a universal spirit of *savage independence* and opposition to all regular government that it was *every year* necessary to besiege a number of villages before their rents could be collected" (1808; cited in Beaglehole 1966:53-4*).

Records were held to be in spectacular disarray, generally by local design (*cf.* Frykenberg 1965). The existence of *mirasi* rights were steadfastly denied by the dry zone Collectors, led by Munro[19], although his polemical favour for his own authorship of the *raiyatwari* method - settling revenue contracts with individual cultivators - surely edited his documentation of any corporately held rights. The fight over Company policy in Madras was between people with radically different modes of perception, instilled by different environments, which were different political spaces. And, relevantly, the fight was also conducted as one between the *military* and the civilian appointments to Collectorships by the Board of Revenue (*cf.* Irschick 1989:477); one aspect of this fight involved the extent to which the military collectors were allowed a personal commission on what they could collect (*cf.* Stein 1989b:48-61). Despite Munro's vision of the *raiyatwari* system as a means of helping the small and moderate farmer, the militancy and vigour with which he prosecuted his designs managed, in the long run, to drastically re-structure the fabric of the Tamilnad dry zone.

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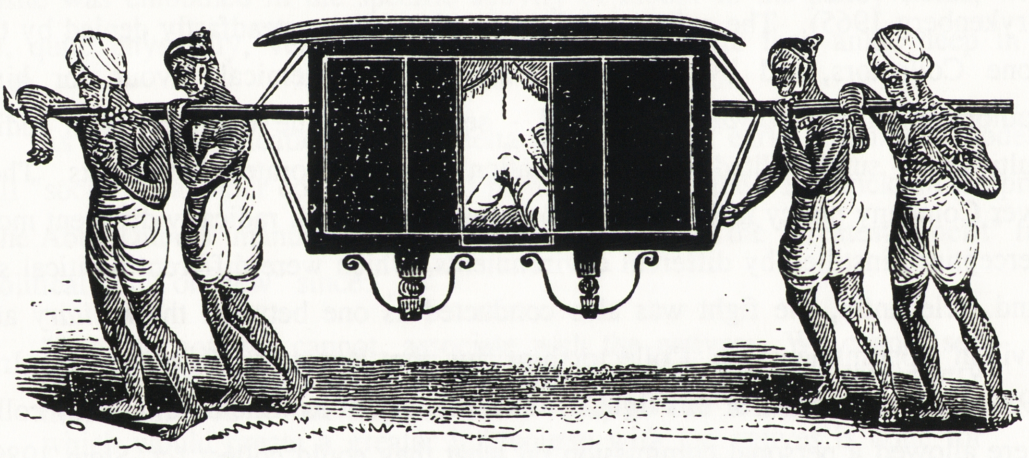
connected with the happiness of the people" that he sought to repair various temples and restore various ceremonies - always feeling inadeuate because he could not "enter into" the "intricacies in theological doctrines and forms" of interest to the locals (*cf.* Irschick 1986:12).

19 In the twelve published volumes of *The Baramahal Records*, composed by Read and Munro and their assistants in the late 18th century on the interior drylands from Salem to Mysore, Murton found only one mention of the word *mirasi*, and this was to a sub-region where the *patels* [VHM] held these rights in their entirety (*cf.* 1973:167n27).



A Thug riding in a Palanquin to a Feast prepared by his Gooroo.

> "... and suddenly with all the vigour of a love long and purposely lost the heat of the Plains will throw its arms around you and claim you once more for its own."
>
> - *The Civilian's South India* (1921:182).

"Alpine dwellers will always have different conditions of life from those of people living on plains." Engels (1875; in Lenin 1972:32-4) wrote that statement to stress the ubiquity of different social formations according to geographical and ecological habitat. In this section I will consider the conditions making for such differences, thereby questioning Kumar's decision to follow linguistic rather than geographical categories (1965:8) - a commitment not hers alone.[1]

Although political history does not neatly follow rainfall patterns, the availability of water does lend some form to the reciprocal appropriations between land and people in south India. For one thing, the land-person ration varied in India under the influence of irrigation on soil fertility. Dry lands were readily available in the 18th century, for those who cared to risk their labour clearing them. "Landlessness" was for this reason often a choice, and the demand for the labour of the landless meant that it was not necessarily the least desirable choice.[2] The productive intensity of delta or irrigated land propelled the extension of proprietary dominance: one controlled people *through* controlling the fertile land (*cf.* Stokes 1978:46-62). These tracts were subject to exclusivist notions of tenure such as those practised by the *mirasi* communities of Chingleput.[3] The latent productivity of the soil, supplemented by a class of "untouchables" explicitly prohibited from enjoying that productivity as such, allowed for profits and social differentiations derived from the practice of leasing out land, and by consequence, permitted a form of landlordism. The controlling idiom of land tenure formally expelled the human relations which subsisted below the community of that discourse; untouchable servants were left only with mimicry - they used the term *mirasi* as the borrowed title for their subordinate "rights" in the produce.[4] The construction of human-made irrigation facilities from channels to tanks only intensified the notion of "value-added" to the land, thereby strengthening the sense of proprietary rights; maintenance of these "public works" also became the labour of the lowly. It was *their mirasi*.

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1 The creation of linguistic states in India is another example of that choice. Even in the early debates regarding the "village republic" in south India, one colonial officer in the Jaghire declared that only Tamil villages were really "republics", Telugu villages being more like monarchies. The distinction is properly wet vs. dry, not Tamil vs. Telugu; the data in the early 1800s were largely from the dry zone of the Ceded Districts (in Andhra), and the wet zone of Chingleput.

2 In the drylands, *parakudis* ["outside cultivators"] were offered lower rates of tribute in exchange for tenancy than those offered to longer term residents, a tactic declared illegal by Munro and the Company.

3 Lionel Place remarked in 1799 that the "idea of permanent property was such in the minds of the natives that they declined cultivating any fields... unless under the meerassee tenure" (in Irschick 1982:482).

4 This mimicry resonates with Moffatt's (1979) argument that "untouchable" castes replicate the ideology and institutional structure of the local society as a whole; however.

In the dry villages, there were fewer landlord forms, and less profit to be made from leasing out. As there was plenty of available land to clear, but not the promise of wealth to warrant human domination based on the control of large surpluses, holdings tended to be individual and under family cultivation. Controlling people through forms of land-ownership would have proved an elusive agenda anyway, as migration was so readily available. Rural pre-eminence in a dry village might be constituted by the number of cattle, ploughs, and family members one could count on to work - or the number of cultivators one could attract by the promise of reasonable terms of co-habitation. The question of State taxation also mattered; the proportion of produce theoretically owed as the King's share was appropriately less in the dry tracts, and then again was only sporadically collected. Particularly in the hinterlands, collections were subject to the success of the nominal lord in mustering the means of military coercion. As such, a "landlord right" would seem to be out of the question; those pretending to sovereignty might, however, extract tribute. Tribute is not tax; the amount of its collection is a function of the situational strength of the collector, not directly the size or yield of the crops.[5]

Stokes lists another important asset in a dry village, that of a privileged immunity from the full exaction of the State, i.e., a concessionary holding usually known as *inam* [Tamil: *maniam*] (Stokes 1977:7-8). While these holdings were very numerous all over south India, and figured prominently in Munro's reports from the dry Ceded Districts, they were rather scarce in the history of Cumbum Valley of the old Dindigul country. As many tracts were in tribute-relations to State centres, the notion of a concessionary holding is a difference that does not make a difference: the tribute due to the State would be collective, and not based on a proto-*raiyatwari* system. The parties to the tribute relation (even if described in the state's *doxa* as a revenue contract) would be the King and the chiefs representative of the dryland peasants who were not directly incorporated into the King's polity. Inside those dry polities, such as the 28 *palaiyams* [the *tinai* of the dry zone is the *palai*] or political territories of the Dindigul country, there may have been *maniam* grants, to various sorts of people ranging from local saints and Pantaram florist priests to field guards, guaranteeing them exemption from the levies of the rural chiefs or the sporadic assembling of tribute to pay to the larger States should one of them have an army close at hand. Such concessions would not, however, have been recognized on the level of the larger State, but would be conditioned by alliances within the *palaiyams*, and given by the polegar chief.[6] The evidence suggests, however, that in the land

5 Autonomous chiefs had to pay more as central governments' power increased. To the British, from a purely fiscal point of view, this looked like revenue farming (*cf.* Wink 1986:350-51).

6 The primary sign of sovereignty in south India was the ability to give gifts. For precisely this reason, we should be aware of the nominal nature of some of the powers of "kings"; many of these "gifts" were "given" to their existing possessors. In his famous "*Report from Anantapur*" of 1807, Munro anticipated Stokes' later argument (1978), observing that although 30 or 40% of the lands were claimed as *inam* gifts in dry Anantapur,

west of Madurai, such *maniam* grants referred to very small holdings - if, indeed, they referred to holdings at all (and not, for example, produce, trading rights, goods, or even cash).[7] At any rate, for reasons of politics and of plain ecology, "ownership" of land did not function as economic *capital* as it could do in the delta; the result, if not the cause, was that land control could not serve as a mechanism through which practices of human domination could function.[8] Political structures existed autonomously of the institutions of the centralized, hierarchical state, and relied on other means for their consistency, better represented through a language shorn of transcendental fixities: communal territorialies, segmentary alliances, and political exchanges.

One of the reasons for my emphasizing the distinctiveness of the dry zone is that there are accumulating suggestions, contrary to established wisdoms, that "untouchables" - or rather their pre-colonial ancestors - existed in the dry zone as peasant cultivators. It is perhaps misleading to make the observation that these peasants "owned" land, for to do so connotes social and economic values that modernity's scarcity had yet to provide; on the other hand, since the Company's settlement implied an answer to the question "who owned the land?", one might as well say that these peasants were indeed owners.[9] Kumar, as has been noted, indicated that Pallans owned land in Madurai District (1965:44). Whereas the normative landlessness of the Paraiyan untouchables of Chingleput has been noted,

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"all above five per cent may be regarded as unauthorized. The frequent changes of government, and the loss or rather concealment of accounts, have during a long course of years, facilitated the fraudulent extension of these enaums, at the expense of the cirkar [State] lands" (*The Fifth Report*, v.3:270-1); in Cumbum and Dindigul, Hurdis declared in 1803 that much of the lands there had been "clandestinely bestowed" to poets, musicians, heroes, and others "contributing to the pleasure of their immediate employers, and which never having had positive claims on the cirkar, have generally been assumed and formed part of the extra revenue account" awaiting the BOR's decision (*ibid.*, p.234-6).

[7] I am grateful to Jeyaraman, senior lecturer in History at the HKRH College in Uthamapalaiyam for conversations during the summer of 1990 about the 18th century and the "polegar" chiefs in Cumbum Valley; he claims that much of the "gifts" of the *palaiyam* political economy were given in cash, and not privileged tenure. Jeyaraman is writing his PhD on the subject for Madurai Kamaraj University.

[8] Dirks criticizes Stokes' analysis of *inams* (1978:46-62), as over-conditioned by his "revenue-centered view of the Indian state," with its "zero-sum view" of revenue. Dirks goes on to note that Stokes' view "even neglects the well-known fact that in Indian political systems control over land, and revenue, was secondary to control over men" (1987:135). This is contentious. Perhaps control over people is the *sine qua non* of any political system in the final instance; the desire to make *single* general statements about the nature of "Indian" land revenue continues, nonetheless, to leave its dubious legacy. The point I am trying to make is that there would be different tendencies according to the value of the land's productivity. Of course, a high revenue demand could wipe out the advantage of fertile land, but often such high revenue demands were "re-invested" in manners that co-erced agrestic serfs not to abscond. This, for example, would seem to have been the case in colonial Thanjavur and the Kaveri basin in Trichinopoly, where Collectors punished deserting "slaves" and returned them to their "proper masters".

[9] Was the Company's question "premature"? No - because no teleological evolution of property was underway; it was force - the havoc of the sword - which proposed the question. The speculative salience of any endogenous "organic" temporal development was rendered nugatory by the immanence in space of colonial rule, blocking out the endogenous sun with its external horizon.

> "[i]n the dry or unirrigated areas, untouchables were not formally bound to their pankalis (the owners of a share in the wealth of rural produce). Many untouchables owned their land and their status in these dry areas was consequently higher than their fellows in the wet areas" (Irschick 1987:157).

Ludden makes the same observation, noting that, due to the availability of land, Pallar and Paraiyar families might easily set up households in the dry zones, "giving their very low status in the regional caste system much less degraded social content here than in the wet zone" (1985:82). Later he makes the cogent argument that "caste status by itself predicts peasant living conditions only where it became equated historically with the ownership of fixed capital, that is, in irrigated communities" (*ibid.*, p.94).[10] Whatever the scope of "untouchable" landownership in the dry zones, and whatever the magnitude of its rewards, the "social" relations between communities in those territories were evidently not cut from the same cloth as the very vertical weave of the delta societies.

Detecting differences in early colonial reports, I am claiming that untouchables owned land in the dry zone of the 18th century. By 1900, untouchable landownership was perceived as minimal, so by implication I am insinuating that they must have lost land in the 19th century. This militates against the representation that, albeit minimally, untouchables *as a whole* gained ground under colonial rule; it also spars with Kumar's methodological equation of untouchability and landlessness. But is Kumar wrong? I submit an alternative perspective: *Kumar's equation is by and large valid - because the "owners" of land in the pre-colonial dry zone were not "untouchable".* In other words, the ground gained untouchables under colonial rule. An investigation of the social and political fabric of the dry *tinai* follows, arguing for the plausibility of this proposition.

Politics.

> "... such a universal spirit of savage independence and opposition to all regular Government..."
> - Thomas Munro, 1808.

In the dry zone, as already intimated, the agrarian surplus was much less than in the paddy deltas. For the most part, agriculture was based on scratch-and-turn millet cultivation, especially *ragi* [finger millet], *cumbu* [pearl millet], and most especially *cholam* [*jowar*; sorghum]. *Cholam* is a good crop for unreliable rainfall, as not only can it withstand waterlogging on occasion, but it is relatively drought resistant; the

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10 For breaking down the delta bias, Ludden's typology of agrarian zones in Tamil Nadu (and even in Tirunelveli district alone) is useful: wet, mixed, and dry, and additionally a special dry zone with black soil auspicious for cotton. In the wet zone, he observes two distinct strata: one owned land but did not labour; the other laboured without owning - often without even owning their labour power. "Here our standard notion of 'peasant' does not seem to fit at all" (1985:93). The Abbe Dubois also notes that "Pariahs" and Chakkiliyar families cultivated soil for their own benefit in "a few districts" (1906:50).

plant can remain dormant during periods of drought, and resume growth when conditions again become favourable. It is susceptible to bird damage. Grinding must be done frequently as the flour tends to become rancid because the embryos are not removed. *Ragi* suffers little from bird damage, and needs only moderate rainfall. It prefers an altitude of 1-2000m, which suits it to the interior uplands of Tamil Nadu and Mysore. It cannot tolerate waterlogging, and needs a lot of weeding in its early stages. Best of all, it can be stored for up to ten years without deterioration or weevil damage; this has made it an important "famine food". The fields may be grazed after harvest, and its straw makes good fodder for pastoralists.[11] The main drawback is that the food is no longer loved by its cultivators, who for the main would prefer the more prestigious staple of rice.[12] Nonetheless, I was told repeatedly by people in Cumbum Valley that these millets build hardy and strong people, unlike rice. One of them even reckoned that the days of upward mobility through playing the role of "tough" [*pista*] were over, not merely because of the increasing prominence of State institutions, but because of the tendency to spurn a part of the *tinai*, the region's original food.[13]

Although surplus land is not in great evidence in south India today, once it was.[14] The British efforts to enforce cultivation, and their delight at its extension, contributed to a geographical revolution in the landscape.[15] These efforts were no doubt part of State traditions which always wished that cultivators would cultivate more, so to pay more revenue. Yet leaving fallow was at times an act of protest, as was desertion from a taluk or district if the revenue was deemed too high. At some point the State had to come to a compromise; the colonial state was the first to so systematically employ arms across the map to succeed in so uncompromisingly

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11 See J.W. Purseglove's *Tropical Crops: Monocotyledons*, 2 vols. Longman, London: 1975 (*ragi*: pp.142-156; *cholam*: pp.261-287), which makes two other points on *ragi*: first, that it has the advantage that it may be malted and *brewed*, and second: "Finger millet does not enter into world trade" (p.156). I am very appreciative of Jill Thompson at RSPacS for her provision of and expert guidance through this and other books on tropical plants.

12 Now that the Periyar Water Project provides massive irrigation for the valley fields, paddy is grown in abundance. Anyway, the State Government's price-scheme makes paddy relatively available throughout the state. Farmers, trying to avoid the State's fixed-price levy on rice, switch to more lucrative crops: coconuts, table grapes, vegetables, bananas, although they all require some pump irrigation. As a result, these one-time staple millets have increased in consumer price even more rapidly than rice (although they are still cheaper in absolute terms): more harsh consequences for the landless. (The same has been true for much of north India in the 20th century as well; *cf.* S. Sarkar 1989:170-1).

13 This was especially insisted upon by the inestimable "Cocopatti" Ibrahim, an Uthamapalaiyam Muslim whose life-story has been from rags to stupendous riches, achieved through hiring himself out as a "hit-man." "*Pista*" has now been appropriated as the marketing name for a flavour of ice-cream in Tamil Nadu.

14 Writing from Dindigul in 1808, Hodgson (Munro's best-spoken opponent in the Company) explicitly referred to "dry grain districts", in which he claimed that the land actually under cultivation was less than 20% of all possibly arable land; he also noted that, because of this, *raiyats* felt that in taking up *pattas* for land they were in fact performing a favour for the Company government, and not receiving any "boon of property" (*cf. The Fifth Report*, v.3:558). By failing to reciprocate, or even notice this, the Company ended the gift relationship...

15 Thomas Munro complimented the Raja of Pudukkottai in 1826 on the fact that whereas the forests had been dense when he had travelled there as a young officer in the 1780s, forty years later "the woods had been almost cut down and cultivation was going on..." (in C.Bayly 1988:139).

pursuing the goal of maximizing cultivation.[16] In the hinterland dry zones of south India, "revenue" was collected by the centre (delta-fringe) kingdoms sporadically, through force. Sometimes tribute was offered more generously, as regional chiefs exchanged it for rights of recognition: *nazar*.[17] Since succession was a volatile affair in the chiefly polities, the price for this service could be very expensive (*cf.* Wink 1986:189-92). On the other hand, these chiefly polities, bound as they were to their condition of low agrarian surplus and strong ties of alliance not articulated through proprietary land rights, were able to take some of their income through imposing protection fees and through outright plunder. The unsteady relations of power between the deltaic plains and the dry uplands did find expression in the sporadic and armed forays into the other's territories. The chiefs also often mobilized predatory bands who disabused alien traders of their goods, or, preferably, charged them *kaval* for protection services.[18] Otherwise, the chiefs would try to collect some levies from the population, but the balancing effects of desertion were always immanent and people played this tactical card close to the table; this structure of practical accountability was abolished by colonial rule. In the dry tract around Madurai, including the huge *zamindaris* of Ramnad and Sivaganga, the incidence of local taxation per capita was greatly below the average of the Madras Presidency as a whole, and especially lower than the rates deemed typical of Thanjavur and the Tambraparni delta in Tirunelveli. The British found the degree of taxation to be especially low in the Dindigul country, comprised entirely of these dry chiefly polities.[19]

The political structure of these places beyond the dominion of the centre States remains a conundrum, yet it seems that the basic, widely reported impression is that, while the Chingleput and Thanjavur regions were home to structures of rule based on

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16 *Cf.* J.C. Scott (1976:93-4; emphases mine) on Viet Nam and Burma: in pre-colonial times, "the more effective a kingdom was in imposing its taxes, the more its tax base leaked away." Colonial rule, with its monopoly of modern weapons, regular army, and vast paperwork, was less obliged to come to a compromise: "Although it may be possible to exaggerate the official reach of established colonial regimes, there is little doubt that, compared to the kingdoms they replaced, they left *few places to hide*."

17 On "nuzzer" in the Tamil country, see Rajayyan 1966:71-5, who also notes that polegars, "when they appeared helpless before a formidable army, begged pardon for their fault and offered to pay tribute. This practice was in consonance with the maxim asserted by the *Panchatantra*, the book of apologues in India, probably the oldest of its kind in the world. This book suggests the sound wisdom of procrastination, whether with or without a reasonable hope in all critical times..." (*ibid.*, p.78n34).

In its Mughal form, *nazar* was a contribution made to the King in order to attract his attention to the contributor's problem. Unlike other "contributions", *nazar* was unregulated and was completely voluntary insofar as the value of the contribution was concerned; it recognized the fact that the existence of the subject was a direct function of the "protective" gaze of the Emperor. I am grateful to R.Raj for this point.

18 In the words of Munro, reporting from the Ceded Districts in 1802: "The system of *cawelly* [*kaval*]... is a kind of tribute imposed on government by its own feudatories, as the price of forbearing to oppose its authority" (*The Fifth Report*, v.3: 426-7). Washbrook noted of warrior-leaders in the pre-colonial era that "[i]ndeed, if they were successful at looting, their local expenditures amounted to more than their local incomes" (1976:331).

19 Francis 1905:221. There wasn't much to take, and so the tradition of kingship which declares that leaders are to be munificent found a suitable outdoor auditorium for its voicing. It is an outstanding question whether the fact that revenue demands being so low in the Dindigul area implies that there was an active market in land.

corporate groups, the dry zones threw up single leaders or chiefs who were seen to run their territories as "monarchs."[20] It is also the case that the structure of "tribal" groups were often said to be similarly monarchist by the colonial reports; this related to the trading relations between the people of the hills and the plains merchants. The western Kallar of Madurai District were also said to be under the sway of a hereditary and "monarchist" headman.[21] On the level of the village, the difference appears again, as the itinerary of the office of "village headman" illustrated: there was no such institution in Thanjavur, whereas the *patel* seemed very powerful in the dry districts.[22]

The "polegars", or *palaiyakarrar*, were the powerful figures in the dry countryside, and many of them continued to be so under colonialism as *zamindars*. They appeared ato be larger versions of the local figures of influence who often thrived in the regulation tracts, those revenue-paying spaces integrated into and subject to the kingly state: personages such as village headmen who also functioned as the local revenue collector and agent of the King. Of such people, the Abbe Dubois wrote:

> "[t]hese men have quite a patriarchal authority in their villages, but those who attempt to abuse their power are soon confronted with deserted homesteads, waste lands, and ruin staring them in the face" (1906:89).

The Abbe, who clearly liked this class of people, "the most respectable and the most interesting" class in India, also noted that the rise and fall of "estates" among these sorts of people was rapid: "[i]mmense fortunes seldom survive the second generation" (*ibid.*, pp.89-92). When the independent polegars are considered, however, it is difficult to ascertain whether they truly exercised a patriarchal authority or were subject to frequent "coups." Whether they were essentially "chiefs" or rather a form of landlord or tax farming renter is a difficult question, and both forms existed.[23] It

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[20] See Stein 1980:110; also, Ellis in *Three Treatises on Mirasi Right*, 1816 (cited in Dumont 1966:76). Ellis felt that it was the *Tamil* villages which were run by a republican senate, while the Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi villages, "in their constitution, though, I believe, not in their administration, resemble[d] a monarchy rather than a republic." Ellis was writing from the Jagir in Chingleput, and his comments, I believe, refer yet again to the constitutions of irrigated versus dry villages, and not Tamil vs. Telugu.

[21] *Cf.* Francis 1905:94. This is an example of how within "a single caste" (e.g., the "Kallar"), the social and political structures might be different; both Dirks and Dumont seem to want to make generalizations about "the" Kallar. The "hill tribes" also seemed to have this sort of political structure. "Their headmen are all powerful with them," wrote Price in Salem of the "Malayalis" and the Irulers, (a bit "wilder" and with the reputation amongst plainspeople of being sorcerers), who seldom emerge from the hills, he declared that their headmen were "in their own way little kings" (Cornish, p. 58).

[22] *Cf.* Baker 1979, *passim*, and Gough 1981:177 on Thanjavur. The reports from the Ceded Districts, Anantapur (southern Andhra) and other dry zones by Munro and his colleagues all indicate the strength of the *patel* or "VHM."

[23] For instance, the conflict between David Arnold's interpretation in "Rebellious Hillmen...", in *SAS*, v.1:88-142, and that of Suranjan Chatterjee (1987). Arnold referred to the *muttadars* as feudal chiefs or landlords, to which Chatterjee's polemical reply: "[t]here is a characteristic difference between the socio-political role of an exploiting landlord and an exploited tribal chief"; he goes on to consider Arnold's historiography as "bourgeois."

is in fact a question of political space, which might be a subordinate unit whose borders were determined by the administrative canopy of kingship, or - as with the independent polegar cases - might be a territoriality which dilated according to the shifting amounts of power mustered by the inhabitants of a *palaiyam* as opposed to that of the revenue states. The positivity of the former would depend greatly on a populist formation including as many people as possible in armed resistance to the encroachment of an outside state; such populism would make succession to chiefly power particularly contested in the intra-territorial politics of the dry zone. As noted, the problem of succession being so uncertain, the turn to the larger State (such as the Nayakka king in Madurai) for legitimacy often cost enough to perform a virtual conversion into a subsidiary renter of an estate, as it were a revenue farmer[24] - but this sort of expense and subordination would not be tolerated for long, and the cycle would begin again. Regarding the un-incorporated and independent polegar territories, which the antagonistically expanding kingly state saw as the locus of refractory politics, any claim that succession always entailed a dispute and consequent petition to an external larger power is merely to note what might happen, and not necessarily to articulate a norm. Trying to extend power over these chiefs was, to repeat the Vijayanagar Emperor:

> "*like trying to clean a mud wall by pouring water over it.* If... [the King] gets angry with them he cannot destroy them utterly. If (on the other hand) he attaches them to himself by *kind words* and charity they

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What is a *muttadar*, then? That is obscured by colonial rule, under which *muttadars* were definitely a sort of landlord, contracted to pay revenue for their area and its peoples. Prior to colonialism, I'd say it varied, but the fact that such estates seldom lasted long (at least in the same hands) is already an important difference from colonial landlordism.

In the pre-colonial Tamil dryland case, I support Chatterjee over Arnold (see note 23); the polegars were not "landlords" but chiefs. This correlates well with the facility of selling land in the dry communities (the market was not obstructed by proprietary rights invested in the "sovereign"). On the other hand, those polegars who survived the colonial flood were often made into *zamindars* under the Permanent Settlement in Madras (@ 30-40% of the total Presidency area), at which point they were, obviously, landlords. The Andhra uprisings studied by Chatterjee and Arnold occurred during colonial rule, and so it would be a question of the relation between the two forms - official (*zamindari*, or *mittadari*) and historical (chiefly) - as their rhetorics were used by the insurgents.

In Cumbum Valley, there is a man of an ex-polegar lineage of Kombai. The latter was not made into a *zamindar*, largely because of a defiance of the Company in the early 1800s. However, he maintained even in 1990 a position of enormous influence as a sort of "chiefly" person in the region. In one of my visits, some men brought in a wicker couch, used for marriage ceremonies. It had been in circulation for months without Appaji Raja Kumar, the ex(?)-polegar having seen it; in fact he had forgotten about it. He attends over 700 events and ceremonies a year, for people of all communities; his actual land-holdings, while considerable (@ 70 acres) are hardly astounding, and he lives simply. His position is based on other criteria such as a sort of clan-respect; "...the shabbiest police official has more 'authority' than the organs of the clan, but even the head of the military power and so on may well envy the elder of a clan, who enjoys the 'unstrained respect' of society" (Engels, cited in Lenin 1972:60).

[24] But only in theory - the sporadic collections returned the *de facto* relation to one of *tribute*, perhaps an elephant rather than a portion of the real produce of the domain. Elephants "became among the most valuable prizes of warfare and a reason for Hindu kings to have control of, or good relations with, forest chiefs where elephants were captured and trained for work or fighting" (Stein 1989c:22-3).

> would be useful to him in invading foreign territory and plundering their fortresses" (cited in Stein 1989c:94*).

The totalization of space imagined by colonial conquest rendered this function, incidentally that of "sweet speech", superfluous and saw only depredation in any manifestation of sovereignty outside of the havoc of its own sword.

The colonial intervention in the dry zones assumed a military form which dictated the historiographical representation of the polegars. Hurdis, writing from Dindigul in 1797, began to grasp this, but to no avail:

> "...the character of the poligars, I do not conceive, to be fairly understood. The Europeans have received their impressions from the *amils* of the Nawab of the Carnatic and have enquired no further. As they have been plundered by the administration, they have deemed it essential to plunder others; this does not show their character, but their act. The poligars are called refractory and detachments moved against them to overcome their resistance by terror and when it is satisfied in its full extent, the instrument by which it was enforced was withdrawn. However no attempt was made to win their confidences; we understand from the official papers that demands were made for tribute, we hear the demands were refused and we hear that fire and sword exacted, what was demanded" (cited in Rajayyan 1971:23).[25]

Munro was also one of the *military* Collectors; defending his execution of the old and crippled polegar of Vimlah[26], he exclaimed later in 1809: "I never was considered by Government as an ordinary collector; I *acted* rather as a kind of Lieut. Governor" (in Stein 1989b:138). It was this sort of vigorous government that he wanted for the Company in south India; he frequently objected that a separate judiciary was not

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[25] It was not "talking to Brahmins" - the accusation that Berreman levelled against Dumont - but talking to the King's agents (*amildars*; often as not Brahmins) that enabled the British misrecognition of Indian polities.

[26] Munro had tried to make an example of this chief, a blind old man, which outraged his superiors in London and Madras, then still favouring the Permanent Settlement and the support of indigenous nobility. Munro felt that this polegar's failure to attend his office, even when ordered repeatedly to do so, indicated that he was a puppet of other forces in the *palaiyam*. That the polegars represented a powerful and popular reality, the independence of their territories, was implicitly recognized by Munro in his efforts to wipe them out (in fact and in print). His ally Webbe in Madras, wrote to Munro with irony against the latter's critics: "the refractory spirit of the rebellious polygars will yield... to a gentle care of the native prejudices, timidity, and ignorance of European maxims: the halcyon times will return when jamabundies shall be settled through the more natural channel of the native dubashi, conversant with native matters; the crooked sword into a scythe shall bend.... In sober truth I fear that all our plans for a vigorous government within [the] conquered country are frustrated..." (in Stein 1989b:89).

With due regards to such "puppetry", Thackeray wrote in 1810 to Munro explaining the real nature of the Company government: "[o]ur govt is one of form, private interest... [and] a right to be moderately stupid by Parl[iament]. How the govt is to find men among them to be Collectors, upon the old footing [as enjoyed by Munro], with *unbounded authority*, that is to be... *Princes* of large provinces to unite in their own persons all the authority, and duties, and functions of Civil Govt I cannot imagine. [Of the job-seekers there is] hardly one fit to be the prince which the collector was formerly. This is the real cause of changes in the system, the others that are assigned in the *public* writings were pretenses... Having now been three years in some measure *behind the curtain* [of govt] at Madras, I have *seen* how the *puppets* are played, and I own that I am disposed to think very differently than I did before I was *initiated*... The Govt must consider the relation in which they stand to the laws and Govt at home as well as to this country - they must consider the Europeans they have to manage, as well as the Hindoos they have to govern. It is the most difficult task to manage these Europeans properly" (*ibid.*, pp.167-8*). Itself using the metaphors of "curtain" and sight, this passage uncannily describes the structure - of "public" discourse and administrative implementation - that I call "the King's gaze".

compatible with his *raiyatwari* settlement, which required virtually despotic powers for the Company's agents in the "village establishment." As Stein (*ibid.*, p.88) observes, the logical and political ramification of this was that polegar authority was in competition with Munro's own; the executive, therefore, executed. His violent distaste for these figures of chieftainship emerges in a letter from 1818, regarding the polegars of the Ceded Districts (and reflecting on his earlier policy towards them):

> "[the polegars] were a set of fellows whose ancestors had been expelled forty or fifty years before. Some of them were serving as common Peons, when they were discovered by some adventurer of a Karkern [*karkun*? from the Persian, a financial agent], who borrowed a hundred rupees in the bazar, rigged out the new Rajah with a turban and a mantle as fine as Timour the Tartar.... On these fellows I certainly had little compassion.... But for fallen monarchs I have great respect...." (*ibid.*, p.232).[27]

Ironically, in the course of proclaiming his version of south Indian tradition, in which polegars were interlopers, he had to establish that the village headmen were indigenous institutions, the natural link between the state and its subjects, along which revenue and administration might be managed. This sort of a link, unlike that of a sporadically operated "tribute", was an innovation on these independent spaces, an innovation imposed upon them by the new colonial state. An administrative apparatus of this imposition was the definition and restriction of space, bounded now by the colonized village, the ritual subject of revenue collection.

Munro's opponents in Madras claimed that in the non-*mirasi* districts, the office of *patel* was hardly a symbol of primordial corporateness as alleged by Munro, but was actually and actively purchased (*cf. ibid.*, p.195). Munro, if he did not on occasion invent the job and select its incumbent, certainly buttressed such institutions in the revenue polity of the immanent colonial state, thereby deferring to their use and abuse for widespread oppression by those Munro naturalized in their designation as "principal inhabitants". Later, in 1817, pushing his *raiyatwari* policy as the method of settlement for the whole of Madras Presidency, he went on a rampage through

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[27] Of his plan to squeeze the polegars out with the "legal" technique of enforcing extraordinarily high revenue on which they would then inevitably default, thereby legitimating their removal or forcing them to be attacked as "rebels", Munro wrote to his friend Webbe: "I am afraid you will say that this army [requested by Munro] is rather intended for conquest than defence, but if you are attacked by a Native Power you can only oppose him... by invasion" (Stein 1989b:89). In another letter of 1801 Murno wrote to Webbe: "it would be decorous before we begin with them [polegars] to have some reasons to produce such as might be worked up into a manifesto after the fashion of modern Europe. As the whole gang of them was expelled by Hyder and Tippoo though restored by the Nizamites I am for turning every last soul of them adrift again - or at least for depriving them all of authority... *by confining them to a single village each* - ... this is what I would do if there were no one to call me to account for oppressing fallen royalty..." (in Beaglehole 1966:62*). Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan were the Muslim rulers of Mysore, defeated for the last time in 1799 at Seringapatam. The Nizam is the Nizam of Hyderabad. It is interesting that for all the invective Munro throws on Tipu Sultan, their administrative goals and methods were remarkably the same (*cf. ibid.*, pp.33-4); Munro promoted the war against Mysore, declaring the Mysore state as "the most simple and despotic monarchy in the world", yet he clearly admired the "vigour" of Tipu's government, and frequently justified his practices by referring to Tipu's previous usages (as in this case), leaving little doubt about his ideal of structural despotism.

Thanjavur, irate that the Collector there had claimed that many villages did not have "potails" or headmen. In meeting the *mirasidars* of one taluk, he found that they "brought forward every argument they could devise against their being required to act as Potails or Heads of Villages." His explanation:

> "It was evident, from the whole of their arguments and from each individual concurring without the slightest variation in every part with the two or three principal speakers, and from all assuming what they knew to be unfounded - namely that no *mirasidar* has superior authority to another - that they had all preconcerted their answers and that they acted under the influence of some of their number, or some leading men of the country who directed them.... I thought it advisable to have no more meetings with bodies of principal inhabitants..." (*ibid.*, p.208).

The "village establishment" with its "principal inhabitants" did not suit Munro in its deltaic incarnation, who found his coveted figure of the *patel*, half symbol of the people and half agent of government, in the Thanjavur position of the "*nattamkarran*" - a supralocal authority of just the ilk that he had spurned as the rigged up polegars of the dry zones![28] Unsurprisingly, the man of the colonial military averred that sovereignty must be singular in the Company's *raj*, and disparaged institutions which went against him: internally, the *mirasi* communities' republican spirit of blocking government intervention, and externally, the existence of other forms of sovereignty. As the Company was a force of conquest to Munro, no externality was recognized, and so the sovereignty of polegar chiefs had to be denied, executed, and dismissed. *Mirasi* communities, invisible interiorities, were ultimately manageable because they were based on land-holding; chiefly forms were ultimately not tolerable because they were not.[29]

Nor were these polegars new to the idea of keeping independence. The large-scale revolt studied by Rajayyan (1971) is the classic example of what Company officials like Mark Wilks feared when they worried about "*a last struggle for savage independence*" in the generalization of polegar uprisings (*cf.* Stein 1989b:89-90). Cumbum Valley was full of polegars[30], and at least the two larger ones at Bodi and Kombai both resisted the Company Collector's march through this westernmost stretch of the Madurai and Dindigul country. In 1795, Tirumala Bodi Nayakkan and

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28 "If Tanjore *mirasidars* did not see fit to recognize this cherished Indian usage and convenience to British authority, then other candidates for the office should be found to serve" (Stein 1989b:208).

29 This is quite similar to the north American process, in which the native peoples were external sovereigns, represented as the epitome of radical freedom while being destroyed; meanwhile, the slave-holding south, while also antagonistic to the alleged republican ideology of the USA, were tolerated for some time, because at least southern society and economy was encompassed by capitalist forms.

30 Bodi, Tevaram, Kombai, Gudalur, Cumbum, Chinnamanur, Uthamapalaiyam, Vadakarai, Erasanayakkanur, Gandamanayakkanuur, and Hanumanthapatti all had polegars, none of whom were interested in delivering the charge of their dominions in obedience with the Collector's order. As taluks, apparently Gudalur and Cumbum were nominally allied to the Raja of Travancore, but the latter gave the two taluks to the Collector of Dindigul to supervise. The Raja claimed these taluks as his from ancient times, but reduced by Haidar Ali. *Cf.* Wynch to Collectorship, 1794-95, *MDR* vol.1203:2, 77, 114.

his neighbour the polegar of Vadakarai, armed over 600 men and fired upon the Company's peons. This "rebellious and disobedient conduct" was committed under what even the Collector acknowledged was a correct assumption: that the Company intended to impose a high assessment [*peshkash*].[31] (He repented later and was restored to favour; by 1807 his son was helping the Madurai Collector *shoot* elephants.) Appaji Kavundar, polegar of Kombai, was despised by the Company as a thorn throughout southern Cumbum Valley. He had his estate resumed; apparently, he had merely instructed the Company people they had "no business to remain in the area".[32]

The Raja of Gudalur had died in 1794, leaving Appaji Kavundar to take possession of the Gudalur palaiyam, which he did. The Company's desire to blot out these figures was intense; not only does Gudalur never again appear as an estate (in the 1920s it becomes a rehabilitation camp for "Criminal Tribes"), but Appaji Kavundar was squelched again, this time as the revenue defaulter of 1805-6, for the Cumbum and Chinnamanur estates. Later he is described as the late *zamindar* of Uthamapalaiyam - testimony to the Company's initial confusions about spatial definitions and indigenous political authority. At any rate, the effort to purchase the defaulted estates by Copia Muthupillai failed as the Zillah Court declared the transaction fradulent, the buyer being seen as the deputed agent of Appaji.[33] The Governor-General in Council wrote to the Madurai Collector, ordering the confiscation of the estates and directed him "to give wide publicity to the order."[34] Indeed, such wide publicity would be necessary to re-classify an entire social map

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[31] Wynch to Collectorship, 24 April, 1795, and 8 May 1795; *cf. MDR* vol. 1203, pp.203-238. Indeed, in 1795, the Company raised the revenue 25% over what even Tipu had claimed, and moreover collected it annually. In 1797, Hurdis raised the Gudalur *kist* by 97% (Rajayyan 1971:51) to punish Appaji Kavundar's antagonism to colonialism.

The history of the Bodinayakkanuur *zamin* stretches back for ages. The *zamindari* family came from Gooty in Anantapur (now Bellary District), defeated by Muslim armies. They established themselves as Rajas under the sway of the Raja of Poonayar (now in Kerala). Some generations later the family received a royal gift from Tirumalai, the king at Madurai, for having captured a great Muslim warrior named Mullakhan. Subsequently the *zamin* was meant to pay a tribute of 1000 *panam*, destined ultimately to the Nawab of Arcot. The East India Company raised the tribute to 2500 *panam*, and under the Permanent Settlement fixed the *peshkash* at Rs.7235. (*cf.* Vadivelu 1915:673). Another account suggests that the Bodi dynasty remained more interested in its links with Travancore, whose Raja had rewarded Chakku Nayakkan for overcoming a famous and ferocious wild boar in single combat. The Raja was so delighted with this display (he was presented the boar still half alive) that he confirmed the Bodi estate, on condition that 100 *pons* should be paid each time the succession devolved on a new heir (an example of the role of *nazar*, or the recognition fee). This sign was maintained into the 20th century; at each succession, the new *zamindar* sent a present of money and the Maharaja of Travancore returns a gold bangle and other gifts, including, in 1879, an elephant (*cf.* Francis, pp.313-16).

[32] See Wynch to Collectorship, 1795, *MDR* v.1203, p.121, and also Francis 1905:313-322.

[33] See the Letters to the Board of Revenue, 5 July and 25 July, 1808, *MDR* v.1154: p.13, p.91. It may well be that the man who was accused of buying the estates of and for Appaji was the man (Muthu Irulapa Pillai) earlier deputed by the Company Collector to take charge of the two taluqs of Gudalur and Cumbum, a task he found impossible as the incumbent, Nambool Nayak had no intention of giving them up. (Wynch to Collectorship, 1794, *MDR* v.1203:20–27).

[34] Letter from the Board to the Collector of Madurai, 9 May, 1808, *MDR* v.1225, p.104. The estates were confiscated under section XVIII of Regulation 1802: the Madras Permanent Settlement act.

along lines devoid of territoriality and its different modes of sovereignty. These hinterland spaces were independent, as articulated in the very notion of "tribute", a relation of power and honour, and not administrative incorporation. Under colonialism, this fact was not simply changed, but erased, as the aberrant situation of "pre-colonial anarchy," now restored to order. Other regimes, such as that of the Marathi, had knows the adversity of such autonomous chiefs, determining their tribute demand on their respective powers of resistance. The actual payments of this tribute were usually well in arrears, and the whole idea seems to be a part of the centre States' nominal ideology of universal dominion - not, in other words, as a regulated fact of life from the point of view of the chiefly polities, the territories of which were understood to be "one's own place."[35] From that view, the amount of "tribute" was the inverse measure of the power of *existence* held at any point by the fluid chieftainships. It is precisely this sort of power that a colonial imaginary usually negates.[36]

Manners and Social Modalities.

> "... only relays, intermezzos, resurgences."
> - Deleuze and Guattari. *Nomadology.*

The forms of social integration proper to the dry zones remains to be addressed; particularly, the structures and processes involving "castes" or *jatis*. Many of these pre-colonial polegar domains seem to have been preponderantly "mono-caste"

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35 I am following Andre Wink here. The Marathi regime seems to me somewhat typical of 18th century state formation in India, at least as Wink portrays it. The generic term used by the Marathi court for all autonomous or semi-autonomous chiefs, i.e., those from whom one did not collect revenue but rather tribute, was *samsthanik*, "one who possesses a *samsthan*, a royal abode." The word *samsthan* literally means "*one's own place.*" It is significant that the term was equally used for rival states or sovereigns, such as the state of Mysore (*cf.* Wink 1986:189-92). The role of Marathi ideology's continuing influence in colonial south India is attested to by such details as the fact that Colin Mackenzie's assistants, interpreters and translators were by and large Marathi Brahmins (Frykenberg 1963:139n3), as well as their preponderance in the *mofussil* [rural country] collectorates (*cf.* Frykenberg 1966).

36 The question "Does the Indian *exist*?" is rarely asked in colonial discourse. Nehru wrote in 1942 of the British news representations of Indian society: "[r]eading them, one would hardly suspect that they (the Indians) existed.... Almost one would think that it is deliberate so that they may see only what they want to see and be blind to all else" (cited in Irschick 1986:5). In the case I am discussing here, I think that the "power of existence" is something on which a colonial state, in trying to overlook, effects an historiographical erasure. "Delta bias" is less subject to this sort of total erasure; in the same way, essentially, as slaves in America were not as utterly removed from public discourse as were native Americans. Tocqueville made the suggestion that blacks were the inverse of "equality" and Indians the extremist incarnation of "freedom", the twin ideological co-ordinates of the Yankee map. One might also say that the site of the former was always inside (as forced labour), while that of the outer didn't "exist", being always pushed farther away, outside the frontier. Likewise, the elimination of the idea of places that might be somebody else's own in a way not encompassed by a "rule of property" is a necessity for the colonial (Oriental) state: *nulle terre sans the Raj*. The *Madras Survey Manual* demanded that: "The letter 'S' [Sirkar?] should be cut on the top of field stones planted at bends on subdivision boundaries and the St. George's cross on those marking bends on village boundaries" (*Survey*, 1924, v.1:19), the final instance of marking all space as under measurement, record, and rule.

regions, especially amongst the Maravar of northern Tirunelveli and the southern border of Madurai (*cf.* Ludden 1985:72). However, even within a "sub-caste" there can be ranked lineages; this has been observed with the Nadar community in its concentrated base of southern Tirunelveli, and among the Piramalai Kallar of western Madurai. In both cases, one lineage, usually amongst five, is ritually low; marriage and even food exchange with them is avoided.[37] The Nadar case is somewhat exceptional, but Dumont found the same amongst the Kallar, the *pulukkar* category also being deprived of land (*kani illada kallar*[38]), and who are felt to speak very fast (*parappara*), which is also said of the coastal Paraiyar (*cf.* Dumont 1986:167-69). Interestingly, the Kallar apparently tended to imagine that these low statuses, even that of being Paraiyar (and not at all a Kallar) were the results of the discretionary powers of punishment by kings, or, in the Kallar case, "the Tevar" or headman of the *nad* territory (*cf. ibid.*, p.169,pp.340-43). The suggestion is that chiefs had imposing powers, as intimated by the colonial image of their "monarchistic" rule; at the same time, however, the rise and fall of their power was relatively rapid, and presumably the ever-renewable need for alliances mitigated any tendencies towards permanence in imposed abject statuses.

Dumont's fieldwork was in Tirumangalam taluk, west of Madurai city but east of Cumbum Valley. The region is very much Kallar Nadu; for this reason, competitions for power often occurred between intra-caste groups rather than between nebulous entities such as whole castes. Ludden observes that in the dry zone, secure

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[37] For the Nadars, see Hardgrave 1969:34-49; the low group of the ex-Shanars were known as Kalla Shanars, also called *Pulukka* (cow dung). *Kalla*, according to Hardgrave, is "spurious, false." Their lowness was described as due to their being products of illegal unions within the Nadar community; the name most commonly used to refer to Kalla Shanars was *Servai* (which is also an honorific, meaning "chieftain" - obviously used with some mockery here). On the other hand, they were believed to have once been the slaves and palanquin bearers of Pandyan kings. Missionaries, who had good luck with Nadars generally, had little or none with this sub-group, of whom one wrote in 1845: "I have always found them peculiarly slow in learning, careless of order and decency, and difficult to manage" (in *ibid.*, p.48) The prose appropriate to the Nadar *converts*, according to Caldwell, their early missionary-cum-ethnographer, is that they "are particularly docile and tractable, peculiarly fitted to appreciate the advantages of sympathy, guidance and protection, and are peculiarly accessible to Christian influences" (in *ibid.*, p.49).

A similar case appears evident in Dirks 1988:71-2: some Maravar polegars "had an entire Maravar subcaste, called Cervais and sometimes *Pulukka*maravar, devoted to their service." Gough makes a strangely similar observation for Thanjavur: *Panikkar* was often a title used for Pallars and Paraiyars (1981:19; [Panikkar signifies "chief" in Malayalam].) According to Kailasapathy (1968:98), the word "*polikka*" (similar to *pulukka*) used to mean in Malayalam "to measure corn heaps, paying the reapers in kind." In Chingleput, the Paraiyar used to do the work of measurement from the grain heap, for which they received a pittance of grain known as *kalavasam*, ranging from 2-20%, a right over which the colonial state squabbled like Sarter's Pariahs (*cf.* Irschick 1982, 1989.)

[38] *Kani* is derived from the root for "eye" and "to see"; it also served as the Tamil root for *kaniyatchi*, which is the Tamil equivalent of *mirasi* (a Persian/Marathi word). I interpret this as an instance of the western Kallar playing with incorporating some of the deltaic models; the fact that Dumont's fieldwork is after WW2, when there is little land available, the laws of land have been long individualized in a "rule of property", and the Kallar subject to massive colonial pedagogy by the British who saw them as a "criminal tribe", makes me see this as an exogeneous idiom. As for *pulukkar* (see above note), Dumont relates it to Malayalam *pula* [pollution], and mentions the existence of "an Untouchable caste" in Tamil Nadu, the Pulaiyar. In fact, the Pulaiyar are officially a "tribe" in Tamil Nadu, although in Kerala the name is that of an ex-untouchable caste.

title (*pattam*) to land involved "fighting with kinsmen"; resolution was often obtained by "expressions of loyalty to superiors in warfare" or to larger sovereigns in a region (Ludden 1985:168). Before the Company claimed the sole right to distribute objectified *patta* deeds of entitlement to land, alliances were the elusive goal of political activity, and the principle of *pangu* or "share" was highly emphasized to cement these relations. Groups were defined through this idiom, which did *not* articulate itself around an agrarian mode of production[39] nor exclusively through "caste"-like ensembles of kin, but were heavily inflected by territorial solidarities; this echoed the Tamil geographical poetics of the *tinai*, which co-ordinated an equation between people and their spatial region. In the dry areas, the principle of shares did *not* apply to the harvest; there was no village grain heap (*ibid.*, p.168; *cf.* also Dumont 1986:46). Instead, *pangu* operated as the idiom governing the distribution of chiefly power in terms of rights to the assets of smaller domains of practice, such as the distribution of booty from plunder operations or the *kaval* protection-contracts.[40] By 1990, however, during my fieldwork, the notion of *pangu* was expressed largely within the kinship idiom of *pangali*, and referred to inheritance rights, particularly of material property. This made for embarrassing moments when individuals of poorer kin groups were laughed at for even using the term, since its referent was so impoverished for them. Others, such as the Pulaiyar (S.T.) of Kotukudi who have recently become labourers (*cf.* also Gardner 1988), knew better: "what's the use [of thinking in terms of *pangali*]? At the end of the day, there is only a pickaxe..."[41] The other arena in which it found articulation was in temple ceremonies, with each community having a *pangu* in the ceremony, designating a right to a certain symbol or ritual moment.

That the above mentioned modern usages of *pangu* mark restrictions of the style of the late 18th and early 19th centuries is an indication of the imposed extension of the State's ideas of property, assisted in the 20th century by the scarcity of lands. As Ludden argued, the dry zone societies "do not seem to have systematized share-holding in village agricultural production" (*ibid.*, p.168), which was left to family groups. Political relations between groups, centred on lineages and factions, were centred on temple ceremonies and the military perquisites of *kaval* and the occasional

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[39] As noted, there was very little lamination of tenancy, a pattern which continued into the early 20th century in much of the *raiyatwari* districts (*cf.* Baker 1984:153). As late as 1935 in Tirumangalam taluk, it was noted "[a]s a matter of fact, sometimes the labourer is better off than the cultivator" (*ibid.*, p.152). In the *zamindari* tracts, tenancy was by structural definition prevalent, as every cultivator was the tenant of the *zamindar*.

[40] For accounts and examples of this distribution of "booty", *cf.* Ludden 1985:168, Hatch, 1928:111, Dumont 1986; the 1823 Census records extant "*kaval* shares" in several dry taluks in Tirunelveli, inhabited mostly by Maravars (Ludden 1985:252n1).

[41] Cocopatti, the Muslim man who elevated himself from his childhood in a hut so small that "if the cow urinated, it fell on my food" to a vast estate by serving the Uthamapalaiyam [UP] elite as a henchman, told me in the presence of one of the bluer-blooded UP Muslims, that they were *pangali*. The latter turned to me and said, mockingly: "he has too much cash."

visits to the deltas. That these were not reflections of a delta-style hierarchy of castes, articulated in parallel with the classifications of political economy (land, tenure, and labour), is suggested by the shared interests of those *jatis* now "untouchable" and the chiefs; colonial records of the polegar uprising exhibited no caste patterns (*cf.* Rajayyan 1982:227). At least once, in 1804, after the uprising had been crushed, a Pallar man named Dasen led its second edition; claiming divine authority to liberate the country, assuming the title of Ramaswami and conferring similar titles upon his followers, he was received in villages from Coimbatore to Salem. Their insurrection was snuffed when the Company detected a huge store of guns and other weapons in the forests; the rebels were the same peasant associates of the polegars.[42]

Another example of the confusion of caste in the interior of the country may be culled from early colonial reports from Cumbum Valley itself. The ex-*zamindari* families of the area are all Tottiyan Nayakkars, but Appaji Kavuntar and the ex-polegars of the southern part of the valley are, today, Gowders.[43] The difficulties of determining a "caste-name" are particularly extreme in this case, but as that is the point, a sketch must be made. The Gazetteer, citing earlier documents, noted that the southern end of Cumbum Valley had many Kannada-speaking Kappiliyans (Francis 1905:318), which happens to be one of the sectional names for Gowders. Meanwhile, the Tottiyan Nayakkar, who are otherwise known as Raja Kambalam [blanket], are said by Ward in his memoir on the province of Madurai and Dindigul to be subdivided into nine sub-castes, six of which were in Tamilnad. The six subgroups' names were, according to Ward:

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[42] Rajayyan 1982:292-3; also see 1971:129 for earlier accounts of the light arms factories in the jungles of Melur and Tirumangalam [Madurai district]. Lushington, in Ramnad in 1799, realized that the people of the *palaiyams* were struggling to arm themselves. "The sudden and extensive *nature* of the attacks in which the inhabitants suffered no malestation [*sic*] bespoke something more serious than the common depredations of plunderers, and the anxiety shown to get possession of the muskets of *sibbendy* peons indicate a higher object than the acquisition of a little plunder" (cited in Rajayyan 1971:73).

Rajayyan defines the polegar as "the administrator of his palaiyam, commander of his forces, the renter of the ruler and a ryot among his people" (1982:53). The third clause is over-simplified; I argue that the polegar was essentially autonomous, and find Rajayyan's definition a bit too congenial to Munro's ideal intermediary between local population and the state. Rajayyan's theme, that the polegar uprising was "the first war of independence" in India, may lead him to consider the polegars as incorporated agents of some Tamil proto-nation-state. Such a state bias, while preferable to the delta bias, misses the historical importance of the sort of dual polity "system" in south India, between the Brahmanical deltas and the chiefly, populist drylands.

[43] "Gowdas" are numerous in Karnataka, and the Cumbum Valley Gowders have links there, including the Kannada language. However, they are now linking in with the "Gounders" [Kavuntars] of Coimbatore, who are also known as Kongu Vellalas, just to emphasize the complexity. Finally, the term "Kavuntar" seems to have been a generic terms for "leader" (as Nayakka and Reddiar can be as well, and as Tevar can be, which is now the corporate caste name for both the Maravars anad the Kallars). Munro's reports frequently mention "head gauds" in what is now southern Andhra, *gaud* being very likely a variant on "Gowder."

1) Chellavar[44] - Gentoo Cumbalatur
2) *Pulla*var - Golah Gentoo Cumbalatur
3) Vullakavar - *Copliar* Cumbalatur
4) Tokalava - Vada Cumbalatur
5) Yerisumavar - Yedidie Cumbalatur
6) *Coorevar* (the shepherd of this tribe).

Ward continues, noting that the "Cumbalatur" in general bear the appellation of Nayak, except for the Tokalavar, who go by the appelation of Gounder, such as "Appacha-Gounder" (Appaji, the polegar of Kombai!). Ward then notes that the Tokalavar are also known as the Copiliar[45], which, while not exactly fitting in with his six-fold table, nonetheless suggests that the "distinction" between Gowders and Tottiyan Nayakkas was hardly what it is felt to be today - the Tevaram ex-*zamindari* family told me that there could be no connection. To compound the overlapping terms for supposedly distinct, and now substantially distinct, *jatis*, the sixth section in Ward's list, "Coorevar" is a sure reference to the Kuravar, a group that in the early 20th century was considered untouchable by some[46], and as a "criminal tribe" by the British (*cf.* Hatch 1928). It is not a case of a bygone system of inter-marriages between *jatis*; even Ward noted that there was no such thing. Still, the confusion indicates that social integration was quite complex in the chiefly domains, necessitating a proliferation of names, labels, and social positions and roles. The adhesive principle would be *pangus* in the various domains of political control, temple ceremony and the *jallikattu* games[47]; that is now gone: *pangu* is the idiom of intra-

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44 "Cumbalatur" is *Kambalattar*, [people of the "blanket"]. The ex-*zamindar* of Tevaram told me his family pertained to the "Silavu" section, whereas the Bodinayakkanur ex-*zamindar* family was of the "Seelavu" sect. Marriage alliances existed, but the sects were declared to be distinct (both, in Ward's terms, "Chellavar").

45 All of this comes from pp.12-17 of B.S. Ward's *Geographical and Statistical Memoir of the Province of Madura and Dindigul*, composed in 1821.

46 The Kuravar appear fascinatingly in the margins of much of the literature. In Coimbatore, Beck reports that they are "basketmakers" who rival the Matari [Chakkiliyar] to avoid the bottom of the current status heap. They are the only migratory caste; unfortunately, she gathered no information about them (1974:104n). Hatch, following Thurston, tells that the Kuravar have a direct patrilineage tie to Brahma-Venudu, who could not beget a son. The gods produced a man from his right thigh. "He was not beautiful to look upon, and their work was found to be a failure when regarded from the standpoint of kingship." A second effort proved more fruitful, thus angering the first son, who begged to be allowed to rule, "as he had been created for that purpose." The second son had already been enthroned, however, and so no change was possible; the Kuravar ancestor went into grief and exile, but was recognized as the *ruler* of the forests. From there he watched in silence to know the mind of the gods, and some of his Telugu-speaking descendants were given a title related to the Telugu word "to know" (1976:27-8) In the 1891 Census, meanwhile, the "Korava" are listed as a sub-division of the Paraiyar in Coimbatore (Thurston VI:181).

In Chingleput, the Kurivikarans were without reservation the "lowest" of the "untouchable" castes, polluting by touch everyone in the village. They are suspected of eating crow, and "have no place"; they are also migrants. "Their dress is colorful and non-Tamil... and they still speak a form of Marathi among themselves," with a reputation as tricksters (Moffatt 1979:144-5). The name also figure in the poetics of the *tinai* (eco-types), as one for the *people* of the mountains (*kurinci*), the site of the poetic theme of the lovers' union (*cf.* Zvelebil 1973:100).

47 *Jallikattu* [lit. "tying of ornaments"] was "one of the few manly sports which survive in southern India", wrote Francis in his *Gazetteer*, and was especially popular in Madurai district. "On a day fixed and advertised by beat of drum at the adjacent weekly markets a number of cattle, to the horns of which cloths and handkerchiefs have been tied, are loosed one after the other, in quick succession, from a large pen or other enclosure amid a furious tom-tomming and loud shouts from the crowd of assembled spectators. The animals have first to run the gauntlet

caste inheritance, landed wealth is vastly important now and its reification is protected by State institutions, and the bloody valley-wide clash in 1989 between "Harijans" and caste-Hindus (especially the Thevars) is perceived as a blight of "the caste system" and its primordial loyalties...

That the main antagonists in the bodily dimension of today's conflict should be Thevars (Kallars and Maravars) and the Harijans (mostly the Pallars, but "Harijan" is often as not the target) is marked by some historical irony. In the dry modes of social integration of the era of the polegars, temples were a key *loci* of the exchange of roles and services which maintained alliances. *Jati*-endogamy was very strict, and the very plurality of means of integration meant that a sort of caste-chauvinism was probably common. For this reason, the temple was important; these temples, however, were not the huge institutions of Thanjavur or Minaksi in the city of Madurai. Membership was often unclear. For the Kallar, the classic example of a community preferring to imagine that only itself existed, Dumont noted that the "territory" of Kallarnad was not a continuous topography, but a list of areas inhabited and dominated by Kallar (1986:20). Nonetheless, the *pusari* of a major Kallar "lineage" temple in Usilampatti is a Paraiyar.[48] This remains the case today; some of the Kallar of Cumbum Valley told me that this was their situation as well - they had no explanation. It is not unsurprising; it would have served a valuable function of binding neighbourly groups in some sort of enduring relation, before any group was "untouchable".

Today's perceptions of such phenomena as aberrant is tantamount to a forgetfulness towards the space transformed by colonial rule, modern (and increasingly enforced) property law, and the spread of the delta bias. Other evidences corroborate the relative absence of the structurally vertical "system" of castes in the past of the Dindigul polegar country. A relative equality of social relations in the dry zone is suggested by the evidence of a sort of populist dress-code, reported in 1811:

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down a long lane formed of country carts, and then gallop off wildly in every direction; the game consists in endeavouring to capture the cloths tied to their horns. To do this requires fleetness of foot and considerable pluck, and those who are successful are the heroes of the hour. Cuts and bruises are the reward of those who are less skilful, and now and again some of the excited cattle charge into the onlookers and send a few of them flying. The sport has in consequence been prohibited on more than one occasion; but, seeing that no one need run any risks unless he chooses, existing official opinion inclines to the view that it is a pity to discourage a manly amusement... The keenness of the more virile sections of the community (especially the Kallars) in this game is extraordinary, and in many villages cattle are bred and reared specially for it" (1905:83-4) The present (1990) is "one occasion" on which this activity is officially prohibited, as it is often attended by fighting. The competition had an integrative if agonistic function. For a related version from the delta, *mattu pongal,* see Gough 1981:231. Also, see Dumont (1970) on another variation, *erudu kattu*; in this case (Ramnad), a huge rope made by untouchables is tied to the bull's neck, while the other trails behind; young men try to master the bull by seizing the rope. At the end of several local notables' bulls having "raced", the rope is left looped up in a tree near the temple. It is hard to refrain from seeing the competition of controlling the bull as an allegory of the contest over controlling the untouchables - or rather, the product of their labour.

[48] Dumont 1986:172. The *pusari* was once a Vellalar, but in the fall of the latter (and rise of the Kallar in the territory), the post was given to a Paraiyar. In fact, Dumont notes that the temple is that of the god of the *territory* of Kokkulam - but today (in Cumbum Valley as well), it is seen as a *lineage* temple. Dirks also makes in passing the comment that the family tutelary deity of his *Brahmin* informant had a Pallar *pusari* (1987:278n15).

> "The inhabitants [in Dindigul] are of the cast... which interdicts them from wearing upper garments - not because of religion but out of custom. It was a religious [!?] duty from the poligar down to his menial servant - they indiscriminately dress alike and the distinctions only exist in the texture of the cloth on their loins, ornaments, and the fineness of the turban on their heads."[49]

That same report also described the people, who in general lived upon *ragi* and *cholam*, those less-desirable dry grains, as being "pott Bellies to wasted limbs." Yet the situation was not particularly one in which relative equality was the default style of poverty; other reports indicate that women even of labouring families wore the *tol kappu*, a silver bracelet still ideally to be worn (just above the elbow) by Tottiyans, and that they spent more on their dress than was usual in south India - "the fine, handsome Pallan women... being conspicuous in this respect."[50]

Information on the position of women is scant. The Tottiyans, at least, were alleged to practice a form of seclusion in the *gosha* system, although nobody today had ever heard of it.[51] The Kallars, however, who made their reputation for the power with which they executed their protection contracts, apparently used to send a young unmarried girl to escort a contracting party desiring to travel through dangerous tracts. Kallar valiance was so feared, and delivered so inevitably, that nobody would dare to molest her (*cf.* Thurston 1906:372). Given that land and labour were not structurally isolated and re-articulated in the property forms buttressing the delta bias, it seems reasonable to think that women were active participants in family agriculture and not subjugated to Brahmanical scruple.[52]

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[49] Parish to the Collector [at Madurai], 20 July 1811, *Revenue and Judicial Department*; v.1256:54-5. Parish referred to "the inhabitants" in bulk. Today, the Tottiyans of Cumbum Valley, perhaps the most dispossessed of the area during colonial rule (apart from the *zamindari* families), maintain with vigour a similar rule of clothing, eschewing the shirt or blouse. Today this is considered an injunction of their community goddess Jakkammal.

[50] Francis 1905:82. The reference specified that Palni taluk was the extreme example; Palni is in the Dindigul country, about 40 km north of Periyakulam at the northern end of Cumbum Valley. Ward had written of the Dindigul country that it was quite usual to see young women dressed elegantly, adorned with flowers and jewels, grinding rice, drawing water and attending to cooking (in Rajayyan 1966:135).

[51] *Cf.* G.O. 1682 Revenue (Confidential), 19 July, 1915. This report is full of derision for the Tottiyan Raja Kambala caste, perhaps a function of the dislike of small *zamindaris* in constant arrears. "The whole community consisted of uneducated and bigoted people," wrote its author, who disparaged the fact that they kept up traditions. The real tradition was that of colonial discourse, started at least by Ward, who had scorned their punishments of women who had extra-familial "carnal commerce"; this tradition continued in a Tamil weekly which in 1989 published an article on the K.N.P. Tottiyans, lamenting their "barbaric" customs and calling for - of all things - another Gandhi! I had a hard time with the village leader in K.N.P.; he was angry at the article and refused to acknowledge me, answering every question with scorn: "we are Tottiyans, we live in this village, and we live like barbarians."

[52] Given the importance of marriage in the Dravidian kinship structure, and the political value of alliances in the dry zone, it may even be the case that Ward's confusing list of caste-sections results in part from the multiplicity of ways to trace one's identity (matri- and patri-lineal). The importance of *pangu* shares would have enhanced this. Perhaps this is why the western [Madurai] Kallars were "recognized" as "polyandrists" (Cornish 1874:156). Ward reported that the Kallar of the Dindigul country preferred FZD marriage (*cf.* Rajayyan 1966:136-8).

Hinduism.

The trope of the village goddess is hardly a measure of the political or social status of women, but its control through marriage marks the importation of caste-hierarchy into the dry zone. It is, again, a relation infused by the politics of spatial forms. Siva, as a god of orthodoxy, represents a hyper-space, a universal dominion so general as to appear, in a manner of speaking, "unfalsifiable"; to complement this, every temple to Siva has a "myth of the place" [*sthalapurana*], which proposes to explain a perennial question of how universal Siva can have so many apparently independent, local manifestations (*cf.* Fuller 1984:8). For many small or village temples, these myths of spatial consequence tell that, for the love of a woman, Siva descends upon a goddess who is thereby married into the larger spatial idiom governed by the domain of a kingly polity or state. Territoriality is exchanged for local space, orderly bordered space whose fixture is surreptitiously determined by the striated map of the state. The goddess' temple becomes a *centre* for an area which has been transformed through her subordination - in hypergamous marriage - to a sanskritic god. The marriage immobilizes her gaze.

A recent essay by Fuller (1988) argues that the deities in Tamil village festivals in fact function in different dimensions as practically different gods, which he relates to the doxic distinction between meat-eating and vegetarian gods. His brilliant analysis, based on two ethnograhic examples from Coimbatore (Beck 1972) and Chingleput (Moffatt 1979), will be applied here to a different end. I submit that the structure of these local festivals testify to a *change* - that of the incorporation of the dry *palaiyam* areas into the space of the state.

The argument in Fuller's paper is that the deities of some Tamil festivals in fact function in different dimensions as practically different gods, which he relates to the distinction between "meat-eating" and vegetarian gods; his argument and data can be used here as well. As is often the case now, the village goddess is related to a Sanskritic deity such as Siva, to whom she is an escort.[1] This creates a difficulty around what to make as an offering. Typically, the village goddess demands blood-sacrifice, which a Sanskritic god does not tolerate; the conundrum is resolved in the organization of temple space and ritual time, through the idiom of the deity "seeing" the production of the offering. In other words, the Sanskritic modality is shielded from any blood sacrifice, entailing the "lower" form of any deity which is not so shielded, or to whom the sacrifice is directly offered. Fuller's interpretation of these rituals suggests that the purity concerns of the Sanskritic gods do not just "encompass" the impurity of the sacrifice to the village goddess, but discursively

[1]Susan Bayly notes that the polegars tended to select *ammans* [goddesses] as the chief deities of new or newly patronized cult centres. She also argues that as these female tutelaries attained greater power and status, they became closely identified with the elevated (male) consort figures of the great rice-belt temples, a process which she emphasizes was *not* "Sanskritization", but rather based on a model from the chiefly world (1989:30-31,48).

pretend to a form of autonomy. Essentially, blood-sacrifices, normatively associated with "low" caste, subordinate themselves semantically to the "higher" value of Brahmanical ideology, whereas the vegetarian offerings and their cycles do not rely on the inferiority of the ritually low - they are part of an homeostatic system of meanings which does not *recognize* the existence of an outside, which is nonetheless the place of the impure.

It is instructive that one of his examples comes from Chingleput, where one might imagine that Brahmanical ideology has tried and largely succeeded in severing itself from any unseemly dependence on impurity; consequently, Harijans there would not surprisingly perform their rituals to the goddess in terms of petitioning for some small piece of the pie, albeit an inferior one.[2] Gough's report provides confirmation: in Thanjavur, Brahmins do worship the village goddess, but she is seen in her aspect as Sakti, the consort of Siva (1955:47). Brahmins were scarce in the 18th century in the Dindigul country, and as a result their cultic practices (and deities) were localized[3] in centres like Madurai city. Even today, the favourite deity of people in Madurai district is Murukan[4], continuing evidence that the adoption of the Brahmanical idiom is far from thorough. The cults of the village goddesses in dry Tamil villages often celebrate a virtual marriage between the goddess, often named Mariamman, to a Sanskritic husband, generally some form of Siva. The non-Brahmin village goddesses today exhibit what Fuller calls a strong marking of locality, as they are generally conceived of as unmarried, often belonging to particular communities, and marrying Siva at their major festivals (1984:8) - a marriage which seems to be a temporal expedient, quickly dissolved.

In pre-colonial times, when the State was not in direct control over the polegar areas, the viability of such ritual marriages, expressing territorial subordination to greater regional States, was not so strong. Stein's research has shown that, during the two centuries prior to colonialism, Siva temples declined in numbers, while substantial *amman* [goddess] temples proliferated (1984:133). Unsurprisingly, this was especially so in the areas of Madurai, Coimbatore, and Salem, the major *palaiyam* areas; here were the greatest numbers of *amman* shrines, almost always with non-Brahmin priests (*ibid.*, p.139).[5] In ritual terms, the values expressed by

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[2] On this account, perhaps it is no surprise that Gough reports that her Harijan informants in Thanjavur flirt so much with "atheism" (1973:240). The cults of the lower classes (castes) in the Kaveri delta were beginning to resemble the religion of the dry plains by the turn of the colonial century (*cf.* Washbrook 1976:88).

[3] It is perhaps ironic to say "localized", as the Sanskritic deities are by definition less territorially located than the village deities. What I mean is that the dry "localities" were by and large impervious to the influence of Siva and his mates.

[4] Fuller found that 44% favoured Murukan, 17% Minaksi herself, 8% some form of Visnu, 7% Siva, 7% Vinayaka [Ganesan], and 6% other goddesses (1984:6,183n13). By and large, Murukan is a warrior-god long favoured by the people of the dry regions, with their stress on valiance. Many Brahmins, however, call Murukan by the name of Subrahmanya, which does not entice others to change in the important matter of names.

[5] Stein asserts that 90% of the *pusaris* for the *amman* temples were non-Brahmins (1984:139). In the wet zone, it was precisely those groups *excluded* from the Siva temples by "orthodox" Vellalar *mirasidars* that sought to

vegetarian offerings would not have held much currency, and, so to speak, Mariamman would not have been divided into higher and lower forms, and as a result would not have been shielded from "seeing" the (blood) sacrifice.[6] The upshot of this is that the structure analyzed by Dumont as hierarchical complementarity, grounded in the alleged *absolute* disjunction between power and status, and expressed in the protection of the pure from contact or sight of the impure, was not manifested in the old dry zone.

The implication of this for the role of "purity" and "pollution" is that such notions did not constitute a vertical axes on which caste-communities as such might be graded. There were strong patterns of avoidance, such that commensality and the use of common wells were hardly feasible.[7] In short, I hope to have conveyed in some sense a picture compatible with a more "Melanesian" envisioning of south Indian social structure, as suggested by Appadurai[8]; however, this is best grounded in the social and political styles associated with the dry zone in a bygone era before the encroachment of the colonial State. Territoriality was re-cast under the colonial gaze, which borrowed its paradigm from the delta and its high revenue yield; the

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support Murukan temples (*ibid.*, p.153). The Mackenzie collection of manuscripts frequently attest to changes in temple management, in which Brahmins replaced Pandaram apriests (*cf.* Waghorne 1978:59n32).

6 See Fuller 1989, esp. pp.26-8. The deity's "seeing" of the sacrifice is precisely what is altered in the "Sanskritization" of village ritual; with the rise of Brahmanical values, the inner sanctum of the temple becomes protected from the violent impurities of practical life outside (ritually embodied in blood sacrifice, usually of a goat, sometimes a buffalo). In step with the division of the temple, the deity is divided into different and hierarchical manifestations, access to which is allocated according to the hierarchical positions of community groups (*jatis*). The extreme case occurs when, as with Moffatt's ethnography of Chingleput Paraiyar, the "untouchable" castes, despite having their "own" ritual for a low form of divinity, nevertheless mark a distinction between orthodox purity and low-caste pollution. In so doing, they enact a "symbol[ic] resistance to a Brahmanical pretence that the low castes have *no* function in the world, [but only] by according pre-eminence to the hierarchical relationships which necessarily link the high and the low" (*ibid.*, p.34). It is to contemporary times, I contend, that Fuller's outstanding analysis applies; this is largely due to the result of the extension of Sanskritic/Brahmanical values to the dry zone, made possible under the colonial erasure of political independencies between territories (the wet and the dry). Fuller even notes that, for Coimbatore, there is *less* of "a sharp opposition between a high form entirely separated from bloody sacrifice, and a low form which receives it" (*ibid.*, p.27).

7 In Thanjavur, with a high Scheduled Caste population, only 19.5% of villages have their public wells unaccessible to Harijans. In Madurai, the corresponding figure is 100%, according to a survey by the All India Harijan Sevak Sangh. This is not merely a result of communist agitation in Thanjavur, as suggested by Mujahid (*cf.* 1989:23,122n37); rather, it reflects a different notion of "public": *mirasidar* formations are far more resonant with the (mystified) notion of "public" facilities, whereas the dry zones historically did not have the comfortable stability of communalized and hereditary power relations to permit such an isolation of a putatively "public" domain. On the other hand, with institutions such as schools, whose novel appearance allowed for their relatively secular role, "exterior caste" children have long been allowed to attend them in dry areas such as Madurai and Sivaganga, even without special reservations - whereas in Tirunelveli and ultra-Brahmanical Kumbakonam in Thanjavur, reservations were necessary and boycotts were the norm should low caste children be allowed in them (*cf.* Hutton 1963:202).

8 In discussing the "ethnosociology" of Marriott and Inden and Val Daniel's ethnography, *Fluid Signs*, Appadurai suggested in his review "Is Homo Hierarchicus?" that "South Asian social thought look[s] more Melanesian than, say, Chinese" (1986:755). I find both Daniel and Marriott's (later) work unsatisfying, but I have long been intrigued by the "Melanesian" insinuation of Appadurai - partly for its re-de-stabilization of the very idea of these sorts of genres.

eradication of the polegars put an end to the very structures of political autonomy that gave breath to the different integrations correspondent to chiefly formations.

Before proceeding to discuss some of the versions of religious culture or "Hinduism" in the dry zone, some mention of Jainism might be requisite. Stein distinguishes Jain from Hindu kingship, describing the latter as entailing a ritually dependent king, with a Brahman *purohit* (priest) and royal sacrifices as representing one kind of legitimacy; the Jain king, however, was represented as morally and ritually independent. Warrior leaders from the dry zone had historically been attracted to the Jainist version of legitimation (*cf.* Stein 1980:79-80).[9] In the village where I did fieldwork, the remains of a Jain temple may be found, with the main figure, seated and Buddha-like, now perched in the river, the temple having been destroyed.[10] Since the Periyar project in the 1890s, the Suruli and Vaigai rivers move water from the west to the east of the Ghats,[11] and covers the statue during the high-water season; it is a fitting cycle that a colonial "public work" should so remove an alternative history from view. During the dry season, however, the statue re-emerges; significantly, it is now headless.

The image of Hinduism as the religion of "the system of castes", propounded most eloquently in *Homo Hierarchicus*, is the central target against which current interpretations try to set themselves off. One of the themes most under scrutiny is Dumont's relegation of kingship to the margins of Indian history; this permits his construction of an autonomous social, ruled by a *dharma* which encompasses an absolutely disjoined *artha*. The effort to return kingship to the centre of the Indian *polity* shows a frequent return to the ideas of Hocart. Insofar as this demonstrates a struggle to edit the "delta bias" with its concomitant Brahmanisms, these efforts are laudable. Still, it is not a question of replacing one totalized paradigm with another; the important structural fact which has been overwhelmingly damaged by colonial rule and the modern state is not the suppression of kingship and the foregrounding of Brahmanical precedence, but the destruction of the *palaiyams* or forts. The institution of kingship, through which castes were held together through the royal ideology of

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[9] Jainism once had a substantial adherence in south India, but not for many centuries. Today, though, it remains quite strong in southeastern Karnataka, and Dubois reported that Jains were "to be found in great numbers in the western provinces of the Peninsula, and especially in Malabar, where they represent the majority of the population," noting that they "differ[ed] widely from the Brahmins in many essential points of doctrine and practice" (1906:13). Long ago (5th century), Madurai was the seat of a major Jaina *sangha* (Stein 1984:25).

[10] The idol figure remains a form of the community security god of the Dhobis, who do their washing in the river where the idol was thrown. The cornerstones of a temple structure are also strewn about the river-bed. Nobody knew how long the statue had been in the river, or about its destruction. The Dhobis knew nothing of Jainism, nor had any reasons "why" the statue should be their god, except that it was sensible because it was in the river which symbolized the site of their livelihood. Just outside of Uthamapalaiyam, the current taluk centre, on the side of a huge boulder, there is a large (21'x 10') series of sculptures of nude Jain *thrthankaras*, with long (Vetteluttu) inscriptions about them.

[11] One other irony, perhaps: the Periyar project transformed Cumbum Valley into a highly-irrigated tract, hence adding ecological support to the spread of the delta bias!

the gift of land, along with a liberal sprinkling of the rod, was not the same as the sovereign formation of the chiefly polity. Chiefs were less stable, hence less dynastic, and more reliant on the support of kin, clan, factions and alliances, hence less wont to construe, much less impose, the sacred duty of kingship: the ordering of the castes. The small chiefdoms were mobile; they were not articulated in notions of *mirasi* or land rights. Their style of territoriality was not something marked out on a positivist cartography; their "power of existence" may be identified by radical alterity to the norms of the centre. They are not marked as what in the next section call "zones of *contradiction*"; these latter would be the interior pockets of deltaic society which, through the intensive power of corporate *mirasidar* bodies, could keep the state from prying too close into their social accounts. Rather, it is *negation* which provides the refraction by which *palaiyam* ideology may be noticed, and *reversal* which characterizes the charismatic role of religious behaviour in their societies. This may be illustrated by two examples, the Kallar denial of the *varna*-based image of the body found in the symbol of "the primeval man" or *purusa* of the Vedic hymn, and the importance of divine possession over hereditary ascription as intimated in, of all things, the role of the blanket in the dry zone.

In the *RgVeda*, the image of *purusa*, sometimes glossed as "cosmic man", appears as the canonical paradigm of the body social in India. *Purusa*, as the first person, is subjected by the gods to the first sacrifice[12]; the ensuing differentiation becomes a model of the *varna* classification, the grammar of a functionalist hierarchy:

> When they divided *Purusa*, how many portions did they make?
> What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet?
> The Brahmin was his mouth, of both his arms was the Kshatriya made.
> His thighs became the Vaishya, from his feet the Shudra was produced.
> (*RgVeda* 10.90, in Renou 1961:65)

These categories are usually transcribed as priest, warrior-king, merchant, and cultivator. The lowly Shudra is ordained in the role of a labourer, excluded from the purifying business of sacrifices.

This differential valorization of the limbs of the human body according to social class was directly confronted by the Kallar when they first found themselves under the sway of higher-caste masters. These latter are depicted as Vellalars, a high status Tamil caste.[13] The Kallar recollect their strategy of countering this domination;

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12 "When gods prepared the sacrifice with *Purusa* as their offering,
They balmed as victim on the grass *Purusa* born in earliest time.
...From that great *general Sacrifice* the dripping fat was gathered up.
...Gods, sacrificing, sacrificed the victim: *these were the first institutions*."
- *Rg Veda: Purusa Sukta* ("The Hymn of Man") (from Renou, ed. 1961).

13 The name appears to stem from a Tamil word for water, *vellum*, thus indicating the role of Vellalas as supervisors of *irrigated* lands. In what serves as another analogy between Kachin *gumsa/gumlao* cycles and the wet/dry spaces of south India, Leach noted that the *gumlao* mode of Kachin organization often harboured stories

they drew up a set of rules exacting compensation for bodily damage inflicted by their "masters". The list of conditions includes the following:

1) If a Kallar lost a tooth[14] via a master's blow, the master was to be fined 10 Kali *chakrams*.
2) If a Kallar had his or her ear torn under punishment, the master was to pay 6 *chakrams*.
3) If a Kallar's skull were fractured, the master must pay 30 *chakrams* - "or in default have his own skull fractured."
4) If a Kallar had an arm or leg broken, the master must pay 20 *chakrams*, give a certain amount of grain and clothes, and likewise grant him as much *nunja* (irrigated) lands as could be sown with 1 *kalam* of seed, and also 2 *kurukkams* of *punja* (dry) land.
5) If a Kallar were killed, the master must pay 100 *chakrams* - "or in default be put at the mercy of the murdered man's relatives." (*cf.* Thurston 1906:373)

On the one hand, this schedule of fines might be seen as a mocking adoption of the principle of the differentiated body of *purusa*, in that a hierarchical valorization of (damaged) bodily parts is entailed. More seriously, the striking thing about this list is the higher compensation demanded for an arm or a leg than for a fractured skull, a negation of the *varna* hierarchy. As the last rule enunciates, the entire list's main principle of compensation revolves around the symmetrical rule of vengeance.[15] In this exercise, the Kallar unambiguously signified the autonomy of their political formation, polemically negating an enormous block of the hierarchical ideology of Brahmanical formula. This determination awaited nothing, but a century after its purpose was opposed by the Company sword, it was dismissed by an imperialist pen - held firmly in 1906 by Edgar Thurston[16] - as "distinctly quaint"; to such an extent

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of entitlement to land which articulated "a tradition of revolution in which the former *gumsa* chiefs were either driven out or reduced to the status... of having no special rights" (1964:206-7). Once again what is depicted as a cycle in time for highland Burma is spatialized in south India. In a sense the Kallars represent their *past* masters as the dominators of *another space* - a space of a different "proper" or political form, of no direct interest to the dryland Kallars. The Vellalars are perhaps over-represented in the ethnographic literature, again a symptom and a transmitter of delta bias; by and large, Vellalars do live today in the delta zones, a point which Dirks observes distinguishes Pudukkottai from the usual representations of Tamil society; mostly dry, Pudukkottai did not have Vellalars (1988:247-49).

14 The word for tooth in Tamil is also *pallan*, a homonym to the name of the Pallar community. In Sattur, where the Pallar-Thevar clash is particularly extreme, I saw a movie in which the star had an aching tooth which he pulled it out by himself, saying, "there, now that damn *pallan* won't bother me anymore", thus provoking outrage amongst the numerous Pallars in the audience.

15 Catalogues of money fines are common in feudal Europe and very frequent in ancient Indian texts; here the key is that the Kallar are enunciating the rules, not their dominant masters, an expression of the symmetry of wills to power claimed by the subaltern Kallars. Today, it is precisely the "rule of vengeance" that is seen as a distinct trait of the Kallars and also the Pallars, and is construed as the reason for the escalating and inescapable violence of their conflict at present. It is felt that other communities do not have such a code (*jatidharma*). Bougle, claiming that repressive regulations take precedence over restitutive ones in "the caste system", and that "the Hindus seem to have lost the custom of collective vengeance between group and group very early" (1971:146,134); such arguments were contradicted by the practices of the dry zone, practices edited out of the script of colonial sociology.

16 Thurston was the colonial ethnographer in the compilation of the 7 volumes of his *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (1909): "In carrying out the anthropometric portion of the survey, it was unfortunately impossible to disguise the fact that I am a Government official, and very considerable difficulties were encountered owing to

had the colonial *raj* decided that all of Hinduism was indeed a function of Brahmanical discourse. Yet the Kallars knew what they were doing, as evidenced not only by their overthrowing of their prior Vellalar masters, but also their consequent re-naming of their territory as *tan-arasu-nad*, or: "the country governed by themselves" (*cf.* Francis 1905:93).

Around 1800, "Kusbah Dindigul" was famous for its weaving and painting of cloths, especially the weaving of blankets.[17] References to the symbolic importance of blankets appear in Dumont's Kallar ethnography as well (*cf.* 1986:155 - "the authority of the carpet"), as an accoutrement of community leadership. The blanket [*kambalam*] was the primary locus of dispute resolution, community reconciliation, and the enactment of family vows and prayers. I saw it in frequent use for the latter purposes in the *kovil* [temple] in Cumbum, which is dominated by and for the Gowders. The case of the blanket with the Tottiyan Nayakkar community in Cumbum Valley today is instructive; the blanket is stressed as essential, as befits the name of the community: Raja *Kambalam*. This is the community which provided the majority of polegars in Tamilnad, particularly around Madurai; they had particular good luck in avoiding liquidation and being converted into *zamindars*. Every family has a blanket for its own ritual use for household ceremonies and worship, and to facilitate purification should any form of contagion by menstrual facts occur.[18] The community at large maintains a particular blanket which is considered very sacred, and is kept in the *kovil-veedu* [temple-house], a special place in the house of the *periyaveedu*-Nayakkar [big house Nayakkar]. It is always the practice not to keep it at the *zamindar's* house - it is brought there for big functions and lifecycle ceremonies, then returned. Only the *zamindari* families should not have any blanket at all; it should be had, ideally, by an "even higher house."[19]

Immediately this appears as a variation on the Dumontian model of the distinction between the Brahmin and the King, in which the latter is given absolute

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the wickedness of the people, and their timidity and fear of increased taxation, plague inoculation, and transportation" (p.xvi). Some of the native apprehension was due to Thurston's practice of putting a spot of white paint on the subject body's face, "to indicate the position of the fronto-nasal structure and bi-orbital breadth" which was feared by Tamils to "blister into a number on the forehead, which would serve as a means of future identification for kidnapping." The very idea of his measuring bodies was suspected as proof that he was an army tailor (pp.xvi-xvii). His anthropometric research finally led him to concede that "the question of the Dravidian head was not nearly so simple and straightforward as I had imagined" (p.xxxviii)...

17 See Wilson's catalogue of the Mackenzie collection; the second section of the book, "Local Tracts" in the "Tamul" language holdings, indexes a number of texts on the Dindigul country, regarding polegars, temples, merchants, etc. (1828:xxxi-xxxviii).

18 The community today is known for its magical prowess, especially in curing snake bites, for which they have long been known (*cf.* Ward, v.3:16). They will also evict ghosts for a small fee. Magical powers, however, are lost by menstrual pollution, save for the restorative effects of a blanket ceremony.

19 Another comparison with the Kachin is possible. In the *gumsa* formation, the chief's house has a special spirit compartment; the spirit is seen as an affinal relation of one of the chief's remote ancestors (Leach 1964:108). The Tottiyan *zamindars* had a similar compartment in their house, which contained the remains of those of their ancestral lineage.

worldly rule but the former maintains superiority on the level, itself superior, of valorized meanings. However, I think that such a structure emerged under the conditions of colonial rule, in this case, substantialized in the *zamindari* settlements. The estates of the *zamindars* were spatially explicit niches, etched into a colonial topography connected to a fixed land revenue payment. In this, they were absolutely distinct from the polegar style of leadership, in which the notion of property had not been so isolated as to be neatly mapped; territoriality was a shifting set of domains marked by the relations entailed in kinship and *pangus* in the exchange circuitry of the fluid domains of the market[20], temple honours, and *jallikattu*. The blanket expresses this fluidity with its own form: it can be rolled up or spread out; it can be moved around - one need not sit on the ground. The distinction between *jati-talaivar* [caste headman, also: *nattanmei*] and *pusari* [priest of the caste], today generally prevalent amongst caste communities, was not strict if indeed existent in the social mode of the dry zone. The blanket contained what later became a fission of roles.

In Kundalanayakkanpatti [K.N.P.], a mono-caste Tottiyan village, the *pattakarrar* [title-person, a sort of headman, also glossed as "chief"] is simultaneously community head, guru/*pusari* for the village, and also *pusari* for the main sectional temple in Rajapalaiyam, where about every 20 years a festival is conducted for the entire Raja Kambalam community in Tamil Nadu. To him everyone should come for the *vaaku*[21], his blessing, permission and even "order" for their marriage. It is such norms that must have led to the colonial sense of "monarchistic" structures in the societies of the dry zones. In this position is combined the role of headman and community priest[22]; the latter role is far more portentous and powerful than is usually

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20 I have not written much on pre-colonial marketing forms of the area. From his journey through the dry interior, Buchanan reported that cash circulated freely in villages around 1800 (*cf.* Hill 1982:268), an observation equally implied in Munro's reports (*cf.* Stein 1989b:82). Buchanan further noted that weekly markets were regularly organized, sometimes within two to three miles of each other, wherein "business is carried on by sale; no barter is customary, except among a few poor people, who exchange grain for the produce of the kitchen garden" (in Hill 1986:59). The monetization of the countryside was in fact greater in the dry zone than the deltas, although currencies were diverse. The monetization may well have been due, in my opinion, precisely to the independence of the dry zone from the regional state; the tribute-seizing armies of the latter might seize livestock and grain, but money is easy to hide (cf. Duby 1980:322-4). This feature may well have attracted fringe villages directly subjected to the state; the latter responding by trying to prohibit trade between such different political spaces. This tradition was adopted by the Company as well in the late 18th century, while managing much of the Nawab of Arcot's revenue domains. Key to the colonial change was the unification of currency by the demand for Company rupees.

21 The *pattakarrar's vaaku* is also necessary to confirm the transmission of magical knowledges.

22 This "fusion" of roles (to use a language meaningful only in retrospect) continues to be maintained among the Kannidigas (a tiny micro-*jati* who once served Tevaram Palace in functions ranging from palanquin-bearing to baby-sitting), amongst whom the *pusari* and the *nattanmei* [headman] are comprised as the same office - suggestive of the erstwhile normal structure of dry zone social organizations. Most other *jatis* have not had the insulation from the "social" transformation induced during colonial rule; it is not surprising that the Tottiyans and this ultra-[ex]-client group should exhibit some of the extinguished formations, since they experienced Madras colonialism specifically without *raiyatwari* motifs. The Kannidigas used to do *all* the tasks for the *zamindar* family, including polluting ones, rendering the division of ritual occupations on the basis of impurity un-necessary. The Tottiyan *zamindars* in general had a "retinue" of domestic servants which Francis called the *Parivaram* "caste"; he claimed that these servant caste subdivisions did not intermarry, and that they followed

the case for the *pusaris* of rural *jatis* elsewhere in Tamil Nadu. The blanket for the village of K.N.P. stays with the chief, this omni-functional personage. The only members of this tightly knit community that do not participate in the tradition of the charismatic *vaaku* are, incidentally, also those who do not have a blanket of their own: the *zamindari* families. After the permanent settlement, the *zamindars* broke off from this relation; they needed "different freedoms", or so thought their poor relatives in K.N.P., for special alliances, including those at the level of the state-level of the Madras government, and with other *zamindari* nobility. Why? "Just because *zamindars* became *zamindars*, and people became people." With that cleavage initiated, a variant of the Dumontian structure emerged; indeed, in a sense, the prohibition of the blanket to the Tottiyan *zamindars* serves to keep some form of obligatory relation alive between "kingship" and the rest of the community.[23] The cleavage, however, sprang from the founding condition of the British revenue settlement, as indicated in the diction of the K.N.P. "people"; Sanskritized values provided but the inflection.

A blanket also appears frequently at the Nandagopalan [Krishna] temple [*kovil*] in Cumbum, an icon of its Gowder patrons' shepherd origins. The times that I saw it in operation, it was set on the ground in front of the temple, with a family seated upon it, facing two other seated men; one of these latter is a specialist, the other apparently anyone who can or is willing to recite the mantra that the first one will say. The specialist is one who knows how to protect the petitioning family from their perceived assault by misfortune or evil spirits.

The temple has some *inam* [*maniam*] lands reserved for its finances, and whose titles are endowed to the "title bull" [*pattathu-kalai*] of the temple's main trustees, a family [*kutumban*] of sacred cattle.[24] The community's *pattakarran* is

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adultery with the *zamindar* - any children resulting from these latter liaisons would belong to the Parivaram mother, but were called *Chinna* [little] *Kambalattar* and were *entitled to marry Tottiyans* (*cf.* Francis 1905:102-3). Thus in the one direct mode of servitude in the *palaiyam* zone, any hereditary factor was interrupted by the next generation. Leach writes of a strikingly similar set of relations among the Kachin of highland Burma, *viz.*: all slaves were owned by the [*gumsa*] chief, and the slave's over-all position "resembled that of an adopted son or bastard of the chief, or even more perhaps that of a poor son-in-law working to earn his bride. Thus by a kind of paradox the 'slave', though reckoned to be the lowest social stratum, stood nearer to the chief than the members of any other named clans" (1964:160). The symbols of this relation are the opposite of those of *exclusion*.

[23] Hence "kingship" is a distinct institution from the values intrinsic to chiefly formations. The distinction seems to reside largely in permanence and the re-figuring of the rule of property in the dry zone. In the former case, succession disputes to *zamindar* titles were frequent and intense, but they occurred within quite restricted genealogical bounds rendered autonomous from the shifting alliances of the past. Regarding property, it is not that its "possession" marks kingship, but rather the form property took under the British settlement that promoted kingship; the spatial rigour and the disabusing of any economic "ambiguity" embedded in prior patterns of "ownership" both sever the chain which tempered simply hereditary status. The ex-*zamindari* families of Tevaram and Bodinayakkanur do keep up relations with their caste folk of K.N.P. The *pattakarrar* provides them with some astrological advice as well. Of course, the economic difference between the "people" and *zamindars* is enormous; in K.N.P., the average holding is 2 dry acres, whereas the ex-*zamindar* holdings are enormous and include substantial tea and cardamom estates in the Ghats which provide the eastern boundary of Cumbum Valley.

[24] I was told that the *inam* grant applied to 3 acres, of which the "king's share" went to the temple itself. As is usually the case in Tamil Nadu now, the State is trying to obtain the rights to supervision of this account (*cf.*

responsible for this title bull, which privileges Cumbum residents by stopping in for visits and food.[25] Occasionally the bull dies, prompting an elaborate funeral, "like at a Minister's death," to which people come from afar to attend. No ritual or worship occurs at the *kovil* until the successor is appointed.

Those of the appropriate gender and generation of the *pattathu-kalai's kutumban* are brought down from the hills for the succession, and assembled in one corner of the temple yard. Sugarcane is cut and put on the other side (about 50m away). The first bull to touch and begin to eat the sugarcane is considered to be possessed by the spirits, and is decorated and garlanded as the successor. "Like a king he is sworn in." (This may take five minutes, or, as in 1983, the last time this event was called for, one week![26]) When the *pattakarran* (human) dies, the succession is determined by a certain man (the *kodiappu*) getting possessed; whoever he garlands around the neck is declared to be the new title-man. In short, the structure of the temple domain here is reproduced through a system based on possession rather than inheritance, a charismatic principle somewhat remote to the inscrutable ascription of, for example, a Thanjavur *mirasidar* or a Brahmin. When I asked about the "internal politics" of the actual modes of succession, I was told by a man influential in the Gowder community that there were "as much as in *all* aspects of life..." Thus the Dumontian disjunction between *dharma* and "politics" is strategically absent.[27]

The Colonial raj and its Hindu kings.

> "A very considerable portion of Southern India, south of Trichinopoly, had passed into the hands of the Poligars. In Madura[i] and Dindigul hardly anything remained in the sovereign's possession; and in Tinnevelly the greater part of the country north of the Tam[b]raparni river was in the possession of the Poligars."

So wrote Robert Caldwell (1881:102), a colonial and missionary scribe, describing a huge sectional swath of the Tamil dry zone - precisely the area where, as already

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Mudaliar 1974, Presler 1987). Currently the case in in legal limbo, due in no small part to the fact that the *inam* grant and title deeds are made over to the cattle themselves - "who can't look after their own accounts." The cattle come down from the hills for the winter, and stay in the temple courtyard; the *kovil* is sometimes referred to as the "shed".

[25] The title bull may go anywhere and everyone will feed it; people get worried if it doesn't visit for some time. At markets and stores, the bull is allowed to eat as much as it likes; the more one the bull takes, the more auspicious for the giver. "Only if the shopowner is fair in his dealings will the *pattathukalai* go. If he's not fair, the bull won't go"; the same applies to family houses. Somehow the bull has not developed a regular itinerary.

[26] During the succession scenario, the Gowder hosts incur many costs, especially for the musicians who play constantly during the "wait" for a bull to reach the cane. This alone cost Rs.47,000/- in 1983.

[27] Another example of the dry polities' religious forms differing from those of the Sanskritic deltas is the Kallar elevation of the god "Rumleysvami"; Rumley was a Company officer who killed many Kallars in the 1760s, when the Company fought to pacify the chiefly tracts (*cf.* Francis 1905:88-90; Thurston V:59; and S. Bayly 1989:211-12).

noted, low taxation per capita had once also been noticed. The chiefly polities did not speak in a language of non-violence and purity, but rather, in Susan Bayly's words, through "an ideology of power and dominance."[28] Political autonomy was the goal of the territory's people; this was a source of weakness as well as of strength: the Mysore rulers had taken the 28 Dindigul *palaiyams* in the late 1700s with a military that united polegars would have vastly outnumbered.[29] On the other hand, they had to be taken again and again from 1770-1799, when the Company won the last of a series of wars against the Muslim kings of Mysore, only to find a generalized uprising by the confederacy of polegars (*cf.* Rajayyan 1971). With such a defiant disposition spread throughout the people, the intra-local domination could not reach great heights. Even today the people of rural Madurai district have a special reputation:

> "In Madurai [district], people don't let others dominate them. In Coimbatore, if you are rich, you are allowed to dominate; you can have hundreds beneath you. For some reason Madurai district is different."[30]

Even the *dhobis* of Ammapatti in Cumbum Valley, where I did fieldwork, had as a god Virapatrasvami, composed of the root meaning "valiance"; they explain: "we wash the clothes with valiance, beating them!"

Personal senses of embodiment were correspondingly different as well. The two examples to be cited here derive from recent fieldwork, but evoke some of the differences in habitus between the two milieux. The first comes from Chingleput, and is somewhat the product of the interpretation of Margaret Trawick, as she writes in *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family:*

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[28] S.Bayly 1989:213. In discussing the folk songs and ballads in which dry peasants exult "toddy is the liquor that we drink...", Bayly claims that "For people like the Marava and Kallar the liberation of murderous wrath is precisely what is called for if they are to fulfill their dharmic obligations... [F]or them..., these same polluting substances are a source of strength and vitality: their consumption was meritorious since it worked to sustain their corporate essence and identity" (*ibid.*, p.213). She also notes that in the dry zones, many folk divinities sprang from contexts of rape, murder, illicit carnality, defilement of temples, etc.; they "reverse what in Brahmanical terms would be thought of as the dharmic order" (*ibid.*, p.33).

The song of *Maturaik Kallir Kataiyattan Vennakanar* captures the spirit:

> "Again and again let us praise drink.
> He who lies here in a stupor,
> who got drunk this morning in this unswept, weed-filled courtyard,
> is our king.
> We are his bards!.." (Hart 1979:204).

[29] Reportedly Haidar Ali had taken 1700 soldiers with him to the Dindigul country, whereas the Dindigul chiefs could have amassed 30,000 easily, if united (*cf.* Francis 1905:69-71).

[30] I heard this frequently; the remark cited was from the son of a very rich ex-*zamindari* family from western Coimbatore district. On the surface, it is unlikely; various magnates exist in Cumbum Valley, which also provides a base for the P.T. Rajan family, big leaders in Tamilnad government since the early 1920s, and hardly famous for their tenant relations. In Madras, students from the Madurai area have a reputation for *pista*; "People can say 'I'm from Madurai' or 'He's from Madurai.' That means 'Watch out! Be careful!'" This is not so for Thanjavur or Tirunelveli folks. Farmers (land-owners) in Cumbum Valley were wont to distinguish themselves particularly from those of Thanjavur, albeit often they were envious of what they saw as the lazy riches of the landed elite there.

> "There could be no greater symbol of the substantiality and continuity of one's own body than the paddy field with its precise but easily broken boundaries and the precious supply of water running through it, easily stolen, easily lost. To sell one's land was not only to lose one's livelihood, but to lose the foundation of family pride for generations past and future" (1990a:158-9).

The fragile nature of boundaries corresponds to the symbolic intensity of the mandates of ritual purity and pollution, which remain strong in contemporary Chingleput - a six year old boy told Trawick that it was bad to be near untouchable people, and bad even to talk to them (at least in a friendly way): "you would become like them" (*ibid.*, p.99). The values of the kindred are intertwined with the possession of the land; not only does food comes from there, but ancestors' bodies are often buried in their fields. This, of course, only applies to those who do own land; Trawick's main informants were from the dominant Reddiar *jati*.

In western Madurai, I was given a corresponding idea by someone from the Tottiyan Nayakkar community, who live deliberately in a mono-caste village, with few lands, all dry, and practice, by their own words, a fastidious attachment to their "tradition". The son of the *pattakarrar* guru explained:

> "there is a river - my original culture.
> Into this river flows many channels - influences.
> But because they come in, should I change my course? No..."

Here an aversion to the influence of others (other *jatis*) is also evident, yet not with quite the paranoia about the violation of a fragile membrane as expressed in Chingleput. There is no conception valorizing the paramountcy of a field which must be "protected". The deltaic paradigm, with its buried ancestors, establishes a fixed point of view that is external to the reproduction of the identity that it mandates: that point of view is the field itself, couched in its status as property. The ambulant image of a flowing river transgresses that static orthodoxy, suggesting an unfixed space, a process of territorialization which winds through the countryside as itself, not as a fear of a broken channel: *"the waters are naughty."*[31]

In the dry zone, webs of communal identity were spun, but *pace* Kumar, without reference to land or property. Colonial rule slashed through the weave of political autonomies which composed the fabric of life in the Dindigul country and other dry zone polegar areas.[32] Company and imperial historiography, exemplified in Munro's vitriol about how to "rig out a Rajah", proceeded to erase that style, a style that was *growing* upon the advent of the colonial intervention; it was not Sanskritic ritual, but the mobile dynamism of shifting alliances and "frontier" family agriculture

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31 From Kampan's *Iramavataram*, [a south Indian version of the *Ramayana*], stanza 26; transl. A.K. Ramanujan, cited in Zvelebil 1973:211-2).

32 The Carnatic Treaty of 1792 mentions the names of 46 major "pollams" [*palaiyams*], and this did not include any of the Dindigul territory (Rajayyan 1966:59).

that was acting as the main paradigm of history in the making in Tamilnad. Not only does kingship adn the state in south India require a greater analytical role than the shadow of the "Brahmin" allows it in the Dumontian paradigm, but it is necessary also to emphasize that until the orientalizing advent of colonial rule, the fringes of any kingdom were syncopated by the polegar chiefdoms, where power circulated in too volatile a way for "caste" to be a language of subjugation, as the delta dialect presumed.

Although today there are signs of some sort of a re-emergence of the values of "valiance" in the area around Madurai, intimated in the dark but constant references to the "struggle for supremacy" between caste-ized communities spanning the arc from Ramnad to western Madurai, the terms of expression are the conflictive ones of "Harijan" vs. caste-Hindu (specifically if superficially, Pallar vs. Thevar), which epitomize a colonial innovation in the dry zone. This is a sign of the viral contagion of the delta bias, transmitted across the unified space of a map of south India which respects no space as that of another sovereign form of polity; the colonial map, which "brooked no dissent"[33] in imposing its own agenda of centralization and absolute dominion. Chris Bayly (1988:157) makes a parallel note, observing that in the early 19th century:

> "the spirit of hierarchy and ritual distinction became more pervasive. The British peace speeded the rise of high Hindu kingship, Brahminism and the advance of principles of purity and pollution in the countryside."

The role of "kingship" here is important; in south India, it refers to the new position of the ex-polegars: as *zamindars*, protected by the law and arms of the colonial state, their polities managed to align themselves into a higher pomp than the chiefly system permitted. Amongst other things, they imported Brahmins to officiate over the ritual production of a different society, enshrined as the proper Hindu "tradition" insofar as it could be brought to resemble the social structure of the deltaic society. As will be argued in a later chapter, the "village community" was re-structured into a greater corporate unity, articulated around the twin concerns of differentiated purity and hierarchical control over land (*mirasi*).

Peculiarly, the role of state power (in this case colonial) has been largely disclaimed in effecting this transformation. Anticipating Kumar by 150 years, the

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[33] The phrase is borrowed from Wink 1986:155; the British "began to make attempts at territorial consolidation and set out to dissolve the system of alliances and rivalries by replacing it with isolated units, each tied separately to the universal sovereignty of the British themselves and now without the potential of dissidence which had been, in the context of the eighteenth century, rather a strength than a weakness to it"; and, pp.381-2*: "*British power did not brook dissent and replaced fitna by the absolute dominion of the single sovereign state*" [*fitna* : rebellion, sedition, drawing away from allegiance]. Wink is referring particularly to the Mutiny, but the historical break occurs even earlier in south India due to the dominant *raiyatwari* settlement, which, by abolishing supra-local rent-receivers and conduits of power, severely localized powers and cut down the propensity of alliance-making, which was replaced with a greater stress on closed and disembedded *jatis*.

Abbe Dubois asked after "the general condition of the natives" as compared with thirty years before: "has it improved or has it deteriorated?" Dubois answered that in general people were better off, except for "some provinces," where misery had increased for the lower classes. However, he claimed that this was not due to Government or its policies, and would have been worse under the old regime (*cf.* 1906:92-4)[34]. It is not simply that he thought that the government held no responsibility, but that he propounded the claim that native society possessed an encompassing autonomy - even to question this would lead to political suicide. Kumar's assumptions regarding the "peculiar rigidity" of south Indian "society", described at the beginning of this chapter as tending towards the tautological, are variations on this old theme.

The same trope and division comes up again in Munro's influential claims regarding slavery. As Governor in Madras in 1825, his "liberal" version of an apologia articulated the distinction between the executive and the administrative modalities of government, a distinction which, significantly, he had generally derided previously, in favour of "vigorous government." Munro muses:

> "... a numerous class of slaves have not the free disposal of their own industry, but are in a *peculiar* state of servitude. Their condition *may*... be regarded as capable of being improved by Government. *But* the consideration of the measures proper to be taken... is a matter in which more good is to be expected from the gradual operation of justice and police administered in a spirit favourable to personal liberty than from direct interference on the part of the Government" (cited in Kumar 1965:70-71*).

Kumar refers to this idea as "emancipation on the instalment plan" (*ibid.*, p.71), yet one might also critique it as overlooking the fact that those apparent "slaves" would be quite unlikely to have access to either the courts or the police, regardless of the allegiances to equality that those institutions theoretically embodied. More important is the distinction defended between policy and administration, a distinction surely impelled to establish cleavages between "politics" and "society"; such a distinction must always seem strange in a *colonial* situation.[35]

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[34] Dubois cites the main causes of misery as population growth, and the introduction of machinery, mainly cotton mills. In the early 1820s, just before the Abbe returned to France, he lamented the misery of the weavers: "Such is the deplorable condition into which the poor Hindus have sunk; and it grows worse daily, thanks to the much-vaunted improvements in machinery which some nations glory in. Ah! if only the inventors of these industrial developments could hear the curses which this multitude of poor Hindus never tire of heaping upon them! If only, like me, they had seen the frightful misery which has overtaken whole provinces, owing entirely to them and their inventive genius, they would no doubt, unless they were entirely wanting in human pity, bitterly repent having carried their pernicious innovations so far, and having thereby enriched a handful of men at the expense of millions of poor people, to whom the very name of their competitors has become odious as the sole cause of their utter destitution!" (1906:95). Nonetheless, he recited popular opinion: "in my humble opinion, the day when the Government attempts to interfere with any of the more important religious and civil usages of the Hindus will be the last of its existence as a political power" (*ibid.*, p.97).

[35] Perhaps the reason for the very *unreservedness* of Cotton's *public* commendation of Sarter's book is due to the location of that "public" space: the England that was absent in India.

The real influence of such governmental enunciations in the case of Madras Presidency, I propose, can best be grasped when measured against the *different* types of independent polities and societies which they erase. This erasure is produced in the unification effected by the very notion of the elite distinction between official politics and *its* model of "the social." The homogenization of the social not only tore down the sovereignty of the chiefly formation, but allowed for the administrative infrastructure to emerge which could transport cultural models from one region to another - in effect, a virus. In this case, a body of influences diffused from the delta into the drylands: those influences were, as Bayly indicated, Brahmanical discourses of hierarchy.

The "Hindu" content of the social revolution in the "interior of the country" can lead to the view that it was indigeneous cultural templates which inflected social change (and continuity) in Tamilnad during colonial rule. "Untouchability", after all, does not have *genealogical* ties to the British, and "High Hindu kingship" and its attendant forms is likewise of local manufacture. *Archaeologically*, however, colonial rule effected a rupture in which the native body was crippled, and hence immunity was low; the viral spreading of Sanskritic values owed its efficacy to the structure of the colonial state. For some of those who had to live in the ex-polegar areas, there was no escape from the assault of the dialectically self-constituting equation between untouchability and landlessness. During my fieldwork I was lucky to meet a historian working on the "*zamindari* system" in Madurai District. He felt that the system was oppressive, while the theoretically more "egalitarian" *raiyatwari* system had delivered many of its promised goods. The fulcrum of the difference was the "traditional" greed of the *zamindars*. I was also fortunate to hear from some Paraiyar ("untouchable") labourers of Cumbum Valley that they suffered from no ambiguity about the origin of the *zamindars*. They were seen as sure local sources of the values which invented untouchability in the dry zone, enshrined as the prohibition of walking in the streets and temple entry, as well as demeaning dress codes[36]; they were also seen in their direct relation as "appointed by the British."

This point of view is not so peculiar, although indeed many of the people of this valley were "wrong" to think that they lived under zamindari rule; Ammapatti, for example, was in the raiyatwari tract of the colonial Sirkar. The "wide publicity" supposedly given to the distinction was perhaps not loud enough - it was clear to me that the term zamindar was used to refer to any past overlord: magnate, tahsildar, or "real" *zamindar*. In other words, it served to personify the elite beneficiaries and teh technicians of the colonial administration, an administration that not only assumed the territory, but re-classified it as a set of local spaces. This was a new form of space -

[36] Moving away from the similarity of clothing reported in 1800, the labourers whose *jatis* were untouchabilized in Madurai district began to resemble those in Thanjavur, where "[t]he Pallar and the Paraiyar women wear the sarees rather high above the knee..." (Baliga 1957:137).

a space of state property - whose de-territorialized prroperties echoed a new colonial idiom of pure domination, inviting a new history to the dry zone. This history would be one whose exclusions replicated the political space of the colonial state, and borrowed its spatial culture from the bounded paddy fields of the delta.

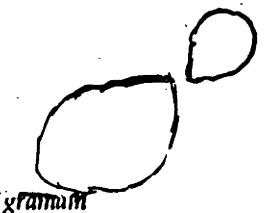
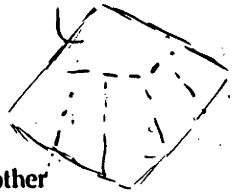
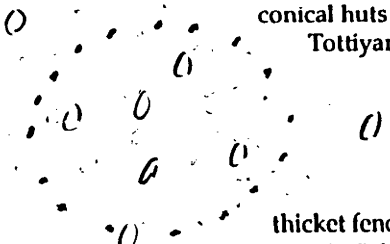
political ecology → / dimension of praxis ↓	*mirasidari* delta	kingship mixed zone	polegar dry
settlement myth (origin of land entitlement).	gifted by past Raja. Adi-Dravida "already there."	desacralized right of first clearer, sanctified- as *inam* from Raja	revolutionary tradition of eviction, or island colonization of agrarian frontier.
settlement layout	untouchable *ceeri*  clean *gramam* (*cf.* Moffatt 1979:65).	King's kin  other communities	 conical huts of Tottiyans. thicket fences - also some houses in fields.
Ranking: caste and class. Lineages.	are synonymous, so castes are ranked; lineage ranking among *mirasidars* is minimal: "Brahmins have no betters." Non-*mirasidar* lineages ranked according to idiom and model of caste-ranking.	are not synonymous; castes are ranked by King. Lineage ranking occurs within caste, co-ordinated around control of the *inam* holding, the King's gift.	not synonymous; castes are not ranked. 'Lineage' ranking within shifting 'clan' organization, around territorial space.-
Debts, tribute, and rates of "tax"; cultivation rights	Absolutely ranked according to caste, thus according to absolutely held property; *parakudis* (outside tenants) must pay more, else lose tenancy.	Ordered by King through *inam* structure. Ranked, but re-distributive- in theory.	No King, so no enforcement nor sanction; demographic dominance and "valiance" are main enunciators of demand, but threats of desertion counter opppression. *Parakudis* can pay less, in order to attract them.

Chart.

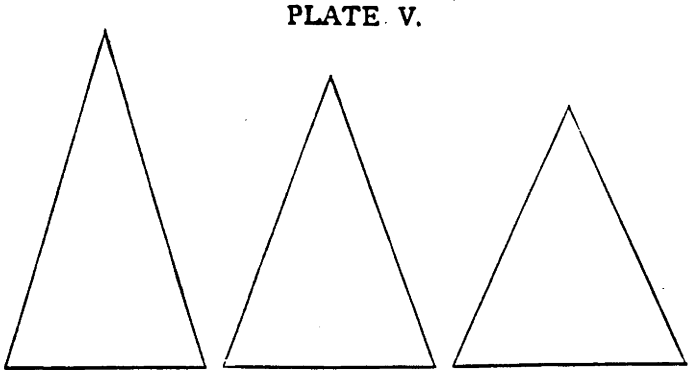
(based on Leach 1964:204-7).

political ecology → / dimension of praxis ↓	*mirasidari* delta	kingship mixed zone	polegar dry
Community Authority (structural idiom)	"republican senate" of *mirasidars*. property	caste headman for each caste. caste	"monarchist" territorial
Inheritance,- Succession, and fission.	*mirasi* property ideally distributed to all sons. Monopoly (by *mirasidari* community) of property militates against fission.	caste fission reduced by state and *inam* grants, a miniature prebendial incentive. Within castes, lineage fission is prolific, as lineages fight for access to and relative monopoly of the "office" of the *inamdar*. (This leads to the *inam* being converted into a service-contract to the village [elite].)	in theory, political succession goes to eldest son; in practice, it is precarious, hence *nazar*. Property is not an isolated category, and "citizenship" varies according to length of residence; it is "bought" since recent *parakudis* pay less (see above). Amongst lineages, there is rapid fission, regrated around flexible notions of common clanship, whose redaction expresses a mixture of caste, kin and territorial idioms.

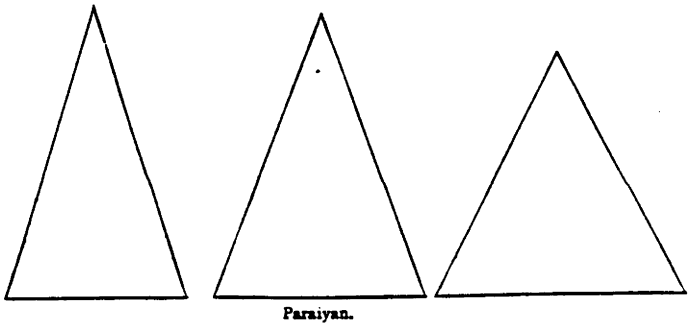
political ecology → / dimension of praxis ↓	*mirasidari* delta	kingship mixed zone	polegar dry
Marriage	Elite *mirasidars*: ranked hyper-gamous MBD, across localities (extension of dominated space). Labourers: MBD, FZD; involuted circles within localities.	Elite King's Kin: MBD within own *nadu*, or to King's own centre-kin *nadu*. Ranked according to proximity to King's lineage. Commoners: MBD in general ranked according to *inamdar*-lineage, i.e., proximity-to King's spatial presence.	Chiefs: rarely with each other, possibly a daughter given to King, but only if weak. Polegars' slaves: not allowed to marry other polegars' slaves, but any offspring they have with polegar are entitled to marry in latter's kin-caste. Generally, MBD or FZD both occur; hypergamy is an illusion - alliance reverses in alternate generations. Tendencies to localize are complicated by bilateral tactics, which respond to territorial strategies: territory thus expands like a blanket.
Ritual (Sacrifice)	*mirasidar* elite: a) regional, Brahmanical temple, de-territorial b) village temple (high) commoners: a) village temple (low) b) lineage or caste temple	elite (King's kin): a) king's centre temple b) lineage/nadu temple (high) commoners: a) village/nadu temple (low) b) caste temple a) village/*nadu* temple (low) b) caste temple	Elite (chief, "monarch"): a) own lineage temple b) village temple (first) commoners: a) village temple (after) (female deity) b) nadu temple: territorial, clan, caste (male deity)

political ecology → dimension of praxis ↓	*mirasidari* delta	kingship mixed zone	polegar dry
Political Domains (Space) *NADU.*	*Nadu* is an administrative-unit converted into a sub-empire of "republican" elite. Property (*mirasi*) defines space. There are no representations-of territoriality,- which is replaced with vertical dominance. The "village" is a representation of that dominance, its locality is a point - there is no *room* in its space. There is no "history" for the elite except for the inscriptions legitimating-their property rights.	*Nadu* is an administrative space shared by the kin of royalty, who exercise territorial dominance. Kinship is disseminated into its own kin who control the terms of territoriality. (Kingship it self then becomes sacred to its social, as its "protector." A territory of clear dominance (by King's kin) is represented as the King's space.	There is no administrative unit, no distinction of social or political-strategies - but in the language of the State, one must say that "social" spatiality is more determining than official political space - which does not exist; space is not an idiom on its own. No clear dominance, since territoriality is shifting, and is represented as the space of alliances.

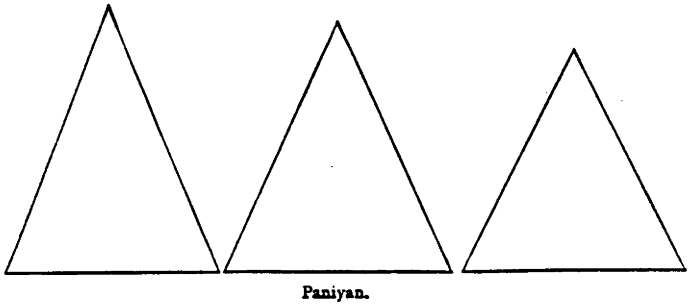
PLATE V.



Brâhman.



Paraiyan.



Paniyan.

Min. Average. Max.

DIAGRAMS OF NOSES.

> "There is no other measuring rod used by intelligent ministers than the monarch's eye."
> *Thirukkural* 710

If, in the dry zones at least, "untouchability" was not the stigma that it has become since the colonial intervention, then it is useful to work out a model of sorts to account for the existence of those beyond the ditch where a ditch existed; after all, the concept and category is not a British one. Is it a Hindu one?[1] By and large, the figure of the untouchable has been contrasted to the allegedly exalted persona of the Brahmin, the former conceived as the embodiment of the absence or negation of the values of purity incarnate in the latter. This scheme has been taken up by Dumont, in his argument that kingship and power are forces subordinated to the principle of purity in the perpetuation of the Hindu social order. Perhaps like Munro, Dumont might for this reason doubt the possible efficacy of contemporary State programs organized to remedy the social disabilities of the Scheduled Castes.[2] In this chapter, I want to propose a model which does not consider stately structures to be so marginal or indirect in the construction of untouchable groups; a consideration of kingship is for this reason inevitable. The last chapter argued that the dryland *palaiyams* were not ruled by kings, but rather were chiefly polities. However, much of south India did have other, "kingly", political formations, built around the deltas and emergent on their fringes. If in the 18th century there were, bluntly, no untouchables in the dry interior, then any theorization of a relation between an official "state" and "untouchability", must be sought for primarily in the areas subject to kingship, and account for a topology of regional differences. That such a relation did exist is the premise that this chapter sets out to explain; the model used will be called "the king's gaze."

The King's gaze is defined as the doxic field framed by idealistic discourses such as the normative texts of Hinduism, which set out to be both legal and descriptive. Although "gaze" is a metaphor of vision, it is not exclusive of language and discourse: reading, for example, is a visual act, entailing the distribution of writing.[3] In actual usages, the metaphor of the gaze often entails orality as well. The term *nazar* means gaze, honorary gift, and the recognition of quasi-sovereignty in

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1 Gandhi, for example, constantly asserted that untouchability was not a "Hindu" institution, or not a proper one, although *varnashrama dharma* was.

2 Dumont observed that "contrary to Gandhi's opinion, ... the Untouchables will not be finally emancipated save by themselves..."; he also lost his earlier confidence that the non-Brahmin Dravida Kazhagam movement would be of any help (1980:223).

3 Writing obviates the need for a direct social relation in order to transmit information, although it is nevertheless underpinned by cultural literacy which enshrines the worldview necessary for "successful" semantic decoding of much written information. The severing of the direct social relation, however, may alter the nature of the shared "cultural literacy" which permits reading; in south India, literacy was a prerogative of only some groups, notably Brahmins. As a result, the obviation of the direct social relation was practically total *vis-a-vis* very low status groups, especially if they were kept away even from direct contact with those bodies who could read.

exchange for tribute. This presents a difficulty when related to kingship. Kingly discourse naturally presumes to command the kingdom and its subjects, not to be shackled by the exchanges of words, scripts, and tribute-for-legitimacy deals[4]; that this presumption was hardly in practice in India rather damages some of the fanciful European conceptions of "Oriental despotism."[5] The entailment of texts and discourses, along with the exchanges they imply, is one reason why kingship could not become an absolute function in south India; it was always compromised by ruptures into the doxic field, spawned by the relations of power in "the real".[6] Nonetheless, the King ruled; the "King's gaze" is conditioned by the compromises, which are denied through a web of textual illusions - the *doxa* which, interestingly and ambiguously, denied the existence of untouchables.

"There is no fifth."

Discussing the texts promulgating the four-fold *varna* model, Dumont notes:

> "First and foremost, these texts were to mask the emergence, the factual accretion of a fifth category, the Untouchables, each emulating the others in proclaiming that 'there is no fifth...'" (1980:68).

The declaration can be found in the *Laws of Manu* (X.2), where the Sudras have but one birth, and "there is no fifth (caste [*varna*])." In fact, this claim seems to be part of an expanding series; the *Satapatha Brahmana* long ago had proclaimed: "Two fold

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4 "The king's *sceptre* is the standing proof of Brahmanical books and their teachings" (*Thirukkural* 543). The tenuousness of this representation is conceded by the same text, which recognized the existence of other sovereignties by attempting to de-legitimize them: "Victory is won not by the spear but by the unswerving sceptre of a righteous monarch" (*ibid.*, 546). The spear represents chieftainship in the *Thirukkural*.

5 Andre Wink's (1986) critique of the notion of "Oriental Despotism" is superb; he does not merely ridicule it, but traces the deceptive language of Mughal and discourse, whose pretence to universal sovereignty is eroded through the polite tolerance of the fiction. Europeans, however, tended to take these discourses simply, as actually indicative of the state of Oriental affairs. This in fact belies more the political worries and history of early modern Europe, where absolutism was much more of a reality. It also explains the concern the Company had to find native "nobility" to mediate the perils of the relation between the sovereign and the people, which European thought had apparent reason to consider as precisely not based on exchange. *Cf.* Bacon's 1632 apology for the nobility: "For nobility attempers sovereignty, and *draws the eyes of the people somewhat aside from the line royal*" (in Wink 1986:1-2*). This is a bureaucratic and functionalist view, in which the nobility serves to mollify the fundamental relation, which suggests that there were no illusions about its extractive unpopularity. The position of polegars, and even of tribute-paying proto-*zamindars*, was generally different; they often defended their sovereignty, and are not the "agents" of the king.

6 Certain postmodernizing readers have have hassled me for this use of "the real", as if it were being used as a hegemonic term in promoting a dualistic *episteme* which they find repugnant. Admittedly the term is rather vague, but I use it in order not to use Dumont's term "residue" which, while in meaning is quite parallel with what I mean (the *outside* of official discourse or "culture"), is posed in his methodology as of subordinate importance: a sort of inevitable discrepancy between theory and empirical fact. Guha describes his use of the term "people" (and his synonymous "subaltern classes") as: "the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those... described as the 'elite'" (*SAS*, v.1:8). Obviously, the minimalist style in the definition does not imply a sort of statistical effluent; likewise, invocation of "the real" can *lean against* the doxic imaginary (thereby presuming the existence of both the norm *and* its other). In this case, it is more of a spatial concept than a class one; the space of the kingdom is not homogeneous, nor obedient to royal injunction. The gaze describes the ensuing compromise.

in truth is this, there is no third" (in Heesterman 1985:148).[7] Dumont's observation, that the texts mask the actual *emergence* of a "fifth" (*varna*), is a crucial technique for his entire interpretation and its implicit historiography (*cf.* 1964). This negative reading relies on the very plausible idea that repeated and/or insistent denial is generally evidence enough to surmise the positive existence of what is denied. Dumont's technique of negative reading as such seems salutory; what emerges, then, from the simplest and initial juxtaposition of the textual and the practical orders is the clear shadow of a "contradiction." It is necessary to see how this contradiction "works". The case is *not* one of a "logical contradiction" which would work itself *out* in "practice"; rather, it seems to be a problem of sense and reference, of a textual assertion and the divergence of an imagined concrete and practical reality.[8]

What is the truth or actuality when the discourse is one of "denial"? The negative reading posits the existence of what is denied, perhaps thereby echoing those Buddhist texts which, reportedly, did occasionally mention a "fifth" (Hocart 1968:5).[9] Another question is who is speaking: whose "will to truth" is operating? Normative texts in Hinduism, such as the *Laws of Manu*, have often been seen as Brahmanical scribblings, with some doubt expressed as to the scope of their readership. Why, though, would Brahmins want to deny the existence of a "fifth" *varna*? Brahmins, the symbolic opposite of the untouchables, would surely be more likely to acknowledge their existence. One Brahmin lawyer in Tamil Nadu, serving as a lawyer for a group of Brahmin *archakas* [Tamil temple priests], expressed scorn at them for being so low

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[7] In the *Satapatha Brahmana* this passage occurs after articulating that the three gods (Agni, Soma, and Indra), as well as other gods, participate in each other so that they "came in a threefold way to consist of one 'deity'", and that "he who knows thus becomes singly the chief of his people." However, the general movement of the text indicates that the king or chief exists as such "on account of reciprocal relations with his people" (*cf.* Heesterman 1985:147), and so the "third" that is prohibited is the idea that the king should not construe himself as privileged according to his being the "connecting" link to the gods.

The *Satapatha Brahmana* was the first great Vedic work in prose (Renou, ed. 1961:81), which calls to mind Hegel's remarks on prose and the State: "It is the state... which first presents a subject matter that is entirely appropriate to the prose of history; indeed, the state creates it as it creates itself" (1988:64). In the prose of the *Satapatha Brahmana*, however, it is precisely the ascendancy of the "state" which is being curtailed.

[8] "Contradiction" here refers to a problematic somewhat distinct from that discussed in the previous chapter, in which processes of reversal and negation were named. The Kallar negation of the *purusa* body metaphor of the *varna* scheme, for example, was a self-conscious act of (successful) resistance; here the "contradiction" is such only from the point of view of "the system as a whole", or that of kingship itself. Kingship itself either didn't care about the contradiction - or didn't know. As the centre of *power*, the cares of kingship might not have extended to this contradiction; however, I argue that the King did not *know*.

[9] Buddhism was once prevalent in Kerala, where high incidences of "untouchability" have been historically present. The Malayali term *boudha* (lit. "Buddhist") today finds its general use related to the vulgar meaning: "idiot" (Pullappilly 1976:30-31). Some urban Paraiyar in Madras also claim that they are original Buddhists. This was suggeted in a 1909 issue of the *Tamilan*, which argued that their Buddhist monasteries at Mylapore, Tirupati, Trichy, and elsewhere were later captured by the followers of Siva and Visnu, who simply applied their sect symbols to the foreheads of the images of Buddha and thereby converted them. The reason the Paraiyar were not allowed in the temple was for fear that they would, by *seeing* the idols, identify them as those of Buddha and expose the truth (*cf.* Hanumanthan 1979:59).

as to "get paid" for worshipping and receiving from all.[10] *Archakas*, he said, are *mattyana panchama*, "until he takes his daily bath, the *archaka* is of the fifth and lowest class of the Hindu hierarchy" (in Presler 1987:144). This suggests that it is not particularly Brahmanical discourse which characteristically enunciates the discourse of *denial* of "the fifth" *varna*.[11]

Why is it that the discourse is led so emphatically to "deny" something? Is it due to a value system inherent to the discourse, or to which the discursive position subscribes? Rather than ask "who is speaking?" it is at least as important to ask "to whom is this discourse directed?" I propose that it is kingly discourse, and is directed both to the self-reflection of the kingdom's glory, and, as a sort of administrative manual, is directed to the "agents" of the King. From this position, the task is to relate the first and third questions together, *vis*-a-*vis* the central contradiction. What is really happening? Why is this denied? How is it that, despite itself, the "contradiction" works? Does the kingly discourse merely deny something which is objectively present, or does that same kingly discourse participate in creating its own contradiction? The structure of kingship does, in a complex way, participate in creating its own contradiction, albeit somewhat unwillingly; the gaze is unable to see.

The Very Idea of a Good King.

Many are the examples of agrarian or "peasant" societies thinking rather highly of their king, while abhorring the intermediaries between the King and themselves. *If only the King knew*, they might have thought, of the deeds of the taxman, with his criminal opulence and arrogance. For example, peasants in south-west France complained:

> "Built as they [the excise men] are from the blood, sweat and substance of the people, their mansions sometimes surpass even the palaces of kings in the *symmetry* of their architecture and the comforts and adornments they *contain*."[12]

These complaints suggest that the opulence of kings was somehow taken for granted, but the local and felt imposition of the excessive tax-men was certainly not. The

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[10] There is some mystery around the Brahmin temple-priest, who holds a rather low status, especially in the eyes of other Brahmins. This Brahmin lawyer expressed the basic problem: the *archakas* receive from anybody, thus "commercializing" their sacrality and contacting impurity. How this Brahmin lawyer manages to bring himself to accept payment from such filthy beings is perhaps less of a mystery.

[11] I added this question "Who is speaking? etc." at the prompting of a critic, who suggested that discourses of denial/repression create normative speaking positions. I.e.: "There is no fifth. There is no position outside of this order from which to speak (because it has been excluded)." By and large, this is exactly what I am trying to get at; however, I want to see how the "contradiction" *works*, not leap to an interpretation/analysis made possible by a model of discourse which would rely on such direct power - an amount and economy of power which south Indian kings did not have.

[12] Bercé 1990:265* Another complaint was directed against Mazarin (the king's minister), showed him giving directions to his butler, to make up 28 dishes from the loot he has levied, and to bring "a stewed peasant, garnished with taxes" (*ibid.*, p.264).

putative audience for the above complaint is the King himself, who is warned of the taxmen's hubris in the surpassing "symmetry" of their mansions, with their miserly exclusion of others from what they "contain"; both notions are amenable to the visual rhetoric of the metaphor of the gaze: the treason of the seen and the thefts of the hidden. Evidence for the perception of a similar sort of alliance between the peasant "people" and the King in south India is hard to find, but, given the ubiquity of taxation, may well have been at play. Srinivas, for instance, notes that mulcting the cultivators under their assignment often incited tax farmers to try to transform themselves into local emperors; however, not only might their milch cows run away, but the king might learn about the agent's inhuman exactions. "Punishment was likely to be swift and deterrent in such a case, as the act often provided the king with a chance to regain his popularity with the peasantry" (1975:56-7). Such a move would surely perpetuate the *mythos* of "the good king", if only he could know.[13]

That the King so often did not know causes a great paradox. It is very easy to be cynical and employ *only* the technique of negative reading, content with the assumption that oriental despots sat around denying things and ordering higher taxes. These kings, however, were exalted, and might not have been so undetermined to realize their ideal values within their polity; surely, for instance, it does matter whether a King is Hindu or not. The Hindu King, after all, was often reminded to maintain the order of the castes (the fourfold way: there is no fifth), and even to supervise the propriety of their customs. In 1744, the head of the Maratha Svarajya punished a sect of Brahmins for improper marriage relations[14]; the King excused the history of this conduct since they lived in territory under the Portuguese from 1532-1739. *"But the kingdom of dharma has been established now.* Therefore looking at law books (*dharmashastra*), this is an improper conduct" (in Fukazawa 1968:38-9*). In the south Indian context, "[t]he acceptance of paradox is the hallmark of orthodoxy" (Shulman 1984:43-4). The paradox existed in the ambiguity of the relation between Brahmins and Kings, and also in the balance of power between the centre King and the localities in his *kshetram*, or kingdom. The urge to dissent was

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13 After writing and explaining this chapter, I read Ryszard Kapuscinski's *The Emperor*, on Haile Selassie I, which expresses a generally similar theme ("the king's gaze") as I am trying to work out here; e.g.: "His Majesty liked to visit the provinces, to give the plain people access to him, to learn of their troubles and console them with promises, to praise the humble and the hardworking and scold the lazy and the disobedient. But this predilection of His Majesty's drained the treasury, because the provinces had to be put in order first: swept, painted, the garbage buried, the flies thinned out, schools built, the children given uniforms, the municipal buildings remodelled, the flags sewn, and portraits of His Distinguished Highness painted. It wouldn't do if His Majesty appeared suddenly, like some poor tax collector, or *if he merely came into contact with life as it is*. One can imagine the surprise and mortification of the local dignitaries. Their trembling! Their fear!..." (pp.39-40*). Haile Selassie's death in 1975 was reported in the news release as due to "circulatory failure" (*ibid.*, p.164).

14 Some Yajurvedi Brahmin sect was practising cross-cousin marriage, which was too close according to Brahmanical law, amounting to an intra-*sapinda* relation (Fukazawa 1968). They lived just to the north of Goa, which is on the fringe of the "Dravidian" zone, where cross-cousin marriage is the ruling system. The important point, at any rate, is that the change in rulers did not merely prompt a retrospective pardon or alibi, but convoked the announcement of a new *Svarajya*, an ideal polity where henceforth things would be done properly.

often in fact the urge to break out of the paradox and realize the vision implicit in the (Brahmanical) values (*ibid.*). The King might also be prompted, by his own inspirations, to instantiate the ideal society - in which, untouchability hardly being a credit to one's statecraft, "*there is no fifth*".

One thing that needs to be thought is whether the textual pronouncements, such as "there is no fifth", are to be read as texts, or to be constructed in their discursivity. The former, I take it, involves endowing it with a fecundity or "openness" towards a multiple construction of meanings, depending on the situated context of interpretation. The positive value of this stance is that it assumes that people are not passive receptacles for discourses of *author*ity. The latter, however, would seem dearer to historians and social scientists, who may find that the plights of referentiality are unavoidable. Both have their uses in empirical studies, depending on the particular subject at hand.[15] Yet in a case such as south India, where non-literacy was for some an enforced norm, the question of its subjects' interpretation of that system of meanings, distributed through the ages among elite ruling groups, intrinsically "orthodox", may not be of the utmost relevance.[16] In short, when it is particularly injunctive, and affiliated with a relatively solid repository of power, such as a King, a discourse is a discourse (rather than a text available for everyone to try to be a clever hermeneutician[17]), or best read as such.

In this case, "there is no fifth" is best postulated as a phenomenon of *discourse*. It is not a Brahmanical text, to be read by other Brahmanical scholars throughout history; rather, it is an injunction - it expresses and enjoins a normative order (including the sense of "command"), not a scribe's representation of village life. And hence the question of "the good King" - Dumont's "cynical" and valid reading must be complemented with an "idealist" one; the King was not a mere pawn in Brahmanical clutches (or rather, to say that he was is to leap ahead in an argument), and insisted that in his realm, as an ideal realm (a *Swaraj*), there *shall be* no fifth. Simply speaking, the King did not want there to be "untouchables." There are any number of possible reasons for this, besides a proto-Gandhian motif of *varnashrama*

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15 For example, certain types of documentation which stand as "ownership" symbols of sorts, such as are contained on the medieval stone inscriptions of south India, might valuably benefit from a textualist's view - because revenue collection, the state's agents, and even the regional power itself changed periodically, and the inscriptions *as texts* were essentially contested in renewed bouts of negotiation between various interested "readers" of the inscription and its allocation of rights. The changes in the mode of official inscription, from stone to copper to *cadjan* leaves to *ryotwari* paper, would be a fascinating angle to take on the history of agrarian property in south India. The body would be the other manuscript, perhaps especially in the middle and late parts of the 19th century, when the colonial courts would not accept *ryotwari pattas*, issued by the Department of Revenue, as legal titles, considering them flimsy evidence... (*cf.* Washbrook 1981).

16 Perhaps this is why Dumont remarked that the lower the status of your informant, the lower the quality of your information: "you get what you're asking for" (*cf.* R.K. Jain's comment in Mencher 1974:484).

17 "A discourse is a discourse" seems a pathetic slogan - my point is only that if a Paraiyar from Gough's Kumbapettai in Thanjavur were to come up with a very clever way of conceptualizing the *Laws of Manu*, I don't think it would mean much; or: if s/he did, we would never know anyway.

dharma with four and only four *varnas*, in which a "fifth" was by definition undesirable because that would be polluting and unbecoming to a great King's religious ideals. It is necessary not to take people for idiots, nor to be so thoroughly cynical as to reduce the grasp of practice. Besides which, a political and economic reason for a King not to want a "fifth" in his domain is that he would not want other local powers to be hoarding and hiding the produce of their local sub-tyrannies, producing an invisible extra surplus through quasi-slave labour, and preparing for *fitna*, rebellion, or secession.[18]

On the other hand, the *same* utterance, "there is no fifth", can be seen as the model form taken by the lying, cheating, stealing, conniving discourse which the local agents of the King *present* to the King in their reports on the well-being of the kingdom's districts. Thus enter the "evil ministers" of the King, the trope familiar to so many peasant societies, and possibly why some of them have been peculiarly monarchist at awkward moments. An understanding of the relations between these two uses of the same bit of discourse is a reflection of what has been the bane of every gambit to "rule" portions of India: the incredible difficulty of implementation, effective surveillance and control of political space.[19] This difficulty is especially exacerbated by *local* powers, who are often delegated parts of the mechanics of rule.[20] This problem is a recurring pedagogy in both Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and the *Manusmrti*, and one of the reasons why the King is exhorted to have spies: to check the abuses of his agents. "Let him [the King] protect his subjects against such (men)" exhorts Manu (VII.123), while Kautilya had earlier observed: "[t]hose whose relationship with the ruler is established over a long period of time are however likely to completely take over everything from the ruler and pose as rulers themselves" (Kautilya 114).[21]

The hatred of taxation of any sort found expression in the *Thirukkural* (552), where the King who demands money from his subjects is compared to a highwayman who with his spears threatens passersby. But Kings and States demand money; that is their "function." In south India, noted David Shulman, kingship has a "neurotic"

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[18] That Tamil kingship did indeed endeavour to act according to these ideals is indicated by the occasional demeaning punishments of deltaic Brahmin landowners (*cf.* Tirumalai 1987:124-5), and the order from Rajaraja III in the 13th century to Thanjavur landowners (Brahmins and Vellalars) that they were not to interfere in the constitution of "work groups", all of whom were to be ***eligible*** to cultivate land - i.e., not untouchable (*cf.* Stein 1980:223-4).

[19] In response to the same order noted in the previous note, the landowners proclaimed through their *nattar* [people of the *nadu*] assembly that anybody who carried tales to the King against Brahmins, Vellalas, or the accountants, would be deemed enemies of the *nadu* and evicted or locally punished (*cf.* Tirumalai 1987:68).

[20] This "difficulty" is such that the notion of an "administration" separate from the "executive" arm of a government (run by definition by the ruling class), is hardly credible. That such a political rhetoric reached its apogee within the structure of the colonial state makes the likelihood of its incarnation even less plausible. That it should lurk in the distinction between "the social" and the government in Kumar's framework is yet more frightening.

[21] In the Tamil case, Tiruvalluvar notes that "[e]spionage consists of watching *all* people, *to wit*, the king's *employees*, his *relations* and his *enemies*" (*Thirukkural* 584*).

side: as the King is totally responsible for the rule of *dharma* in his kingdom, any infraction of the rules (revealed by lack of rainfall, disease, untimely death, etc.) is laid at his feet. The people demand this, and so "the king must hold relentlessly to a severe ideal of righteousness lest he stand revealed in his inner nature as no better than the bandit whom he knows to be his alter ego" (Shulman 1980:303). The ideology of kingship in south India, then, comes in part from the subjects themselves, who demand an ideal unlikely to be met, but not for that silenced. Perhaps this is why public ceremonies of giving away land (e.g., to Brahmins) occurred so often, and on such a scale. On the other hand, the King and his court nonetheless must - and did - take their share of resources, through an administrative system of delegated tax agents.

This occurred through forging alliances across the lines drawn by what Rajayyan calls the "conflict between the forces of exaction and those of evasion" (1982:160). These alliances were made with figures of a locality who seemed to have power in the community, and checked by the *karnam* or village accountant, usually a direct appointment by the State, and often a Brahmin in Tamil kingdoms. This was the dual system, in which executive delegation was shadowed by a record-keeper, that characterized kingly polities from the Deccan southward. The constant potential for the local powers to unite indicated the fragility of the structure; insofar as revenue was paid, presumably suspicion was consoled.[22] Yet this was the kingly structure, diffused through the inevitable agents. The apparent referential inadequacy of the statement "there is no fifth", indicates that the King's gaze is compromised, and largely by its own structure, the structure of its rule and its delegations. In this sense, with a slight leaning to the textualist model[23], we might say that the royal edict "there is *[shall be]* no fifth", is as much a hint as it is a warning against abuses -

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22 The fragility was, of course, not only between the centre and the locality, but also between the components of the locality. During the early 19th century, when the restored Hindu raja of Mysore sent out Brahmin tax-farming accountants to the interior dry zone, *both* the Brahmins and their arch-enemies the rural big-men, Kannada versions of polegars, accused each other of exploiting the labour of the weaker sections (*cf.* Stein 1985b:20-21). This suggests that the King was indeed seen as one who prohibited "the fifth" *varna* and its subjections, and those who spoke to the King all denied that they themselves were violating that prohibition.

23 Burghart refers both to W.M. Whitney's 1889 *Sanskrit Grammar* and to J.D.M. Derrett's recent research in Hindu law, noting that they both comment on the fact that "Brahmanical codes of conduct" were written in the *optative* mood. The idea seems to fit normative discourse generally within the context of south Indian kingship. Whitney wrote, marvellously: "[t]he optative appears to have as its primary office the expression of wish or desire... But the expression of desire, on the one hand, *passes naturally into that of request or entreaty*, so that the optative becomes a *softened imperative*; and on the other hand, it comes to signify what is generally desirable or proper, what should or ought to be, and so becomes the mode of *prescription*; or, yet again, it is weakened into signifying what may or can be, what is likely or usual, and so becomes at last a softened statement of what is." In orthodox and regal Hindu discourse, the imperative, subjunctive and optative are "more or less exchangeable with one another". Burghart's gloss is remarkably convenient for the idea of the good King's discursive claim that "there is no fifth", both as a moral claim (subjunctive), and as an objective naturalist description (declarative): "*the optative mood was conventional for describing areas of obligation, and this mood did not denote so much a sense of determination as of volition.* The presupposition of the optative mood is that 'thoughts' are real and that objects exist as a *germ* in one's desire. Its textual function was to make real - the more in being - the *speaker's intentions* in the world" (*cf.* Burghart 1990:270-2*).

tantamount, in short, to an attitude essentially meaning: "I don't want to *see* it." The *Thirukkural* (574), text that it is, continues to ask:

> "What is the use of one's eyes if they do not beam with immeasurable love?"

Canonical Symbols of Negation: UN-touchability.

> "Besides, I am a Brahmin: for me everything becomes reversed, like a reflection in a mirror; left seems to be right, and right becomes left." - *Mrcchakatika I* (in Shulman 1985:152).

In line with the insistence that "there is no fifth", exist a series of canonically negative tropes that have been claimed to be the historical stigmas of the "*un*-touchables" in various parts of India. One thinks of the various references to "un-seeability", ranging from the rulings that the lowest castes should depart from public roads upon the presence of higher castes (if, indeed they should ever use them at all), to injunctions for untouchables never to appear in public in daylight, to the expectation that they erase even their footprints on the paths behind them.

These metaphors, which functioned as a sort of grammar for the King's gaze, were not always literally enacted; they had more to do with protocol and etiquette, as well as, on occasion, bland coercion.[1] For instance, in 1783, an edict was issued at Baroch forbidding some untouchable castes (Hahalkor, Dhed, Chandal) to come out of their houses after 9 a.m., "lest they should taint the air or touch the superior Hindus in the streets." The English observer, James Forbes, understood that the agents of the government of Baskar Rao, the ruler, would cancel the proclamation - or, more to the point, its "implementation" - upon the incentive of the appropriate bribes (*cf.* Hutton 1963:81n31). This provision, that there might have been a covert custom of reconciliation, however harsh or cynical the financial imposition, appears to have been lost sight of in the assumption of colonial rule; indeed, it was the colonial imagination which "ran riot" in taking these regulatory practices to be

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1 As Freud wrote: "[i]n general, repression of the ideational presentation of an instinct can surely only have the effect of causing it to vanish from consciousness if it had previously been in consciousness, or of holding it back if it is about to enter it. The difference, after all, is not important; it amounts to much the same thing as the differnce between ordering an undesirable guest out of my drawing-room or out of my front hall, and refusing to let him cross my threshold once I have recognized him." He adds in a footnote: "[t]his metaphor... [is] applicable to the process of repression... I need only add that I have to place a sentinel to keep constant guard over the door which I have forbidden this guest to pass, lest he should burst it open" ("Repression" [1915], in *Collected Papers*, tr. Joan Riviere. London: The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, Hogarth Press 1948, vol. 4, *cf.* pp.91-2). In his essay "One of the Difficulties of Psycho-Analysis" (1917), Freud mockingly wrote that " '[y]ou conduct yourself like an absolute sovereign who is content with the information supplied him by his highest officials and never goes among the people to hear their voice" (*ibid.*, v.4:355).

norms.[2] This, I believe, is due to the relegation of the disembedded versions of "caste" and "religion" to the murky friction of the "social", whereby metaphors of political exchange were re-constituted as real practices forcibly reproduced under the guise of "tradition."[3]

In 1932, a Madrasi journalist reported in *The Hindu* that in Tirunelveli district there was a community of washermen, known as *Purada Vannan*, who were doubly polluting on account of their working for other untouchable groups. They were a class of "unseeables", expected to work at night and not allowed out during daytime because the very sight of them was polluting.[4] The colonial government had no sanctions for this sort of social relation, neither explicitly positive or negative. The *raj* had disinvested its executive legislations from regulating such indigenous practices. This was no particular innovation (and so hardly an improvement) on the pre-colonial state of affairs in the Tambraparni delta of Tirunelveli, where untouchability had long existed. The instructive point seems to be that the State was unaware that such compounded ramifications of the "peculiar" servitudes of south India were occurring; it took a journalist to observe it in the Congress-charged atmosphere of the 1930s. The journalist, however, was not a modern incarnation of one of the recommended "spies"; after all, the colonial *raj* was not *swaraj*. This latter point is synonymous with the "social-ization" of "caste" through the executive separation of itself from the "administration of things"; the state perched lightly and precariously on the deep slumber of society, as apologist historiography still understands.

The *Purada Vannan* did not have a durbar to petition and bribe to escape from their situation. They were the victims of the replicatory structure of hierarchy in the

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2 Dumont almost noted this point; of the distance rules in Kerala, he asks: "how would a Nambudiri Brahman ever have noticed that a Pulayan had come closer than the prescribed ninety-six paces?... This was not a custom, but a genuine ***regulation***"; the same applies to the Tirunelveli Maravars beating Untouchables for wearing sandals, which were not polluting: "the villagers had simply wanted to uphold a symbol of subjection" (1980:82). These are "imposed features rather than functional rules for preserving the purity of the superior persons" (*ibid.*, pp.134-6). The *colonial* mentality perceived these as peculiar *customs*, hence somewhat released from official State interference; thereby the assumption was made that these practices, *strategies* of power and domination, were naturalized in the *rule*-governed (normative) *habitus* of Hindu "society" : the "society of castes."

3 As J.H. Hutton, the Census Commissioner of 1931, noted: "So far from accepting the position of arbiter was the British Government, that in 1921 the Chief Commissioner of Assam said that every man's caste was to be returned as what he said it was" (1963:97). This is exemplary of the colonial self-perception on this matter. Practically, the case was more like that in Tinnevelly District in 1911, for which census instructions announced: "[g]enerally speaking, it does not matter what a man chooses to call his caste *as long as the new term he employs can be easily identified as a synonym for the more used term*" (cited in Hardgrave 1969:133*). By this point, the classificatory problematics of the early 19th century had resolved themselves - at least for colonialist purposes - around the dominant paradigm of caste.

4 *The Hindu*, 24 December 1932. The journalist, a Mr. A.V. Thakkor, noted that during his interview with them, "their whole bodies [were] shaking and trembling", and they spoke only after much persuasion. (See Hutton 1963:81,201).

irrigated *mirasidari* tracts[5], a structure in which the low did not have access to the royal ear. That access was cut off by the territorial involution consolidated by corporate *mirasidar* dominance, a situation which the colonial settlement had by and large accepted early on. *Mirasidars* jockeyed with the state, arguing over the latter's appropriations, just as had earlier occurred with kings; the ruling power had in each case legitimated *mirasidari* elites by empowering them as official subjects of the realm - i.e., by recognizing (often through gifts!) their claims to "ownership" of their land, and overlooking the micro-politics across the water of those claims.[6] In such zones, the King's gaze was short-circuited, and did not "see" the practice of untouchability; in this sense, it is revealing that the Tamil word for *mirasidar* is, and was, *kaniyatchikkaran*, derived from *kani*, "to see" (*cf.* Ludden 1985:39). These deltaic elites, "landowners", did the King's seeing for him - in this sense they were his agents. In performing this function, they both obstructed the King from facing the fact that his kingdom did not conform to the imperative virtues, and in so doing, simultaneously managed to further consolidate their claim to being the local elites, the *mirasidar* groups, local allies of the King. As the King's eyes, they lied, but as his allies and "agents", they did what the King wanted: faithfully paid revenue. The "untouchable" landless and labouring groups often found that the market for patrons in fact offered them *only* their masters.[7]

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5 *Cf.* Moffatt 1979, *passim*; his fieldwork in Chingleput was in an area of *mirasidar* dominance as well. I think that his "replication" thesis is plausible only for the *mirasidari* spaces of Tamilnad's political ecology, a point which Deliege's (1988) ethnography of a Paraiyar community in Ramnad makes from a different angle.

6 Washbrook, writing on the 19th century, noted that the government of Fort St George "set the rules of the game and, through the threat of its reserve powers, could make sure that they were kept; but it did not look too carefully at what was happening in the scrimmages and *placed at least half the field on its blind side.*" The "rules" related to the amount of revenue expected, and revenue continued to flow (Washbrook 1976:48-9*). In *mirasidar* areas, this had long been more or less the way official politics worked; Washbrook claims that no fundamental change occurred in "the Tanjore economic systems" until at least the 1930s (*ibid.*, p.87; *cf.* also Trautmann et.al., in Frykenberg and Kolenda, eds. 1985:1-30).

7 *Cf.* Irschick 1982. In this article, Irschick provides evidences that labouring groups often found their alliances with their dominant masters preferable to interacting with the early colonial state. I find this an important complement to the often observed spatial restrictions of untouchable territoriality; their marriage circles were much smaller than the village elite, etc. This relates to the fact that it was practically the case that the only access to goods was through the local elite. Hierarchical alliances with their particular village patrons help explain the commonplace that Paraiyar often fight Paraiyar from other villages, each group as henchmen for their village bosses, who were factionalized in their own intra-caste struggles for ("economic") dominance.

Likewise, the fact that the market for patrons was hardly a market, in that only the "masters" were available, indicates the closure of the system. Since at its core there is a political subjugation based on landlessness and expressed through ritual stigmas, the phenomenon of hierarchy within untouchable "groups" is an unsurprising emanation of the spatial closure of the system (as one of subordination and domination).

Emigration must have been an option, as Irschick notes. However, the deltas were always intensively cultivated, and the same microcosm existed throughout; as a result, mobility through local departure was a scarce commodity. More likely, immigration often occurred at the invitation of dominant *mirasidars* when their existing labourers were proving recalcitrant, as seems evident in a Thanjavur case of the later 19th century recorded by Gough (1981:164,195). In that case, the importation of a new group of Pallar labourers led to the new group being considered "lower" by the original Pallars, who had to struggle and supplicate to win back some of the patronage they lose through resistance.

Un-seeability is a trope most often reported as having been practiced in what is now Kerala state. The *Census Report* of 1931 speculated that for those subject to this extreme of "distance pollution", such as the Nayadi caste, "progress must have borne a strong resemblance to that of a malefactor for whom a warrant is out and whose one object is to avoid close contact with his fellow men". That, at least, was the case "when the system was in full force" (cited in Hutton 1963:226). Eric Miller suggested that "now" such distance pollution is only operative in ritual situations; a high-caste Nayar had no hesitation in coming near and helping a low caste person who had cut his hand and needed assistance in attending to the wound (cited in *ibid.*, p.221n11). Thus even contact with blood, usually a highly volatile symbol, was not an issue outside of specific situations. I query whether this is so much a development as claimed; rather, "unseeability" and many of the symbolic stigmas were articulated as metaphors, hence appropriate only to some occasions.[8] Ritual occasions with their formal offerings to gods and patrons would be examples of such moments, and in this case the metaphor of "see-ability" correlates with the evidences of Fuller's analysis, noted earlier, wherein the purity of the god is invested as the exclusion of the sight of impurity. The injunction of "unseeability" might better be seen as a fictive metaphor indicating that the untouchables should not enter into the field of vision of the King's gaze. Walking on public road, or any behaviour entailing "visibility" would be dangerous, as in principle it incurred a risk of being seen. This would provide the intermediary local elite with a compulsion to punish violations of this, as well as explaining the relative laxity of local practice.[9]

The obverse of this local laxity is displayed when the membrane is violated, as underlies a case reported by Dirks from the Tamil princely state of Pudukkottai, wherein a group of Paraiyar moved from one *nad* to another, describing the event as one of flight, dragging thorns behind them to erase their footprints (1987:277). They transferred their locally established servitude from one spatial "locality" to another. Within their own narrative, the erasure was ostensibly a "strategic" act, designed to elude their ex-tyrants; structurally, however, the passage mnemonically reflects the

[8] See, for example, Pocock's comment on the dominant peasant caste of Gujerat: "[a] farmer works with his labourers, often Untouchables, in an easy intimacy, and although water-pots are kept separate it is difficult to be over-scrupulous when the heat is intense and water short... the labourer can take a *bidi* from his master's hand, whereas in the village it would be thrown or placed on the ground between them. It is not uncommon to see a young Patidar farmer out in the fields discussing his problems with an older Untouchable labourer who knows his family well, and showing him almost as much deference as he would adopt to a senior relative" (Pocock 1972:21). The nature of the agrarian life militates against the literalness of many metaphorical stigmas (although promotes the structures of practical domination). The example of the *bidi* again suggests that rituals of avoidance are particularly conditioned by whether or not anybody might be watching.

[9] As a metaphor, it might well be adopted more diffusely by the elite, in relatively non-ritual occasions for instance, or as a generalized sanction against particular families who were proving difficult. Kerala, it should be noted, tended to be divided into relatively small domains, with an extreme incidence of hierarchy, and symbols of degradation (*cf.* E. Miller 1954). This results in the situation that "Kings" were dense on the ground: they were, so to speak, always local. Hence the danger of the King's gaze seeing a denied and prohibited being was even more great than in the larger kingdoms of Tamilnad.

"tactical" mobility possible within the bounds of necessity - of remaining metaphorically invisible - a necessity imposed by the "rules" of the King's gaze.[10] These rules are the recombinant result of the interests of the local elite and the King (State), which leave the Untouchables out of consideration. By logical derivation from this political structure, the Untouchables become, in the eyes of the elite, "the most manifest symbols of disorder in the social universe" (*ibid.*, p.279). It is precisely this disorder which, as a blemish in his "kingdom of *dharma*", the King intends to banish through the proclamation that "there is [shall be] no fifth."

These "symbols" are, however, not to be taken literally; I have already suggested that the colonial mentality did take them so, by naturalizing them as norms and considering them in the category of passive resilience labelled "custom." It is said that traditionally in orthodox households, one had to break all the vessels should they be polluted by the glance of an untouchable. At the same time, members of these polluting castes were often household servants! Dominance makes *room* to allow for particularized resolutions of this dilemma through the rhetoric of the special case or the symbolic ablution; it leases out a room in its own house, that is. Orthodoxy, *when it is necessary*, nonetheless entails some degree of subscription to this notion of pollution. But it is not the values of orthodoxy which designate the untouchable as impure, nor render practically salient that impurity; rather, the substance of untouchability resides in official powerlessness. The servant caste, the agrestic serfs, in short, the untouchables, are absolutely polluting in step with their being structurally positioned outside of the King's gaze, i.e., as entities which do not ("ideologically") exist. Theirs is the *gaze-of-NO-power - as such*, the untouchable's glance would practically be defined as a vehicle of defilement. A proverb compares them to the palmyra palm which casts no shadow (Thurston VI:103). They can have

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10 Certain words are in quotation marks, alluding to an important critique and modification of Bourdieu's concept of "strategies" (vs. "rules") made by Michel de Certeau and his description of "tactics":

"I call a 'strategy' the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a *subject of will and power* (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) *can be isolated from an 'environment'. A* strategy *assumes a place* that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for *generating* relations with an *exterior distinct from it* (competitors, adversaries, 'clienteles', 'targets', or 'objects' of research). Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model.

I call a 'tactic' on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a *spatial* or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. *The place of a tactic belongs to the other.* A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The 'proper' is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time - it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized '*on the wing.*' Whatever it wins, it does not keep" (de Certeau 1984:xix*). A Tamil proverb notes: "the harvest of the Paraiyar never comes *home*" (Thurston VI:118).

In the Paraiyar story, they represent themselves as having a "strategy", but in my model they actually exercised a tactic (articulated through a metaphor that is imposed). In their own version, as strategizing subjects, they systematically misrepresent to themselves the structural cause of the situation, by personifying their antagonist directly in the dominant caste. In doing so, they excluded the territorial blinders provoked by the King's gaze from their own envisioning. However, as excluded from symbolic capital, they are unable to properly strategize, and so even their mythicized "misrepresentation" may be an appropriate "tactic."

no reflection in the structure of the polity. No mirror, so no light: the unseeable's gaze is dark, and necessarily taboo. Taboo in this case means both "prohibited" and "to be kept hidden." Prohibited from a share of local power, which simultaneously hides them from the idealist ideology behind the King's gaze (which itself "taboos" untouchability, just like the Republic of India).

Kings and Brahmins.

> "And, like the sun, he [the King] burns eyes and hearts; nor can anybody on earth even gaze on him."
>
> - *The Laws of Manu* VII.6

Despite the intentions of the good King, there seems to have been some distraction. It is necessary to ask what made the royal gaze, so to speak, look away; there are other aspects of the obligations of the good King: notably the propriety of giving to Brahmins, and the virtue of appropriate sacrifices, officiated by the figure of the Brahmin priest.

Figure 2. Rājarāja Chola and Karuvūrttevar

The King Rajaraja Chola stands behind the Brahmin Karuvurrttevar in the great Brhadisvara temple at Thanjavur (from Shulman 1985:17). Karuvurttevar, his court poet, had claimed that "the eye in his (Siva's) forehead/ never departs from my eye."

It is this relation between the King and the Brahmin which, in Dumont's celebrated analysis, structures the entire social order; the elementary principle is the absolute disjunction between status and power. The absolute severance between these two domains allows for the notion of purity to inform a ranking order, and for the holistic and hierarchical "encompassment" of power by status; the Brahmin must "bow" to power only in the inferior domain of power itself. In fact, this leads to the

representation of *artha* to be construed as pure (*sic*) dominance: "brute force is all-powerful at the level of naked fact."[11] This is a rather Orientalist view, and I have tried to rehabilitate the "very idea" of a good King partly in order to contest the arbitrary predication of such excesses to the "level" figured by sovereignty; a King in Tamilnad, after all, has a relation to divinity and its religion - the Chola King Rajaraja was referred to as Sivapadasekhara: he whose crown is Siva's foot (*cf.* Shulman 1985:405).

Why Brahmins? Various speculations have been made on this question[12], which may not be the right one to ask. There are many different genres of the Brahmin in south India; the common derision of the temple priest warns against simply equating the Brahmin with the western figure of the "priest." Two other common vocations of the Brahmin in Tamilnad have been those of government agent and the leisurely non-labouring farmer, and groups of these sorts have generally been of superior rank. The *purohit* who does not do temple work but rather serves particular patrons is yet another variant, and I believe that this figure is the central component of the exaltation of the symbol of the Brahmin. The Brahmanical monopoly on the licenses for being sacrifiers makes them a crucial intermediary for others seeking to achieve orthodox Hindu values in the acts of their own lives. Related to kingship, the good Hindu king is in a conundrum, split between wishing to lead a life of scriptural virtue and yet constantly implored to expand his domains with his sword and to rule by the rod. Purity and non-violence are virtues towards which he is intrinsically compromised, as the themes of the *Mahabharata* tell. Hence the

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11 There is perhaps a stylistic irony in Dumont's prose: what, after all, is "the level of naked fact"? A more appropriate assessment comes in an earlier essay by Dumont and Pocock (1957:33): "The dominant caste is consciously subject to Brahmanic axioms, but once the latter have been accepted and the Brahmans have been 'fed', the less conscious royal model comes into play." The scope of this statement referred to "village studies" and this is all important; it is not that the "royal model" is *less conscious*, but rather that it is altered, precisely because the *locality* is an arena spatially, hence politically distinguished from the domain of the "kingdom" - hence, *where* is "the level of naked fact"? Different political forces operate in the locality, which is not a "microcosm" of the kingdom (although perhaps it is of the imperial state). The ambiguity of Dumont and Pocock on this point is itself due to a colonial artefact: since the English eradicated south Indian kingship in Tamilnad, and in so doing erased the royal ideology *prohibiting* "the fifth [*varna*]" (which the English considered merely customary), the "royal model", so to speak, migrated to the locality. This caused much confusion, epitomized in the early 20th century Congress debates on "Hinduism" and the "Harijan" issue.

12 Baechler, for example, proposes that the reason lies partly in the fact that the Brahmins are the *only* link between the "theory" of the *varna* and the "real" regime of *jatis* (1988:38), providing thereby a valuable cognitive service and thus symbolizing a sort of ideal embodiment. He also notes that the *varna* theory is a categorical one designed for Brahmins (and outsiders like the British), and functions for those who need to perceive Indian society as a totality (*ibid.*, p.50). However, rather than spurn the *varna* image for that, it seems that the very category of "untouchables" - which is not so obsolete in contemporary discourse - implies the invocation of the *varna* model, a point which Baechler acknowledges (*ibid.*, p.49). One upshot of some of Baechler's ideas is the suggestion that the *varna* system re-emerges when the *jati* system wanes, due to the consolidation of a stable political regime, one of which he sees beginning after 1857 (*passim*, esp. p.61).

King of all people has the need of Brahmins to transfer the load of evil which his actions (as "powerful") invariably accrue.[13]

A paradox is that it is polluting for Brahmins to deal with the venting of royal sins. This results not so much in the Dumontian *division* between *artha* and *dharma*, or the King and the Brahmin, as it does in the differentiation *within* the structural figures of *both* the Brahmin *and* the King. The King is split between the prescriptions for a virtuous life and the nonetheless dharmic role insistently allocated to him, again *the* classic subject of many epics. The Brahmin is split between maintaining his purity (which promises him power), or bowing to power (and thereby problematicizing his purity). The difference between a Thanjavur Brahmin *mirasidar* landowner and a Minaksi temple Brahmin *archaka* expresses this polarity. The latter is, as evidenced before, subject to the filth of the non-Brahmins (*cf.* Fuller 1984), while the former is higher-ranking, richer, and apparently performs no ritual functions at all. Interestingly, the King must maintain his split within one persona, whereas the Brahmins divide into sections.

It is precisely the King who marks these latter sections. Some Brahmins must serve in the temple, for which they were generally allocated some *inam* lands, the revenue share of which went to them personally. Some must serve the royal family, for which they presumably are also well rewarded. Some are allocated or have their rights renewed in protected *brahmadeyas*, tracts of land of which they become *mirasi* owners. Any economic function served by this latter relation, which alienated substantial amounts of revenue from the State is unclear,[14] is unclear; ideology makes much of the duty to give to Brahmins. An added aspect of this was perhaps the sacralization of the kingdom, a spatial landscaping of the rule of *dharma*, wherein "rule" implied not only dominion, but also canonical and geometrical ordering.[15]

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[13] It is, interestingly, this type of Brahmin of which we least know ethnographically. The colonial state did not employ sacrifiers as such, and the Princely States and *zamindars*, who largely did, were structurally transformed by indirect rule (*cf.* Galey 1989). Non-Brahmin sentiments and ideology did not begin with colonialism, but I think that the symbolic and categorical role of the Brahmin lost much of its coherence under the colonial State, an effect which was not lost on the people.

[14] For Pudukkottai in the middle of the 19th century, over 36% of all cultivated acreage was on tax-free *inam* grants to religious institutions; and over 15% (more) was devoted to particular Brahmins on the same terms (*cf.* Dirks 1987:117 [I computed the figures from his report, based on percentage of all cultivated land under *inam* tenure, and the proportions of that *inam* land held by various categories of recipients.]). Also important is that Brahmins tended to receive the best lands as well, in terms of irrigation and fertility. By 1882, the British were incessantly advising the Pudukkottai Rajah to redress the scale of these alienated lands - *to bring his state into line with the rest of Madras* - even though they received no tribute from Pudukkottai and so had nothing to gain (*ibid.*, p.331). Actually, I think the British had a political worry that continued awareness of such a radically different tenure system (as the "traditional" one) would upset the *raiyats* of the neighbouring districts. The endurance of distinctions between political spaces was again suppressed, in order to continue to kill off the sense of a living history.

[15] On occasion, perhaps, the land-grant might have been used as a way to rid oneself of Brahmins one feared or did not like, posting them away by giving them land in faraway places. A parallel idea appears in a *cadjan* manuscript, *Kerala Utpatti*, a charter-myth for the Brahmanical salvation of Kerala. Sri Parasu Rama sends many Brahmins there and gives them lands, but they will not stay, fearing the great numbers of snakes. Finally, Rama makes them wear the forelock: "for the Purva-Sikha (or Fore Lock) is very disgraceful in Foreign Lands, and by

The classical texts are full of the obligations of the world to Brahmins, promises that "to give to Brahmins" is a glorious act, and warnings that to take from them is abject and results in perdition[16]; the scale of such endowments indicates that this ideal was taken rather seriously. Such gifts seem to have been one of the main structures of "legitimation" in south India, almost a litmus test for ascertaining whether or not someone was a "King" or not. In fact, competing dynasties (Chola, Pandya, Chera) are on record as having all confirmed grants simultaneously to certain Brahmins, as if not only were there kingly competitions at munificence, but also that the Brahmins themselves did not even have to commit themselves to a single "alliance" or even a politically unequivocal position.

This seems to confirm the structure argued by Dumont, of the radical and real transcendence of the Brahmin in society. Yet there were several types of Brahmins, whose skills in literacy must be kept in mind, as both a boon and a threat to government. Temple priests were unlikely to gain political power; the King's Brahmin was theoretically dependent and at least close at hand; the King's agents were kept as appointees of government and hence somewhat forced into alignment. What, then, of the delta landowning Brahmins? Within the Brahmin category, and according to its own ideology, here was the ideal type, who need suffer no pollution through ritual officiousness with anyone. There was, however, a deal of sorts going on between the King and these latter *mirasidar* Brahmins: a policy of "gift-as-appeasement". Receive and be happy; do not expect too much personal mobility in the structure of decision-making constituting the "political economy" ("*artha*"). As much as the Brahmin's "superior" level was being conceded (and defined) by the royal gift, the King was containing its possible relevance.[17] Dumont inadvertently

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their using the Forelock he considered that if they went away their Tribe would not receive them, he therefore made them wear the Lock on the Forepart of the head" (*cf.* Wilson 1828:73-95).

16 Given that much land had always already been bestowed, the difference between protection and new gifts was marked. An inscription tells that a Pandyan king had his inquiries on this matter to the Brahmins at his court answered thus: "Protection, O Pandya King, is superior to this world than gift. By gifts one attains (*swarga*) Heaven but by protection, *the imperishable state*. Thus all men raised in the Puranas have declared protection to be superior. This, O King, is our view. Render thou protection which is *purifying*" (in Mudaliar 1974:1n2*). This statement came at a time (14-16th centuries), when massive (mostly Telugu) immigration was occuring in Tamilnad, prompted by the Muslim wars in the Deccan. Presumably these Brahmins were interested in maintaining their position in volatile times, rather than lose it to Telugu Brahmins. This passage is a counterpoint to Dumont's allegations of the "lack of interest" in State continuity, *viz.* "[n]ot the slightest value or intellectual interest is attached for example to the stability of dynasties: there is nothing in the texts on this point" (1980:196).

17 N. Subrahmanian suggests that land grants to Brahmins may in fact have been subject to a nominal cess, possibly to avoid absolute claims based on prescription (1989:24), a claim also made in Shanmugam's careful study of the Chola revenue system (1987:188); in fact, the King's army occasionally subjected local Brahmin sabhas to punishment, making them stand in the water all day (*ibid.*, pp.108-10). Also, there are frequent textual declarations that Brahmins are not to hear the "hiss of arrows" nor even to be *spectators* on the battlefield. Likewise, Dumezil reports from the *Code of Visnu* that the Brahmin can never be cited as a witness (1988:24). These injunctions, significantly expressed in an idiom of the gaze, suggest that the King also wanted Brahmins to ignore some of the impurities he incurs in discharging the royal function. The exchange relation involving the Brahmin (Mauss' "Indian gift") may seem strikingly unilateral when tracing the material rewards, but are less so when considered as political treaties of sorts. The Brahmin was, so to speak, *to stay inside* on occasion.

relies on the idiom of the gaze in proposing that the Brahmin, or rather the hierarchy of which he embodies the head, "must give a place to power without saying so, and it is *obliged to close its eyes* to this point on pain of destroying itself" (1980:77*). A passage from the *Arthasastra* which Dumont *does not cite* is instructive in its intonations: "Rulers who are satisfied are lost, *dissatisfied Brahmins are lost*, modest courtesans are lost, and also immodest family women" (Kautilya 106*).

As Kumar stressed in her study, the Brahmin in south India is not to cultivate directly. Others then cultivated their *inam* lands. In areas marginally within kingdoms, such as the dry tracts which stood between the independent *palaiyams* and the centre States, this caused a problem. Brahmins were few in number, and often had difficulty in claiming their share of the harvest. Presumably village headmen would bargain with them, so that the Brahmins' frequent governmental role as accountant [*karnam*] was open to local influence; nonetheless, the Brahmin had much to offer the local elite as well, in terms of sanctifying their spaces so that forms of domination could be instituted on a more lasting and pervasive basis. In the delta villages where Brahmins held much of the lands, and where, be it noted, untouchability and agrestic serfdom have always been highest, the politics of such compromises were less of a problem. It seems that playing tenants and labourers off of each other was the general technique of control, and this is where the language of "caste" in its hierarchical form comes into its own. As part of a dominant community of *mirasidar* kin, or even as a somewhat lonely *karnam*, the Brahmin entered a relation with the State, although it was theoretically a matter of gift or delegation. If labour were to be suppressed in abject servitude, how would this be kept from the King's gaze, which wanted the rule of *dharma*? In short, how did the structures of power in the locality relate to the State?

The Brahmin as Bureaucrat.

> "Verily the two eyes of a king are espionage and the celebrated code of laws." *Thirukkural* 581

The above passage indicates two avenues in which Brahmins served the state.[18] The *Laws of Manu*, that diffuse corpus, are not silent in suggesting how this relation operated:

> "A Brahmana who knows the law need not bring any (offence) *to the notice of the king*; by his own power alone he can punish those men who injure him... His own power is *greater* than the power of the

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Analogizing to Fuller's analysis of sacrifices and Sanskritized deities, one might say that, as well as the differentiation of the deities into different modalities/beings according to the visibility of the sacrifice, there is also an operation at work which presumes that a proper deity will stay inside the temple, and not *look* outside it.

18 *Thirukkural* 586 mentions that spies often passed in the guise of ascetics.

> king; the Brahmana, therefore, may *punish* his foes by his own power alone... *Speech*, indeed, is the weapon of the Brahmana" (XI.31*).

This passage is rich in its innuendo regarding the King's gaze. Three features may be suggested. First, a Brahmin could act without instructions of the King; this implies that he was a type of King's agent (of a heterogeneous kind, not quite appointed) and was permitted to act autocratically. This transfer of power from the King to the Brahmin agent is in effect a self-built limit to the extension and focal capabilities of the King's gaze. Second, and following, it is claimed not only that he *may*, but that he *can* punish his foes. Punishment has generally been designated as a royal function and a tragic cause of impurity, but here the Brahmin is in a position wherein he can wield the kingly rod; indeed, his power is greater than the King's, indicating that he does have a machinery of coercion in the locality. These two features together allow and equip the Brahmin as a local power, and encourage and suppose the screening off of the locality from the King's gaze. Spatiality closed off, the question of voices ("in the night") remains; however, "speech" is said to be the Brahmin's special weapon. This is not only lip service to their Vedic monopoly on religious knowledge and texts, and their correspondent pre-eminence as literati; as an idea appropriated into the structure of the Tamil kingdom's deltaic territories, it indicates that it is through their use of this medium of ambivalent communication, speech (and writing), that the King's discourse is quietly reversed. Nobody listens. The potter who designs the deities which will articulate the levels of visibility (in the language of purity) adds one more touch: he glazes the eyes of the King.

It was not, of course, quite so simple in the drier territories of the King's domain, where the structure of landed property needed more of a political push behind it in order to articulate itself.[19] Here south Indian states adopted the strategy of the Brahmin as government agent, the *karnam*. In the Deccan, the apparently powerful efficiency of the 18th century Maratha state might be explained by its canny use of State patronage as a surrogate for outright "gifts" to Brahmins, thus simultaneously saving themselves some expense and binding Brahmanical "interests" closely to the fortunes of the Svarajya.[20] In Tamilnad, there were other interests to

[19] As noted, the delta lands were productive to the point that one controlled people through control of the land; in the drier areas, this was not so simply possible, and political alliances needed to be quite solid to motivate an articulation of property. This is not to imply that State power was not a vital ingredient in the structure of property in the deltas - quite the inverse is the case - rather, it was there that the ecological conditions (water, largely) encouraged State power to be deferred into the local, corporate *mirasidari* bodies. This was done on a wholesale level, entailing the closing off of the locality under *mirasidar* control; in the drier zones, the State was really trying to obtain control, and so was unlikely to allow this closure. Instead, the structures of deferral were different; they operated mainly through a large number of small-scale *inam* grants. As there were more interests to lull into combination with the State's aims (say, of revenue, market control, and "foreign policy"), no such institution as the *mirasidar* corporate body rose to prominence. It is in this type of formation that something most resembling a "*jajmani*" system would appear.

[20] Even the Muslim states of the south in the 18th century utilized this same device, which makes sense in that they were a minority group with military dominance but hard pressed for co-operative allies in revenue collection in the localities. No State power employed this practice with as much rigour as the English in Madras Presidency.

succour as well, most of them those willing to be military allies. Here the role of the state was more active, less blocked out by its own devices in the *mirasidars*; as a result, there were less of the "fifth", whose demography waxes and wanes according to the success in closing off space from the King's gaze. Ironically, the more successful the State's relation with these drier areas, the less the "good King" noticed the tears in the *four*-fold fabric.[21] Payment of revenue tended to keep the King's prying eyes away, allowing for illegal practices of domination to extend inward in the involuted space of a locality. Nonetheless, there was a limit as here people could easily desert; indeed, there was a sort of market for labourers and tenants at the time, between the various "district" sub-governments, a market which mollified excessive patron-client ties and indicates that labour once possessed its own value - obtained through territorial structures, which were thus politically inflected. Also, it was here at the frontiers of the kingdom that the "oriental" claim to the sovereign's ownership of all the land was most dogmatic.[22] It was also here that vast proportions of the land were given away as *inam*, to headmen, to artisans, to village servants, generally to members of all castes.[23] Munro reported that more than a third of the lands were held on these concessionary tenures in the Baramahal (*The Fifth Report*, v.3:273). Insofar as there were Brahmins, though, they tended to speak, and their more absolute notion of purity began to "encompass" the erstwhile relativity of the "Melanesian" plains. The structure of *inam* grants themselves was sculpted into the framework for a hierarchy of occupations. Many of these occupations were invented and fitted to the rituals which were being re-fashioned; they were not sources of income, but modes of integration in a society in transition - transition to rule from a Centre. "Village

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21 The Vijayanagar Empire spoke often in the language of *varnashrama dharma* (*cf.* Stein in CEHI, v.1:123). The *varna* model is often said to have been absent in south India, but it was just a language, hence it was sometimes used, and especially by centralizing states. As a metaphor, its real meaning had much to do with the ideal command that "there is no fifth." Doubtless it intensified in seeking to combat the "emergences" endemic to the structure of kingly rule.

22 The Company made the most extreme version of this claim; the *raiyatwari* settlement, far from bestowing a "rule of property", was predicated on the *raiyat* being a tenant of the owner-State. It is generally held that the Company and the *raj* were the first state(s) to actually dispossess cultivators for arrears; property under *raiyatwari* was "absolute" only as an idea, while in principle the land market they allegedly hoped to inspire was a market between tenants who were simulating the myth of ownership. Often enough, dominant peasants got the better of the English government in this system, by deliberately defaulting and then buying back the land (i.e., the right to rent it) for prices which attracted no market; hence they bought it for less than its rental "value". In a brilliant essay, Perlin notes that, despite the rhetoric of "property", the colonial state qualified any rights in land by their liability to sale in lieu of tax payments - thus giving them distinctly "prebendial" characteristics (*cf.* Perlin 1985:478). On the other hand, outside of the colonial gaze, dominant peasants manipulated the re-purchasing market through local terror, and imbibed the commodification of land devoid of "customary" dues to actual workers, now disembedded as "labour".

23 "The best way to acquire notoriety as the owner (ruler) of an object is publicly to give possession of it to someone else. The recipient, it is true, then has the object, but you retain *sovereignty* over it since you make yourself the owner of a debt." (Leach 1964:142*) The notion of sovereignty in south India was largely dedicated to this idea, hence the eulogies of the gift; in the mixed-dry frontier zone referred to above, the case was one of obligatory giving, and nominal claiming. Yet surely it is a "substantialist" tendency of the West to consider sovereignty as somehow antithetical to nominalism. (See Dumont's remarks on Ockham in 1965.)

service" became elaborated as the duty owed in the exchange for the promise of the King's protection, a promise which aspiring elites deftly set to exploiting. Brahmanical life-cycle rites, patronized by powerful families, connected the impurity of death to the specific caste community which was called upon to perform related tasks. Births, marriages, and deaths continued as dramas, but added a Brahmanical *spectator*.

As kingdoms waxed, so did the "hiss of arrows" decline within their domains. Yet many of the people of the dry zone lacked interest in the kingdoms, except for purposes of occasional plunder. The people of such areas, where Brahmins were thin on the ground, maintained their revulsion at the idea of external taxation and had little faith in kingship's ability to make it rain. In the *palaiyams*, enthusiasm for Brahmanical rites also seemed lacking; in Madurai district, the region's peoples historically had little use for Brahmins[24], as they were not required as priestly officiants - neither at funerals nor at marriages, where the bridegroom's sister tied the *tali* (marriage necklace), not a Brahmin.[25] This was "one reason why the Brahmans have been unable to impose their rights to any large extent upon the people of the district," noted Francis in his *Gazetteer* (1905:84), in 1905, around the time described by Christopher Baker as an era when the dry zone of Tamilnad still resembled "the legendary wild west" (1976:85).

The colonial preference for Brahmins as state functionaries forged a new conduit for the virus of the delta bias to spread, modified by the removal of the basic, if self-deceptive, ideal of the good King. The imposition of the *raiyatwari patta* [deed], although in practice a slow conquest, was in principle abrupt and relegated the notion of alliance to official irrelevance.[26] The *zamindars*, now protected by the colonial state, began to emulate the rituals of kingship without a chance at *svaraj*; they began to import Brahmins, profusely build and endow temples of high orthodoxy, and were encouraged to improve their estates by developing irrigation with the aid of conscripted labour from the "labouring" and "slave" castes. For this

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24 "The *Paripadal* describes how the Brahmins who resorted to the banks of the Vaigai [Madurai] for a holy dip refrained from entering the water because they found the water made impure by the flowers and sandal paste strewn about therein by indiscrete (and indiscreet) lovers who bathed in the river" (N.Subrahmanian 1989:23).

25 In one of the unsolved aspects of Dumont's work, he demonstrated that the "Dravidian" kinship system, unlike most in north India, entailed marriage as its fundamental "expression" (of alliance), and operated by reference to kinship idioms alone, independent of "caste" construed as a hierarchical and systemic principle (1957). The pieces have not been put together again; the king's gaze helps to explain why, despite the fact that "the south is different" at least in the structures of kinship and marriage, the caste hierarchy has been so historically severe - precisely *where kingship reigned* (the delta bias was a political fact as well as being a perceptive mistake). For another discussion of the kingly inflection on kinship patterns, see Trautmann 1981.

26 The *Thirukkural* (*cf.*, esp. 781-830) expostulates at length against "alliance", preferring "friendship"; this seems to be part of kingly ideology's fulminations against chiefly *palaiyams* in general. It also longingly observes that "[t]hat is a kingdom where there are not many (disloyal) associations, destructive internal dissensions and disturbing murderous chieftains" (735) - these three evils map on to three south Indian political ecologies, respectively: the delta *mirasidari* corporations, the mixed-zone and its *karnam-patel* collusions, and finally, the sovereign *palaiyams*.

they needed to learn some basic values of Hinduism, which, "societalized" (as Inden suggested but did not historicize as itself a product of state formation), was based on Brahmanical notions of purity.[27] All this was a far cry from their erstwhile populist alliances when, as polegars, they were not parts of a territorially consolidated State.

Is it the principle of the Brahmin, though, which of its own accord is the engine of this transformation? The ideology of the non-Brahmin movement in the 1920s and 1930s proposed that it was. Consider, however, the case of "Temple Entry" into the Minaksi temple in Madurai, which in 1939 rather famously transpired without immediate violence. The next day the temple priests locked the temple up, demanding a purification ceremony and going on strike, with the support of many of the high-caste non-Brahmins.[28] In fact, "Harijan" entry was no assault on the logic of Brahmanical priestly prerogative at all. The distinction between priests and devotees did not change at all. The crush was apparently felt by the high status devotees, who feared losing the prerogatives of their rank within the mass of all temple devotees.[29] That the priests rushed to oppose the Entry suggests that to a great extent they effectively understood that *kings* (in the colonial version of their decapitation: dominant castes) buttered their bread, and so they were *necessarily* involved in differentially recognizing the gradients of power in terms of rank, hence structurally subordinate to the not-so disjunctive sphere of *artha*.[30]

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27 Here Fuller's analysis (1989) is crucial: the "orthodox" ideology of the Brahmins did not think in terms of untouchability - that sprung from their *absolutized* notion of purity, whose articulation did not suppose dependence on its symbolic and negated opposite. The *varna* model of *purusa* posits the Brahmin as the head, which cannot see *itself*. They knew not what they did.

28 Including P.T. Rajan, a Justice Party minister whose original wealth came from lands around Uthamapalaiyam in Cumbum Valley, made spectacularly valuable after the Periyar water project. The non-Brahmin party paper, *Justice*, proposed that "[f]or many centures these peoples, most of whom until recently were Animists, were content to worship at their own shrines, and to try to force themselves into Hindu temples is not... to make themselves popular. Nor can we think that any grave wrong is due to their continued exclusion... they would be better occupied in improving their own condition than in a violent attempt to assert rights which no one had heard of until a few years ago" (in Hutton 1963:203).

29 For an account of the Entry, see Fuller 1984:109,116-28. He notes the contribution on this point of Dumont, whose analysis, as usual, is brilliant: after the Temple Entry Acts were passed, "a sort of puritan reaction by vegetarians established itself in Madras...; prohibition on sacrificing animals in the immediate vicinity of the great temples, as the meat-eating castes were wont to do;... finally... *prohibiting by law animal* [blood] *sacrifices in general* (and so *even in the private worship of a locality, a caste or kinship group*)" (1980:230-31*). He goes on to propose that this is a symptom of the "substantialist" thinking of "a modern mentality" - "a totalitarian mentality". This is a peculiar transformation of the gaze, which demands that the impure *cease* to exist. In a sense, this is a return to the "good King" which does not want "bad practices" to prevail; however, the purity paradigm is now so entrenched that this becomes more or less a legislation whose *object* is, so to speak, "the fifth" - which is hence acknowledged.

30 Srinivas reported the following case from Rampura: the village headman, who gave a lot to the village temple and was active in management, refused to enter the *sanctum sanctorium* of the temple while urging Brahmin devotees to stand there while *puja* was performed. Srinivas was surprised since the headman could have entered; nobody would have prevented him; "certainly not the Brahmin priest, who was heavily dependent upon him." He interprets this as evidence that the exclusion of Harijans from the temple does not mean their exclusion from the "village"; after all, even the headman is excluded. The "meaning of exclusion and inclusion in the traditional system" is therefore different than proposed by the "new ethical system" which opposes Harijan exclusion (*cf.* 1975:73-4).

The conditions for hierarchy representing itself through the figure of the priestly Brahmin depends on the mode of political formation. In the other versions of the Brahmin, both as *mirasidar* and as *karnam*, the effective function of service, as "agents" to the King is essential. This convocation of the Brahmins' worldly positions and interests within state structures is essential in that it erodes Dumont's model into a practical soil rather less idealist than pure "ideology" and "cultural values" - in his case, the idea that "purity" is the ultimate social capital. "Untouchability", the central issue here, seems a category almost entirely created through the conditions of state processes. It was as the king's agents, i.e., as "positions" in the structure of deferred powers that constituted a kingdom, that Brahmins were participants in the blinding reversal of the King's gaze, using the same discourse. It just so happened that these positions were disproportionately "Brahmanical" in the 19th century. This use of Brahmins as agents, or accountants, judges, officials of any sort, had appeared before as a re-doubling move within the sacrificial economy of high Hindu kingship, allowing the obligatory "gifts to Brahmins" to be fulfilled largely via State patronage of this sort, rather than an outright expense. Paradoxically, it was only with such economizing moves that Hindu kingship could find the conditions for its own enduring possibility - its material security, strength, and on occasions its significant territorial extension and expansion. In effect, the King's gaze supervised, invisibly and however complexly, an exchange relation with the Brahmin - the vaunted "Indian gift" (*cf.* Parry 1986). It was doubly difficult, however, for a King to control agents when they were Brahmins, who thus usually had their hands in the pie of the "locality", and made relevant alliances when necessary with other influential village-level leaders to protect their really little kingdoms, as zones of contradiction, from the possibly virtuous intentions and sights of the King's gaze. To do this they fed him back his discourse, "there is no fifth" - this time as the denial that Dumont proposes. As Kautilya observed long ago: "All beings are pleased by the gift of sweet words. Hence only sweet words should be spoken. Where is poverty in words?" (Kautilya 113).[31]

I think Srinivas fails to speculate that the headman in fact won't enter because the key here for him is to keep exclusion going, and to do this he must make a strategic (pseudo-) sacrifice of his own ultimate capacities in order to keep the reins on others. There is a *world* of difference here between people being excluded and people choosing to stay outside; in this case that is not just the simple platitude it always is, but also serves the headman as a strategy. The Harijans are unable to even have a strategy in respect of the village temple, since they lack what de Certeau describes as a "proper" *vis-a-vis* their possible desire to enter the temple. In this case, just as in Minaksi, it is precisely the dominant caste(s) that are likely to control the *tempo* of the Brahmanical principle.

[31] "Those who wish to acquire loveable urbanity will knowingly swallow even the poison served", advises the *Thirukkural* (580).

Territoriality: en récherche de l'éspace perdu.

> "The transition between the 'rhetoric of the religio-politico-moral conceptions of kingship' to their implementation and realization in historical circumstances ... is ... made through the cosmological topography of the polity."
> - Tambiah (1980:102)

In 1969, Madras state was re-named Tamil Nadu, thereby enshrining a sense borrowed from the lexicon of territorial terms. As for myself, all I want to be is a naked thing that flame devours.[1] Dumont, I assume, would consider this a modern phenomenon, one of "the territorial conceptions which are bred in us by the existence of nations" (1980:154, and *cf.* pp.225-34).[2] For him, this is an abrupt change, as the elementary structure of the caste system is articulated through "the ideology [which] ignores territory as such" (*ibid.*, p.154).

In fact, the claim that "*nadu*" is itself an expression constituted by a relation to spatiality is contested. This may be a legacy of Durkheim, who urged that all "categories" of thought be construed as "expressions" of the principles of (the expressing) social organization.[3] As a result of this method, Dumont's above claim is made[4], which prompts the inevitable question: who speaks "the" ideology? A critical

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1 Only ashes can get out of this cage of words.

2 It is unclear why the "modernity" of the nation-state must have such a homogeneous impact when it is more or less imposed. Nehru, speaking after the Partition massacres, declaimed against those who felt that the Government was too appeasement oriented to Muslims; the language is instructive: "This, of course, is complete nonsense. There is no question of weakness or appeasement. We have a Muslim minority who are so large in *numbers* that they cannot, even if they wanted to, *go anywhere else*. They have got to live in India. That is a basic *fact* about which there can be no argument" (cited in Mitra 1990:96n45*). The language invokes space, and does so in relation to people on the level of "fact", not value. Insofar as the categories of the modern nation-state emerge in this, I think it reflects the de-valuation of territoriality, rather than its "modern" emergence in discourse (as Dumont would suppose).

3 "[S]pace is not the vague and indetermined medium which Kant imagined; if purely and absolutely homogeneous, it would be of no use, and could not be grasped by the mind... That is to say that space could not be what it is if it were not, like time, divided and differentiated. But whence come these divisions which are so essential? By themselves there are neither right nor left, up nor down, north nor south, etc. All these distinctions evidently come from the fact that different sympathetic values have been attributed to various regions." Although this proposition from Durkheim (1965:11) seems salutory in outline, it fails to bring back into play the idea under discussion: space. Ideas about the differentiations of space (and their social valorization) will presumably differ according to the location of a *perspective*. From *where* does one imagine space? For Durkheim, a unitary and more or less transcendental "social" grasps space uniformly, differentiates it according to a model of itself (the social), and then *expresses* this latter product. Mauss in fact modified this, acknowledging the spatial particularities of the consciousnesses in which this representation occurs (1969, v.3:161), but maintained the fiction of a unified society. One is left with the rhetoric of temporal dimension and spatial metaphor, an echo of Said's (via Schopenhauer) will and representation. "Did it start with Bergson or before? Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" (Foucault, in Soja 1989:10). In the case of the Tamil country, the empirical problem is substantial given that the language (and its categories and concepts: e.g., *nadu*) is shared over a diversity of political formations (*cf.* Leach 1964).

4 Bougle had earlier formulated a similar claim, that as opposed to "territorially based" feudal society, caste works against local groupings; it is "the superior authority of the Brahman, deriving from sources quite other than

advance might possibly be made by inquiring into the opinions of those unprivileged members of society: the non-Brahmin, non-royal people, in short, those whose response to and use of such a pervasive ideology might belie, on the level of tactics anyway, the official "ignorance". Another option, given the existence of sovereign political formations quite literally *outside* the delta-centric kingdoms, is to assert that "the ideology" regnant in those areas was in fact different - and for the simple reason that they were different societies. The people of the dry zone spoke the same language as those of the deltas, but they may not have said the same things. The various interpretations of *nadu* may be better understood in that light, refracted by spatiality itself, rather than as a lumpen-object of methodological and theoretical debate.[5]

Nadus [or *natus*], argues Stein, were "peasant micro-regions" and "the enduring and basic units of south Indian peasant society" (1980:13). Immediately there arises a difficulty in the material itself. *Nadu* was also used to refer both to substantial areas (such as all of Kongunad [now Coimbatore District]) and to local collections of villages which formed the sort of "micro-regions" alluded to by Stein. The larger units were re-named *mandalams* at a point of Chola paramountcy[6], although the smaller units continued with their designation as *nadu*. Structures of polity are thus crucial determinants of the semantic matrix of the term, and these structures varied from area to area, depending on the degree (and hence the mode) of incidence of the official kingly polity on local populations. Following the typology so far constructed, there were three general types of formation:

1) the deltaic *mirasidari* tracts, central to the kingdom but able to deflect the King's gaze;

2) the mixed-zone, more directly under kingship;

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the possession of land, [which] must decentralize the whole system and limit the normal consequences of the Rajput baron's [e.g., Kshatriya's] authority" (1971:65).

5 For example, Leach notes that stable *gumlao* communities appear to be "those in which lineage is virtually neglected and loyalty to a particular place is emphasized instead", a place which is represented by the fiction of common clanship (1964:205-6). It is important to note that here space is expressed in a kinship metaphor, not the reverse. Leach also notes that the *gumlao* demand for a fixed territorial centre is best served by "a patch of *irrigated* rice terraces" (*ibid.*, p.204*); this, however, is precisely what they cannot have, unless they become Shan - in which case spatiality is represented in a property idiom, returning the rhetoric of clanship to that of ranked lineages. The language may sound the same, but its meanings depend on *who* you are - therefore on *where* you are. Incidentally, Leach starts his book with an account of a 1930s witness giving evidence indicating that for the past 70 years he had considered his family as having been simultaneously Kachins and Shans [1964:2]. Also, the various definitions of *mung* held by various groups in Burma, from Shan state to "chief's domain" to adminstrative circle [by the British] resonate with the differentiations within *nadu*.

6 Stein contends that *mandalams* were "broad, instituted political units the Cholas used for geographical reference and little else" (1984:263). I would say that it was an imperial term, regardless of the efficacy of political control; re-naming has generally been a formative process of state formation (or change in ruling elite) throughout south Indian history. "Districts" are an example, and so is *mirasi* (vs. Tamil: *kaniyatchi*).

3) the dry-zone *palaiyams*, formations with their own structural sovereignty *vis-a-vis* kingship itself, and hence somewhere over the horizon of the King's gaze.

Spatiality is all important: the dry zones were, so to speak, beyond the horizing of the King's gaze, while the deltaic communities were able to deflect the gaze. Both cases were *entirely* a product of political power. In the delta, the figure of the Brahmin disembedded the connection between human relations and territoriality. The King, then, although his optative gaze was shut off from determining the former, was able to establish a skeletal polity which left the *nadu* as a de-politicized territorial concept. Political space, meanwhile, was circumscribed by sanctified islands of *mirasi*, whose boundaries were as protected as those of a paddy field - whose ritual protections were themselves emanations of the same de-territorialized political space. As will be suggested, that is the opposite of the inflection of *nadu* in the dry chiefly zone, where the term is heavily determined by idioms of territorial kinship, and not defined by spatial borders. In the order listed above, then, I will discuss the variations in the immanence of the concept "*nadu*".

1. *Nadus*, in the deltaic heartland of empires, were unit areas of administration, whose boundaries were set at the points of political balance between "inside" powers and the state's ability to achieve direct rule; inversely, the state as a structure was construed as something "outside", as suggested by one of the senses of *nadu*: middle, or centre (*cf.* Pandian 1987:94). This is the ("republican"?) perspective of the elite of the locality. Temples often emerged to mark and to resolve the volatile balance between the King and the powers of the local centres, providing a language of negotiation and effectively a covert unification of interests. This resulted in the promotion of the Brahmanical style of hierarchy as both local powers (e.g., *nattars*, *mirasidar* corporations) and the royal office sought to proclaim sovereignty by endowing the temples; sovereignty being tantamount to the successful gift of land, and Brahmins being the ideal recipients of gifts. The temple, with Brahmanical authority, distributed "honours" (*mariyatai*), a term whose literal meaning intertwines with the notion of "boundary" (Dirks 1987:210). By pursuing these honours, which derive from the King's language of rule deferred through the figure of the Brahmin, the local elites conceded the spatial nuance of the term "*nadu*" as paramount; in exchange they represented the maintenance of the boundaries of the area - an area which they dominated, and could now control as a local *empire*.[7]

For the objects of this domination whose invisible labour produced the productive wherewithal for this alliance to work, i.e., the untouchables, the idiom of their subjugation was also spatial: here they should live in residential *ceeris* outside of

[7] See Wink (1986:158) on a generally similar structure in the Maratha Svarajya: "[i]f we can say that an empire existed, it 'existed' on the local level."

the "clean" villagers' *gramam* or *uurs*. This spatial exteriorization dictated impurity itself, just as the ritual tasks of these groups also involved them in a perpetual crossing of "social" boundaries, thus casting them as always disorderly, "uncivilized", and punishably so. Although their dominators were the local elites, it was the spatialization of the term *nadu*, a function of the King's arrangement with the deltas, which governed the idiom and form of their subjugation. It is then perhaps permissible to understand the root *tin*, which designates "stretch of land" (Singaravelu 1966:18), as the archaeological metaphor deployed in the root *tinda*, "pollution"[8]: untouchables should not *cross* defined spaces. Deltaic *nadus* were localities - spaces fixed as points - in which property represented power; denied property, untouchables were denied space, but in order to go to work they had to cross these dominated spaces, and each crossing was a transgression of their purity. Returning to Dumont's claim, the ideology's ignoring of territoriality "as such" appears to be an orchestrated concatenation of the elites' strategy to look at the figure of the Brahmin, gifts to whom were affirmations of sovereignty. Territoriality's repression returns in the stigma of untouchability, which the ideology also denies and ignores.

2. In the mixed-zone, kingship managed to have more direct determination over the fabric of local society. One result of this was that the ideological clause which enjoined that "there is no fifth" had a higher degree of plausible implementation. Caste-communities were given *inam* lands to bind them to the King, who thereby established himself as the sovereign of all the land without the compromises necessary in the delta. At the same time, the kingdom had to be mapped, and this involved a structure of delegated authority which, as Dirks points out, entailed the political inflection of kinship: the appointment of certain lineage groups with concessionary rights over land in exchange for obligatory provision of military support. The leaders of these groups were enveloped in the half-fictive idiom of kinship which mobilized courtly ritual and exchange. In this sense, the King deployed the idiom of *pangu*, or "shares", to spread his sovereignty more securely over the domain. Agrarian production was considered as a sort of frontier science, concessions being promised to those who undertook to develop irrigation tanks and other facilities. This strategy of revenue-concessions forced an elaboration of property rights that the *palaiyam* hinterlands did not need. By "elaboration", I mean the embedding of produce rights within the *political* structure of the kingdom. In this regard, the notion of *pattam* was emphasized as a security or title to the means of production, defined as the land itself. If the principle of *pangu* prevailed in the distribution of the sovereign office, the

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8 Moffatt defines *tiiNDaamai* as a term which in Chingleput "labels the idea of untouchability in the personal sense" (1979:xvi).

principle of *pattam* acquired a notion of "sovereignty" as well[9], implying that *pattam*-holders were bound to kingship in exchange for the promise of security for their economic *assets*. In short, peasant farmers of all sorts were bound directly in relations to the King at the centre whose ultimate idiom was a dyadic bond; *mirasidar* blocs did not intervene *spatially* in that relation. Instead, pattadars shared that bond, and *inam* grants were made to integrate the various caste communities.

The *nadus* were again, from the point of view of royal ideology, units of administrative area, whose governance devolved on kin. Those kin in turn constructed that space as a unit of endogamy, which leads to the conundrum that has surrounded the term *nadu*. Dirks, referring to Pudukkottai, observes that the "royal Kallars" were "grouped into territorially based endogamous subcastes called natu [*nadu*], a word which means social group in a marked sense but in an unmarked sense means territory or country" (1987:.206). This ambiguity was not practically relevant in Pudukkottai, however, as the dominant Kallar operated the term *nadu* as the unit/region of endogamy (*ibid.*, p.256), and hence as tantamount to their subcaste. This is complemented by the fact that the Pudukkottai Kallars (unlike the Pramalai Kallar of western Madurai), took the lineage as the unit of exogamy (*ibid.*, p.256). It is precisely the segmentation of sovereignty into constituent delegates of the King's kin that valorized the notion of *nadu* here, and the King's agents adopted it as the geographical boundary of their marriage alliances.[10] As the Pudukkottai Raja's Kallar kin were representatives of sovereignty, the ambivalence between whether *nadu* was an expression of kinship or a political space was not an issue: the dominance was the same.

For the non-dominant castes, however, the case was different. On this matter, Dirks systematically notes that the usage of the category "*nadu*" by other caste-groups in Pudukkottai refers to the same topographical divisions as the dominant Kallar. The Valaiyars, a low but not untouchable caste in Pudukkottai, had vague notions of social organization around their own *nadus*, but could not name them and their practice exhibited no particular relation to those forms.[11] For the untouchable Pallars and

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9 Some untouchables today use the term *pattam* to refer to some past "kingdom" which was once theirs. I suggest that this is their memory of having once had lands (or, more importantly, royally guaranteed access to the specified share of the harvest they produced on what, ultimately, were the King's gifted lands); they did not "share" in ruling (which required some form of kinship), but they did interpret their *pattam* as a "share" of the kingdom.

10 They would also have certain elite marriages with the Raja's personal "*nadu*" as well, but not with each other. With each other they would compete for status and honours, in the forum of the King's presence. In this sense, Dirks is certainly right to criticize Dumont's interpretation of Tamil kinship as a system which is insulated from political factors. However, if there were no kingship, i.e., in another sovereign formation, the politics of kinship would not have a royal arbiter, and might be best seen as a matter between lineages - in which, to modify Dumont, the idea of the "caste" would substitute for the political territory of the *nadu* (e.g., in Pudukkottai); the Pramalai Kallar do not equate the (territorial) *nadu* with any fixed kinship pattern.

11 *Cf.* Dirks 1987: 270-73. The Valaiyars tended to live in their own settlements, and, while hardly politically powerful, managed to keep "some control over their own social forms." They were often forced to de-forest new lands in pace with the extension of cultivation in the kingdom, a pattern not uncommon to "tribal" groups. Dirks

Paraiyars, however, there was a clear division into "endogamous and territorially named and situated subcastes (natus)" (*ibid.*, p.273); these *nadus*, however, were exactly those of the dominant Kallars which, observes Dirks,

> "suggests the limited nature of the natu as a territorial unit except in so far as it creates an identity between the untouchables and the natu of the dominant caste lineage or village under which they serve" (*ibid.*, p.274).

In this ethnographic scenario, there are strong inklings of a "*jajmani*" system, given the stress on "service." Indeed, it is precisely in these cases where something like *jajmani* would have operated: in mixed-zone agriculture under direct kingship.

There arose another form of the accidental results of royal ideology, which set out to secure political dominion by protecting certain property as *inam* and following the ideal "ordering of the four castes." The local elites, kin and agents of the Rajah, converted the royal *inam* "gift" into a service contract. Compounded by the increasing Sanskritism of kingly ritual, dominant villagers wanted tasks done to fulfill the demands of purity; it is precisely as sharers in sovereignty that this was called for, as they had to emulate the figure of the King. In order to maintain their status as local *replicas* of the King, as the notion of kinship demanded, the spatial nuance of *nadu* was accepted. This led to a structuralist paradise wherein the segmentary structure of space in the King's territory led to the proliferation of escalating Brahmanical ritual. "Village service" shifted from a sort of political contract to the assumption by weak groups of degrading tasks, those associated with death and excrement. The originary sovereignty of the *pattams* was converted into the hierarchical subordination of tenure conditional upon the performance of ritual "service"[12]; insofar as these were "village" services, the sovereignty achieved by the giving of *inam* was being transferred, *de facto*, to the local elite.

In this way, the transition from ideology to implementation of royal ideology led directly into a spatialization of the term *nadu* which, backhandedly, led to the idiom for social relations to free itself from superficial royal strictures and take root in the hierarchical model of purity. Yet insofar as the King was more "present" in these non-deltaic domains, his gaze could never be surely kept out. There were fewer untouchable groups in those mixed-zone areas, and they were not as absolutely contained by the spatial closure of the deltaic "republics." The story of the Paraiyar flight from one Kallar *nadu* to another is an example of their tactical relation to and

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notes that they had little notions of the relative status of their *nadus*, and ritual status was largely played out on the level of the lineage (*karai*). This indicates again the role of territoriality and dominance in determining the domain where the structure of "status" and "purity" is enacted.

12 Dirks writes that "[m]ost Pallar and Paraiyar informants, when asked about the meaning of the term kaniyatci, responded that it meant the right (urimai) to render service to a particular family or a village." He also notes that both groups also refer to *kaniyatci* rights as *pattiyam* [claim, *right of possession*, and also: connection, affinity, relationship] (*cf.* Dirks 1987:275).

use of the ambiguity in the concept *nadu*, an ambiguity which the Kallar agents of state, precisely in order to retain their share of the royal office, had to accept.

3. In the dry "polegar" hinterland, such as the Dindigul country, which was an autonomous formation, the King's gaze had no *place*. As a result, the rhetoric of space must have been different. How did the term *nadu* operate? Dumont claimed that for the Kallar of western Madurai, the *nadu* was "the basic element of political organization ... a kinship grouping named after its topographical container... Territory does not become an absolute category" (1986:183). This view, much criticized by Dirks, is appropriate for a domain which was not subjected to a consolidated state regime. It is the very absence of that state structure which appears in the Kallar's map of "their" *nadu*, in which only Kallar settlements figure; it is not an aerial map which homogenizes space and, in so doing, separates out an autonomous "social" which would be the structuring principle of an area's inhabitants.

It is precisely because of the non-fixity of the topography of the land outside of the King's gaze that people such as the Kallar put so much of *themselves* into their spatial notions. It is almost as if there were a struggle to colonize that space with their dominance. Insofar as that dominance was not institutionalized through the state of kingship, that space remained inflected by the "ethnocentric" ideals of the speaking group, of which there were more than one. It is also precisely because of the "inability" to authoritatively define space - to close it - that the Kallar, and other groups of the area, found no reason to stress the lineage as the fundamental unit of exogamy, nor the *nadu* as the appropriate geographical polity of endogamy, as the royal Kallars of Pudukkottai did. Instead, notions of "caste" emerged to counter the territorial inflection of *nadu* as its operative principle, i.e., as the envelope in which marriage may occur. This complements Dumont's early claims about Tamil kinship, that its "structure" does not implicate notions of hierarchy, which must then come from some other source.[13]

Tamil marriage rules generally prescribe (classificatory) cross-cousin marriage, and a principle of alternative exchange which may bind lineages together in a symmetrical way. Generally, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage has been taken as the norm, but this, as Trautmann noted, is just one form within the matrix of Tamil possibilities, the one which most adheres to the north Indian and Sanskritic ideal of *kanyadana*, "the gift of a virgin" (1981:201-4; *cf.* also Trawick 1990, ch.4).[14] The

[13] It comes as a ramification of kingship and the King's gaze in the "transition" and "implementation", as Tambiah says, of the royal ideology onto the "cosmological topography"; in other words, it comes in relation to a particular type of state formation and is political. This is a development of the embryonic view implied by Dumont's ethnography - a view lost in Dumont's own "transition" from the Pramalai Kallar to the theory propounded in *Homo Hierarchicus*.

[14] Trautmann also points out that there is an "arbitrary male orientation" in most representations of Tamil kinship: "It is from the male's point of view that the *matrilateral* cross cousin (MBD) acquires a name; but to that person the male in question is her *patrilateral* cross cousin (FZS) and vice versa" (1981:201).

latter ideal is based on an imaginary equation between giving one's daughter and performing a sacrifice with no expectation of a return; any "exchange" is less sacred, and hence less prestigious - in short, this is a fundamental "atom of dogmatism" (*cf.* Bougle 1971:136) of the assymetrical structure commonly associated with "the caste system." Here it is crucial to observe, as Dumont did, that the lineage was not the fundamental unit of exogamy for the Kallar and, it would seem, most of their neighbours west of Madurai. This suggests, unsurprisingly, that lineage structures emerged in emphasized forms when there was fixed property to transmit, be it "real" or "symbolic." Polegar society offered few such fixities. The difficulty which Dumont had with the relation between the categories of space (*nadu*) and kinship (alliance) is very likely bound up with the historical prevalence of a bilateral norm: in short, the non-dominance of the matrilateral option. This interpretation is again supported by the non-integration of Brahmins into the marriage rites of the people of Madurai.

Written in the unpleasant Weberian register of "lack", "failure", and "deficiency", the failure of the King and state to enclose all land and population under in its ideal subjection entailed the lack of a transcendent representation of territoriality as mere space through which to administer an abstracted civil society. This deficiency, expressed in the dry zone, led to the intensification of "caste" categories at the same time as it set kinship and alliance within a rubric not governed by notions of encompassment, purity, and hierarchy... In the cultural practice of the *palaiyams*, the category *"jati"* was one of structural equivalence, designating groups of equal semantic significance; opposition was diacritical and not encompassed by a superior value. The same held true for territorial spaces, which could not be the bases for ranking practices. The unity of plunder, in which the subject *nadus* of the kingdom were the target, would sporadically provide practical oppositional representations of an encompassing unity; otherwise, relations between caste-groups were intensely political and competitive, with physical valour and domination standing in as the right stuff of symbolic capital. The *jallikattu* deferred this into an expression in game form. As in such a polity there would be no category of person figured as "untouchable", there is no answer to the non-question of how "they" would perceive and use the term *nadu*.[15] Perhaps "they" would complete the circle and define *nadu*

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[15] There is one other approach to this question. albeit rather speculative. Singaravelu suggests that in old Tamil country there were traditional networks of paths along which bardic and dancing troupes travelled from settlement to settlement for the purpose of "gift-barter." (I suppose he means they facilitated communications of goods and words between areas.) Chieftains of various settlements would have been very interested in playing hosts to the bardic travellers, not just for their entertainment value, but for their usefulness in promoting gift barter. As a poem from the *Porunararruppatai* tells: "The fisherfolk sing hillmen's songs, while the hillmen wear garlands of fragrant blooms of the coast" (*cf.* Singaravelu 1966:52-3). If this is plausible, then it is interesting to note that these travelling entertainers were very likely to be "untouchable", just as thespian groups have been in Korea and Japan. Not only would they be "untouchable", but they would be the very incarnation of boundary-crossers, people who did not honour, indeed could not honour, the inviolability of the thresholds of (political) space. As a

as both a territorial term and an expression of their own kinship group, meaning "centre" - a centre without a space, and hence without exclusion.

The optative discourse, "there is no fifth", experiences a moment of reversal. Considered as a text, the clause can be located within political topography. The specific points at which the text becomes a (reversible) discourse can be seen as the borderlines of a *locality*. There has been much comment on the "localism" of south Indian society, as if kinship and social tradition were the fixed forces constituting the extension of human life, an extension imagined to occur regardless of official political intention. To correct this, a locality can be re-conceived in the form of a political shadow. The degree of spatial inclusiveness of a locality would depend on many factors, some of them ecological and demographic, others a contingency of kingly desire, and some dependent on the will and capacity for organization and "collusion" amongst the government's "agents" and other powerful figures in the countryside (*cf.* Frykenberg 1963,1965). The main symptomatic feature which traces the shadow of a "locality", however, is the *reversal* of the ideal discourse (meaning royal discourse): the backward glance of power.

In respect to this image of the locality, the colonial imposition effects a drastic change, in a sense a turning inside-out of the usual royal inflections. Munro's *raiyatwari* system was envisioned and argued for as his plan for reform, for creating something of what is now called a "liberal" society, for helping the "common man" by freeing him from the *zamindar's* clutches as in the Permanent Settlement.[16] It was far from effective, regardless of whether it was ever intended to be so. Nonetheless, Munro's ideology was clearly that both the State and the peasant would gain by the elimination of intermediaries. Intermediaries were all tax-farmers and illicit leaders to Munro, excess baggage of a bureaucratized old regime as he saw it. Chief-figures of *palaiyams* that simply did not actually pay revenue to larger Kings were seen as interlopers into some un-natural anarchy, rather than personas who performed

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further example of this possibility, the Tamil grammarian Tolkappiyam suggested that minstrel Panar, also apparently "untouchable", were ideally fit for being messengers of love - as they had access to the inner apartments of the houses of all classes (*cf.* Kailasapathy 1968:96). However, just as in the east Asian analogies, these people were hardly subject to agrestic servitude, landlessness, and domination, which I think is the relevant issue. (It is one which is practically the inverse, since dominating labour requires their enclosure within the spatial domain of that domination; what good are slaves if your neighbour and rival has all of them?)

16 Munro scorned the idea of Permanent Settlement: "It seems extraordinary that it should ever have been conceived that a Country could be as much benefited by giving up a share of the public rent to a small class of the zamindars *who do not actually exist* as by giving it to the ryot, from whom the rent is derived." The issue, he thought, was one of the mode of distributing remissions, and the *zamindar*, as "a kind of contractor", could "remit nothing to them [the raiyats] without loss to himself and he will therefore keep their rent as high as ever as long as he can. The zamindar undertakes to pay every year exactly the same amount of public revenue *to relieve the public servants from the fatique of thinking about it, and to settle with the ryot in such a manner that Gov't shall never hear anything about them.*" (Extract of letter from Munro to BOR, 15 August 1807; v.8866:120-28*). Munro grasped the structure of the gaze in this remark; however, one must ask what sort of beings did he imagine the telfsildar, and all the "agents" of the revenue department, would be?

integrative functions for peoples and spaces *outside* of old regime kingdoms. Ideally, the elimination of intermediaries of whatever ilk would effectuate a radical end to the very notion of "locality" as it has been set up here. Some form of mutant "citizenship" with no tax-farming would posit the cultivating *raiyat* as having an appointed position as *his own* "king's agent", so to speak. It is with this aspect of Munro's idealism that one can best assess the relation between Munro's self-concept in a 1782 letter to his mother - "I am a great Castle Builder" (in Stein 1989:13) - and the fact that he was the most strident opponent of the established political figures of the rural dry districts, the symbols of those spaces' autonomous formations, the "polegars." He ordered the wholesale destruction of their many *palaiyams*, or forts. In theory, he wanted a bigger and better Castle, while in practice he destroyed any diminutive version thereof, any bit of architecture which would detract from the glory of his Castle: from which could emanate an uninterrupted, unmediated, and effective King's gaze.

Munro was effectively an ardent reader of texts such as Kautilya's or Manu's or any which set out to instruct the King in Indian realpolitik. The *raiyatwari* system was in a sense a radical re-figuring of the entire tradition of State-liness in south India: both in its "solution" to the age-old plaguing problem (of agents, *qua* intermediaries), and in its achievement of the un-mediated extension of the King's gaze. In another sense, it was the same aspiration as ever. Its apparent design was to be both, i.e., to make it work. Munro argued that all the local quasi-polities were spurious, monstrous aberrations due to the depredations of Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan. They had nothing to do with anything but local despotism and illegitimacy; indeed, the political construct of the locality was precisely the object of attack. In this sense, he was reading them as "evil ministers" of ex-Kings. He did not flinch at setting up his plea for the *raiyatwari* settlement in terms of pseudo-historical arguments to justify his cause as within the keeping of native traditions - i.e., the "real" ones. Hence he conceived of the polegars as ex-agents of ex-rulers, rather than as the figureheads, ever-shifting in their immanence, of a formation un-versed in the discourse of "oriental despotism." The irony is that, often with Munro's strategic acquiescence, many of these local powers were invested with *zamindari* rights under the Permanent Settlement, which initially covered up to 40% of what was becoming the Madras Presidency. This in fact turned them into agents for the King, de facto revenue farmers. The royally unincorporated territories of south India, which were the rising paradigm of political society, were suddenly "localities."

Previously they had not been, as they were not seen by blind Kings' gazes. With their own political structure, generally based on a much less stable agricultural base, and hence less able to tie servants to the land, or excessively dominate their constituent parts, the polegar territories were suddenly trapped on a map. In

consolidating its holdings, colonial rule made them localities on the spot, then rushed to protect the local big-men, as *zamindars*, luring them into the practices of backward glancing. In this way, it is ridiculous to argue that the colonial state did not "penetrate" much into the locality, as those defendants of the "limited Raj" seem to suppose.

The "locality" to which one can refer is constructed as the obverse of the territorial articulation of the King's gaze and its practical blindfolds. In constructing localities, any kingly power, including the colonial one as a mutant form, effectively creates a zone of contradiction - the point of reversal of the royal discourse, a reversal which seems silent in its tonal slip from the optative to the descriptive, from the ideal to the dominating representation. Colonial rulers, just as kings before, lamented the imperfect implementation of their ideals, their "rules", but this seems largely to have served rhetorically as a further incitement to their imagined mandate(s). The classical version of Hindu Kingship warns constantly of the fickleness of (the sovereign) power's *own* agents; this seems appropriate if paradoxical. Colonial discourse's crucial innovation on this lies in the insistence that it is an obstinate *social* base that prevents the success of its rule; this functioned as a mandate throughout, particularly in the form developed especially for the days of high imperialism, when the constant chatter was about the incapacity in India for "self-government." This innovation separated the "social" from its vital spatiality; henceforth territory was to be unambiguously owned, and space was the expression and not the cause of a (revenue) map.[17] If untouchability often emerged from precisely such an operation of spatial closure, here was the final solution. In this case, the foreign-ness of the colonial government is profound, for as stolid empiricists they only knew that "the fifth" existed, especially in the deltas, and as from another place, were in no position to understand, let alone speak, that optative enunciation which denied and prohibited "the fifth (*varna*)."

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[17] The Durkheimian idea of space as an expression fixed by the social (see note) reached a hollow apogee in the striated colonial revenue map. "Royal science only tolerates and appropriates perspective if it is static, subjected to a central black hole divesting it of its heuristic and ambulatory capacities" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986:24).

Speech and Textual Economy.

> Contestation does not imply a generalized negation, but an affirmation that affirms nothing, a radical break of transitivity."
>
> - Michel Foucault, *A Preface to Transgression.*

Acts of language co-exist, often hazardously, with the metaphor of visuality pervading such idioms as those of "gaze" and "space". In this section, I want to discuss a few scenarios of discourse which manifest parallels to many features seen in the structure of the kingly gaze; by dint of their phonic aspect, these moments of discourse appear to the western mind as temporalized, which will allow some facilities for the speculative reconstruction of, to steal Hegel's term, subjects "who knew what they were and what they wanted" (1988:4).

The optative modelling of the statement that "there is no fifth" relied on a notion of reversible discourse which in turn provided the sandy foundations for a spatial formulation of zones of contradiction - localities - within a kingly polity. As an exercise, that modelling indicated several things. Firstly, Dumont's model in *Homo Hierarchicus* is in many ways the view of the dominant elite, and *not* the Brahmin, contrary to Berreman's perhaps unfelicitous phraseology.[1] This re-introduces the notion of power and its modes, mediums, and mediations. Secondly, to render these ordnances usable, the classic injunctions from the "great tradition" (of kingship) can be transformed into "texts", thus opening their margins to the *multiple* discursivities which they allow, reflect, and express. One primary axis is that of the *reversibility* of certain figures of discourse, such as that prohibition of (the recognition of) "the fifth." This impelled the third idea, that these instances of reversal can be used as a key to determining the structures of south Indian polities through a

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1 If anything, the sociological models proposed in *Homo Hierarchicus* are *too radical* in their notion of power. Liberated from the context of ritual/cultural "values" (and freed precisely by the content and language of those values: "encompassed"), power becomes practically arbitrary. In fact, the only meaningful relation *artha* has with *dharma* is that those who presume to rule must participate in sacrifices, and sacrifices softened from some fictionally originary violence to a more gift-like relation in which Brahmins are atop a series of assymetrical exchange relations. Dumont writes: "[s]o far as the *varnas* are concerned, he who rules in a stable way, and places himself under the Brahman, is a Kshatriya... the function is related to force" (1980:74). The translator makes a note to indicate that Dumont means "force" as distinct from *pouvoir*, which has been translated as "legitimate force" (different yet again is "authority"). Here and throughout, Dumont indicates that the disjunction between status and power must be absolute; this is necessary for the system-as-"culture" to reproduce itself over time. The argument imagines a scandalously crude version of power, amidst an otherwise elegant argument - deliberately.

But Dumont never really took the idea of a "good king" very seriously, in the logic of his analyses, and hence remained comfortable, e.g., with a simple negative reading of the classic statement "there is no fifth." In doing this, he removed a great deal of subjectivity from the Indian social actor he otherwise insists must not be regarded in behaviouristic terms; he has allowed subjectivity only in the headlong pursuit of ritual goods (purity as the ultimate social capital), and dismissed it as irrelevant (but not at all unreal) in its pursuit of dominance. The imaginary is not so wont to be monkish. By rehabilitating this aspect, which I call "the good King" as a quip, the existence of space becomes a stage for the hardly unorganized ("culturally") exercise of power.

substantial coming to terms with the idea of a "locality." "Locality" is a term inflected on space, and the degree of success this inflection has is a derivative of formally political processes. Construing the "local" thusly, it is clearly not defined in terms of an enduring social base which is recalcitrant to all State-driven change (the "village republic"), nor proposed in a manner presenting it as the passive victim or object of a transparently powerful State, which could efficaciously legislate its order (*a la* "Oriental despotism").[2] Although those two crude polarities and their stereotypes are facile straw figures, I also think that, to use a naughty vocabulary, in the last instance, the structural changes, say, in villages are related to the discourses given from the Centre (although hardly in an obedient fashion).[3] States, for which "discourses" usually exist with some pomp and circumstance for their ruling symbols, are structures of articulation, which determine the point at which a "locality" begins, or better, is cordoned off from the direct and implemented effects of those discourses - screened off from the gaze.

That the King or State has a relevant gaze does not mean that it is all-powerful in its practical expression; but, as Kautilya and Manu were no doubt alone in noticing, a main obstacle to the realization of State goals was not the intransigence of rural peasants, but the "agents" or representatives of the State themselves.[4] Hence Kautilya suggests the essential need for spies, the very idea of which again invokes the idiom of the gaze, this time as its roving extension. Articulation is nonetheless detected as it is determined, by the phenomenon of reversal. In the case of the good King's injunction, "there is no fifth", the normative mode is elided by the backward glancing of the conniving, cheating, and stealing agent. This latter must speak in the descriptive mode, and so lies.

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[2] The King's gaze is, materially, the "thousand points of light" which shone over Baghdad but which used to articulate the relation between the King and the Locality (or the state and the village, in colonial terms). It is a thoroughly compromised relation, of course, but not in the sense that the locality or village sleeps profoundly outside of the State's striving but uneffective whips (*a la* "continuist" historiography); why else would Manu (VII.18) observe that "Punishment", the figure of the King and his task, watches over people even "while they sleep"?!

[3] This sentence, an expression of belief, is hardly a positive article of faith for me; I don't enjoy it. There are three things I feel inclined to say in order to temper its tyrannical innuendo: 1) insofar as a State pretends that spatiality is an expression of itself, it is committed to institutions which may erode, or rather, *usurp* it; 2) although I seem unable to shirk this notion of determinism "in the final instance", that is not to say that hegemony is either an empirical fact or a resignedly inevitable norm - rather, there is a constant parade of failed revolts; 3) in the case at hand, I consider the polegar tracts to have their own (de-centred?) "states", with a plenitude of sovereignty ("*auto-nomy*" [*ordered* by *itself*]). A further speculation: the issue of "determinism" necessarily requires the definition of the *x* and the *y* who determine and are determined. The "problematic" which informs this definition is usually inflected with the categories of dominance already; in other words, "structural change" would not be of direct interest to the subaltern mind, who is busy fighting for her/his/its perpetual sovereignty in terms of "*hetero-geneity* [*originating* from an other *source*]": an incessant insistence.

[4] Like Kautilya, Manu (VII.118-23) recommends spies, noting that "generally" the servants of the King, appointed to protect the people, become property-seizing knaves: "Let him [the King] protect his subjects against such..."

Within the specific context of the "transition" to colonialism in south India, another case bears out the relevance of the forms of reversible discourses. The *Thirukkural* is the great heart of Tamil philosophy, and one of its suppositional rhetorics is the valency of divine kingship (*cf.* Thomas 1990); at the same time, it clearly deplores aspects of government, particularly taxation. Hence some of its strophes glorify the sun and sky, which give with no expectation of return; they give to the earth so that its produce may grow, and generally unilaterally aid fecundity of all sorts while taking nothing - for what could be given to the sun? South Indian kings are described in poetry as being too bright to look upon (*cf.* Shulman 1985).

With this tradition of imagery and understanding in mind, the Tamil ballad of Kattabomman is interesting. Kattabomman (or Kattapommu) was a "polegar" before and during the early years of the 19th century. Eventually he was executed for his part as leader of a full-scale war against the British which took years to quell.[5] In the ballad, Kattabomman had taken tribute from a village (Arumukamankalam) that, from another point of view, was outside of his own domain. He had also stolen some cattle from a polegar of neighbouring Ettaiyapuram, with whom the English had pleasant relations. En route, he had plundered some grain from another village (Arankulam), and appeared to be rejecting the imposition of the Company's tribute-like relations on himself, whom the Company saw as an autocratic ruler of a space now to be mapped and sapped for Company revenue. The British sent Major Jackson after him, and they finally met in Ramnad, whereupon a now legendary conversation is said to have taken place.

> Jackson: Who gave Arumukankalam to you?
> Kattapommu: *I gave it to myself. Why should anyone else give it?*[6]
> Jackson: And why did you seize five hundred sheafs of grain in Arankulam?
> Kattapommu: I took it to feed the birds. Is that so treacherous?
> Jackson: Why did you steal the cattle of the Ettaiyapuram Zamindar?
> Kattapommu: I drove them home to give milk to my children.
> Jackson: And why have you not payed the *kist* (tax) for the last seven years?
> Kattapommu: The heavens shower rain; the earth bears grain; why should I pay for my land? Do you collect tax to command the elements? Does rain shower at your command?

This episode is full of delight, especially the bit about the birds.[7]

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[5] Kattabomman's father's fort was seized by Fullerton, who found a stash of Dutch money, ammunition and many guns, as well as the original of a treaty betwen the chief and the Dutch government at Colombo (Vanamalai 1966:617). Kattabomman himself was described by his later enemy Jackson as "a dissipated young man, without any education but of a peaceful disposition," a view shared by other colonial officials (*cf.* Rajayyan 1971:73n20).

[6] This translation comes from Dirks (1987:69*), who relied on the edition by Vanamalai; the latter himself translated this portion of it elsewhere (1966:615*), with a slight difference.
Jackson: Who *ceded* Arumukankalam to you? Kattabomman: I *gave* it to myself. Who should *cede* it to me?

[7] Feeding birds is often done as an act of piety or in fulfilment of a vow (*cf.* Pocock 1972:8).

Thomas (1990) observes that the motifs invoked in the saga are all the usual symbols of prosperity associated with divine kingship, and uses it as part of his suggestion that "it seems... that kings have sometimes defended themselves upon the ground of accomplishment rather than through reference to structure." That is a pleasing argument to me, but, perhaps against its grain, for my purposes here I want to return to structure - as the reversibility of discourses.

If there is a tradition of south Indian kingship which indicates its capabilities to ensure natural prosperity, which there is, then, regardless of all rhetorical fine points, it was a tough job to keep. Whether Kattabomman the polegar was a "little king", with all the territorial definitions therein implied, is unclear; Dirks argues that he was, but I am hesitant to talk about dryland warrior leaders as "kings."[8] Suppose for the moment that he was indeed a little king. Then, no doubt, he knew from his own experience (especially in the dry zone, where monsoons were and are fickle) that the job had its difficulties *vis-a-vis* the clause obliging him to make it rain. Nonetheless, in this context, sensing a bigger bully of a King shadowing his face, with petulant skill he assumed the other side of the *same* tradition of discourse; he makes a mockery of Jackson in his queries as to the latter's "magical" powers. Whereas the strength of his right arm might have been one of his answers to any of his own subjects, should they have asked him "Why should I pay for my land?", Kattabomman nevertheless uses it to taunt the new king on the block. In doing so he represents the common peasant hatred of taxation at all. While the discourse is the same, this time he takes the peasant/subject's view on the matter, and the new King's agent is queried on the

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[8] Part of the problem is that, as *zamindars*, ex-polegars quickly surround themselves with the syntax and rhetoric of "high Hindu kingship". The exact status of the *zamindar* in colonial Madras was an ambivalent hybrid: *both* a king and an agent. Many of the ambiguities are expressed again in a letter (which was never delivered) from a *fituridar* [rebel] in the Andhra hills in 1886. The rebel hillmen wrote to the Maharaja of Jeypore, the premier *zamindar* of the Agency tracts. This letter is from Rajana Anantayya, who went as Hanuman to lead Rama's army against the latter-day Ravana (the British). After elaborate introductions, the letter reads:

"You have been reigning the country all these years. Is it good, if the English be in our country? The English *eat our money*, but imprison us, and arrest those Rajahs who oppose them and send them to 'Bancole'. Therefore, constables, etc., in your taluk are doing great injustice to the people. *You are a very quiet gentleman, and therefore have reigned the country so long.* Now if your order me for the English, I will, in an Indian hour, take Koraput and overcome the constables in a minute. *I make war in all (four) countries, if I only get your full permission.* It is said that death is sure some day, though we live any number of days. Our name and renown will last for ever. We therefore should wage war with the English. If the assistance of men and arms are supplied to me, I will play the Rama's part. I beg for your orders in reply to this" (cited in Arnold 1979:162-3*).

The *zamindar*-King is here addressed as a good King, under the condition that it be recognized that a quiet and retiring life might be the appropriate manner for such a figure. This mixes tropes from the kingly and polegar traditions. Anyway, is Hanuman here going as a neo-polegar? Is his asking for "permission" a form of exchange relation: recognition of sovereign overlordship for the supply of arms and fighters? It is very unclear how to define the political style here. Incidentally, note that this letter, translated by some government official, puts the word "countries" for what I think obviously means "directions"; this is an example of the translation difficulties of spatial concepts. More than that, it reveals the colonial *episteme* which, in separating out a "social" base, chooses to inflect its understanding of native voices so that they stay within that circuit. The sense of "direction", apparently expressed in a word which also figured in communications of territoriality, kinship, and alliance, is lost because of the insistence that the word means "country"; the word *nadu* has been treated in exactly the same way.

credentials of his master's rule. Part of the "encompassing" political tradition is here reversed, by being spoken from a subaltern position, and appropriated as a legitimation of sovereignty over and against a centre-King. In such a reading, Kattabomman's little kingly discourse is seen as part of a segmentary but encompassing grammar of contestation and reference, in which kingship is a stable prize and the conflict is one over whom will speak with its enunciatory powers.

Conceiving of Kattabomman as not particularly a "little King", however, but rather as a sort of aspiring chief or big-man of the dry independent countryside, an icon of leadership, offers another, further reception of some of the tropes of the dialogue. The Kattabommman instance is quite an extreme case of reversible discourse, seeming so easily to fit the rhetorical needs of anyone with a very negative view of the existence of any "legitimate" King. Kattabomman's petulance is not expressed simply through negation and inversion; it may be read as parodic and transgressive - as dissolving any gambit at a shared grammar, and thus as an expression of a *different* formation of sovereignty.[9] Normally, propriety over land is expressed as the gift of an exalted (hence ultra-legitimate) overlord: Kattabomman, meanwhile, speaks a different language which transgresses that usual expression of sovereignty over lands by saying that he gave the village of Arumukamankalam to himself. Kattabomman exceeds the orthodox structure again in his follow-up question, rife with sarcasm and scorn.[10] "Why should anyone else give it?" In this he simultaneously levels a serious critique of the discourse of Kingship, and, in his skepticism as to the domination hidden within the polity of the gift, suggests that there is no essential need for "higher" and "lower" to be constructed according to the rhetoric of the kingly gift. His reference to "my land" evokes, in its literality, an idea acknowledged even by Manu as a foundational right: that of the first-clearer (*cf.* Wink 1986:18-19). However, that claim is explicitly *political*, since he is not referring to agricultural colonization, but to his own idea of a different type of sovereignty. It is this "political" idiom which, for the Company, makes Kattabomman appear as a (would-be) little King, precisely the sort of interloping adventurer that Munro saw as the real identity of any polegar. Yet that interpretation was over-determined by the ideology of kingship; the grammar of kingship appears as orthodox, but this may be a deception, since Kattabomman operated a different discourse. In testing Kattabomman against the criteria of kingly legitimacy, the Company, aware only of orthodoxy, appropriated as illegitimate a "proper" that in fact came from a heterogeneous formation. In this latter social and political space, there was no need for the

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9 "Parody makes obedience and transgression equivalent, and that is the most serious crime, since it cancels out the difference upon which the law is based" - Baudrillard

10 *Cf.* E. Weber's work on later 19th century French peasantry: "*Scorn* seems the leitmotif of class [peasant class, not Marxian] relationships, from one group to another, every society a small cascade of scorn explained or rationalized on a variety of grounds" (1976:246*).

hierarchy convoked by gifts of land, and this was embedded in the iconoclasm suggested as the cattle-theft's *raison d'etre* and destiny[11]: milk for Kattabomman's children. That this was missed by the colonizing episteme testifies to the foreigners' despotic semiology, in which only some native political forms were deemed recognizable.

Unlike the obsequious agent's prosaic reversal of kingly discourse, which fenced off a trapped space within the map of the kingdom, Kattabomman's instance of interaction with the centre transgressed the code from a position of exteriority. It was a lyrical reversal, its use of the same imagery of the political language which mythically legtimates kingship here appearing as an outrageous insolence. There is a suggestion that these (and perhaps other) discourses about authority and kingship are often spoken through the voices of non-Kings; instead of the "texts" being seen as exclusively Brahmanical or kingly, they might also be seen in their utility to popular elements. The fact of appropriating precisely these central mythemes of the other's authority is not merely part of an act of resistance[12]; a different sovereignty is declared not only by the subversion of intent, but the theft of the words themselves.[13]

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[11] It is a virtually Chayanovian destiny, in terms of the ideals expressed for sufficient consumption; if this be taken as a sort of "longing", then it provided a window into the political intentions native to the independent dry zones: the castle of their imaginary (I take the notion and phrase with some modification from Duby 1980, *passim*, and esp. pp.324-5).

[12] In the dry zone, it was hardly "resistance", but rather empowered rejection; Dirks cites a song in which a Pandyan king's request for the hand of a Maravar girl famous for her beauty is scorned by the Maravars. "The fates of other kings who have made such an offer are well known. If you do not know this, you can see that we Maravars have captured their weapons and keep them on the outskirts of our country, their crowns are being *looked* after, *their possessions used as borders in decorating the roofs of our houses,* and their umbrellas are folded and kept aside. Do you really hope to get a girl from such a Maravar family for the royal wedding?" (1987:87*). The reverence the Maravars had for status is revealed in their scornful appropriation of symbols of royalty such as the umbrella, and their casual re-use of the kings' goods.

[13] During colonialism, the few *cadjan* [palm leaf] copies of the story of Kattabomman circulating in the late 19th century were scrupulously withheld from government's eyes, as it was sensed by the people that they contained such derisory commentary on the English. Likewise, it is not surprising to learn that the ballad, when learned of by a Reverend Kearns in the 1870s (who found it "distasteful" and "absurd"), was noted for its "charm for the Natives,... *especially the peasantry*" (*cf.* Dirks 1987:61-2*). Peasants even more than Kattabomman would like it, as it reflects their dream of a State completely off their backs. Or: "maybe a good King, but no agents..." At this point, it circulated almost exclusively as a "text", in that it was sung and performed within peasant communities, but not enacted in its discursivity *vis-a-vis* the Raj.

Why was it with-held? Fanon notes that a colonized person throws her or himself into the tribal feud, in order "to persuade himself that colonialism does not exist, that everything is going on as before, that history continues..." (1967:42), and that hinterland peasants had long held tricks to keep "their individuality free from colonial imposition. They even believed that colonialism was not the victor" (*ibid.*, p.110). I think that, as a *legend*, Kattabomman represented a sovereignty which, in the despotic structure of the colonial state, was only to be found in that medium. The content of the dialogue cited above allowed the Tamil peasants to muse on the illegitimacy of the colonial rulers, but, precisely because of the radicalization of *artha*, in order to protect themselves, the peasants had to hide the texts; also, as I suggested above, the words were, so to speak, already stolen. Hiding them again invokes the structure of the King's gaze; in this sense the peasants are revealed as having a notion of the (colonial) state now made obsolete, as the harmlessness of Kearns' comments bear out. In "the Manichaean world" (*ibid.*, pp.31-2) of colonialism, there is no place for the sovereignty of native speech; hence that sovereignty introverts and its circulation is out of sight. It would be interesting to know just *where* (e.g., in the deltas? or mainly in the de-polegarized dry zone?) the story was widely told, and how far it travelled, incognito, to spread the word. ("An observer is a *prince* who is everywhere in possession of his incognito,"

This bears resemblance to what now goes as *post*-colonial discourse, a transcendence of a merely oppositional or derivative formulation[14] through a transgressive proclamation; in order to begin, colonial rule had every imperative to crush this voice, and erase its memory.[15]

Like the elemental "there is no fifth", the Kattabomman story illustrates the way that Tamil discourses were voiced in various ways, crucially reversed at points which precisely chart the topography of a polity: where the King's gaze meets the locality, and where it met the dissolution of its every pretension. There were several types of borders: those of the administratively involuted deltaic localities, where spatial closure was re-appropriated by elite groups from within, to subvert the order of the King with invisible domination; and the sudden appearances on the horizons of the lowland state of unincorporated, shifting hinterland territories, where space was politically opened by people's imperative rules of alliance, and in which strategies of domination had nothing to hide - in fact relying on their visibility. The former was a "zone of contradiction"; the latter is a "sovereign exteriority" *vis-a-vis* the supernumerary delta bias. The latter, though, was a different formation; within its "space", a logic by which the prohibited institution of untouchability (the "fifth") operated does not find a home to the "proper" of its contradiction. In addressing the question that Kumar set out to answer, that of whether or not the category of landless labourers grew substantially as a result of colonial rule, the framework here developed suggests that her methodological equation, that of the "social" institution of untouchability and the "economic" structure of landless labour, has a *spatially* restricted applicability. The extension of this equation, as it is reasonable from the retrospective view of the present, must have been historically constructed; that colonial processes dug some of the ditches for that edifice would be no surprise, for it would return the word "colonialism" to one of its lost metaphors: the filling of *space*.

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wrote Baudelaire in "the age of high capitalism"[in Benjamin 1973:40]; here the observer is the imaginary sovereignty of Kattabomman's discourse, which under colonialism became a hidden text.)

14 This idea is triggered by a paper read by Nicholas Thomas at A.N.U., 1991b: "Inversion of Tradition."

15 This was well understood by the Company, who acted accordingly. After defeating the polegars, whose - in the words of Clive - "late, united, extensive and flagrant rebellion" (in Rajayyan 1971:271) was perceived to have had Kattabomman and his brother as ringleaders, the Council in Madras ordered that Panjalamkurichi, Kattabomman's hometown, expunged from all public records (*ibid.*, p.278). That this was announced in the fallen town by beat of drums indicates the early use to which Paraiyar drummers were put by the Company rulers - as always the boundary men, here they marked the boundary between an erased past and a new history.

Blinding Gazes.

> "I've never been in a situation where I can speak through a microphone. So I just sit and speak. Some listen, some just go off." - Chinnathevar, drunk.[1]

In this last section of the chapter, I want briefly to investigate and sketch some echoes and symmetries of aspects of the King's gaze, each of which enjoin a reference to the "presence" of Europe. In southeastern India, the Tamil *nadu*, colonial structures extended the projection of the gaze throughout the dry zone, while simultaneously abolishing the optative prohibition of "the fifth." At many post-colonial desks, the specifically deltaic incarnation of untouchability is generalized for all of south India, which amounts to a sort of academic gazing. A striking document from France during the snows of another age suggests a comparison between "feudal" France and the *varna* scheme in India revolving around despotism and revelation; this suggests a revisionist approach to the juggernaut of "discourse", the forms of which in India were mistakenly construed by Weber, who neglected the vocation of "sweet speech." The chapter then concludes with a brief introduction of the "village" as the site of blindness.

Colonial Gazing.

> "What is given by force, what is enjoyed by force, also what has been caused to be written by force, and all other transactions done by force, Manu has declared void."
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> - *The Laws of Manu* (VII.168).

At age 16, Thomas Munro taught himself Spanish in order to read Cervantes; not long afterwards he was in India, and his letters home include descriptions of himself as tall and lank, "a person of grave appearance and of a discreet and sober deportment," (*cf.* Stein 1989b:7), just like Don Quixote. The analogy to the literary knight is in many ways appropriate, for Munro the adventurer also mistook his ideas as reality; in the historical night, however, power rendered nugatory this dualism. Where Quixote strove to operationalize obsolete metaphors of feudal chivalry, Munro's visionary ideal for south India led him to adopt the detour of an instrumentalist historiography of great pragmatic value in getting himself heard, which in turn gave him the power and influence within the Company government that he pursued. Upon achieving the status of Governor-General of Madras, however, he

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1 When Chinnathevar talks, he told me, people ("even students") often tell him he talks "like the couplet-book" (the *Thirukkural*). Some say that when he herds sheep in the fields, he "talks like a nut," but Chinnathevar himself feels that, at least when he is drunk, he talks precisely and deeply.

he pursued. Upon achieving the status of Governor-General of Madras, however, he promptly reversed his position on crucial issues which he had exploited in his ascent. In this way, the spatial structure of the King's gaze is epitomized in the temporal development of Munro's own life and career, passing from the (agent's) cunning prose of historical description to the (King's) tremulous use of the optative in setting the pace of Company administration.

A few somewhat trivial examples of how the model of the King's gaze informs an interpretation of Munro and the colonial Company in general include his publishing a political essay in England (in *The Asiatic Miscellany*); he followed his father's suggestion: "alledge you found it in an old Persian manuscript which accidently fell into your hands" (*cf. ibid.*, p.22). Not only is this an instance of the "lying" which subordinate representatives of the polity indulged in, but it is also an important evidence of the totalizing impulse in British approaches to imagining India. Why, after all, should a *Persian* manuscript describe south Indian politics? In 1787, though, Orientalism clawed into its subject matter by attaching the signifier "India" to that of "all the land" in the homogenized geography of the subcontinent; the Mughal prose of universal sovereignty was taken over in its emic categories, and only then subject to "political" criticism. Despotism was to be replaced by administrative orientalism, and the latter required an interpretation of the whole and its native usages. Meanwhile, Munro acknowledged the vitality of the differences within the system of English colonialism - in short, the perks of despotism; his friend Mark Wilks had advised him that returning to England was hopeless unless one had become very rich: "[w]e have all attained habits that are at direct variance with those doctrines [of pastoral English felicity]" (in *ibid.*, p.140).[2] *Vis-a-vis* the metropolitan centre and its overlordship, the colonial agents appreciated the advantages they might gain by maintaining the notion of different spaces within what was becoming a single imperial system; by the same token, those advantages were to be denied to the colonized. The outer margins of the early Company regime, then, replicated many of the forms of Tamil kingship; however, the territory of this domination was vastly increased, thereby abolishing, in theory at least, the different types of political space within the Tamil country.

In formulating a revenue settlement policy for south India, the Company considered three main propositions: a *zamindari* settlement following that of Bengal, a

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2 "England is a good place enough for a man who has an abundance of guineas; and... I can tell you... that I advise no man from India to go thither with the boyish cant of content on a little; rural felicity... the cottage and the balderdash. We have all attained habits that are at direct variance with those doctrines, and there is nothing which disgusts me so much as the littleness, which is absolutely necessary, if you desire to keep out of gaol" (Wilks, in Stein 1989b:140). Munro quite liked being in India for other reasons as well, as he wrote to a friend after a brief stay in his native Scotland (1809): "... India is a much pleasanter country than this. [Scotland] is our native land, but after long residence in India appears so cold and dark and wet and dirty that to one who likes to ride or walk in the fields, no fortune I think can make it comfortable" (in *ibid.*, p.141).

dealt with each cultivator individually. Munro vehemently opposed the first scheme, and thought the second equally unfit; his *raiyatwari* plan was meant to return the cultivator to an originary incentive to increase production and improve the lands, and also, it seems, to be more equitable and in favour of the small farmer than the model of the huge Bengali estates could allow. The rules of the game[3] for proposing settlement policies entailed that, as much as possible, "traditional" practices should be continued. The definers of south Indian history would be Company officials, but they were to work within this parameter; the rhetoric of "chaos" and "anarchy" intensified in step with the competition for what Stein called "the enunciatory prize of setting and stating Madras policies" (*ibid.*, p.216).[4]

For Munro to win, then, required that he substantiate a claim that cultivators had for long owned their lands as a form of "private property", and that all intermediaries were mere tax-farmers, artefacts of the wars and darkness of the 18th century. In his appointment to Kanara[5] after the defeat of Tipu Sultan at Seringapatam at the turn of the century, Munro turned in reports claiming that the region had long known a sort of proto-*raiyatwari* anyway - interrupted, of course, by Tipu's usual depredations. The claim was based on "accounts and traditions" supposed to date back to an early Vijayanagar period in the fourteenth century, when the King "made a new assessment of Canara upon principles laid down in the Shastra..." (in *ibid.*, p.66). Proof of this, testified Munro, lay in the existence of the "black books" of revenue kept by village accountants from which could be abstracted a sketch of four centuries of revenue. These had been prohibited, he alleged, by Haidar and Tipu, and many thereby lost, but enough remained to make a sketch. As it were, however, not one of these books, however, has ever been found.[6] As part of

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3 Actually, these "rules" were established by innovative strategies; Munro was the first to use historical documents to present his case to the Company (*cf.* Stein 1989b:65-6). This greatly impressed some in the upper echelons of Company authority. However, Place was roughly contemporaneous with Munro on this count, writing of corporate landed proprietorships in the hands of *mirasidars* (*cf. The Fifth Report*, v.3:151-67); his work was developed by Ellis, in 1814 presented historical documentation of a more precise sort on *kaniyatchi* and *mirasi* rights. Given that Munro's purported evidence has never again been found, it is more appropriate to say that Place and Ellis were the first to invoke historicity; however, Munro was the first to valorize the category in discourse, and his contents were widely believed.

4 Much of this competition was decided in warlike contests outside of the discursive forum; Munro and his first mentor, Alexander Read, both military appointments to their roles as Collectors, were noted for their vast hauls even from less irrigated zones such as the Baramahal. The military collectors, as noted before, received a commission on the amount of revenue they brought to Madras.

5 Kanara is on the west coast, and geographically most resembles adjacent Malabar. Of the place, Munro wrote that only fishermen live in villages. "The Cultivators of the soil almost universally dwell in detached habitations, every man upon his own land..."; Kanara was "rude and savage beyond all description", crossed by many rivers, jungly, and with few roads except on the coast (*cf.* Beaglehole 1966:45).

6 These "black books" are an embarrassing mystery. Francis Buchanan visited Kanara a few years after Munro, and spoke only of a Brahmin informant whose family was supposed to have held the hereditary office of town accountant for generations; the Brahmin had shown Buchanan Sanskrit books said to be from Vijayanagar times and to contain information on revenue administration - the Brahmin provided an oral summary... (*cf.* Stein 1989b:69). In 1894, John Sturrock wrote in the South Canara *District Manual* that none of these black books had been found, even though Munro had ordered that they all be placed in taluk offices. Presumably insects or fires,

the grievances he submitted in connection with his resignation, Lionel Place from Chingleput objected to Munro's account as merely "hypothetical". In the colonial context, "property" had acquired the status of a floating signifier; Munro's ideological inflection on it - that it was somehow privately held in south India - was anchored to the category of "history", which boosted it into prominence in official circles.[7] Regardless of the absence of the black books, or, in effect, the question of accuracy, this whole moment of early colonial structure replicates the model of the King's gaze, in that Munro managed to couch his arguments in the veneer of the descriptive mood.

Munro's successor in Kanara, G. Ravenshaw, commented to Buchanan that "it was impossible for a European to be more respected by Hindus than Major Munro is by those who were lately under his authority" (in *ibid.*, p.72). This statement reveals Munro's success in the locality, and surely it was with a local elite:

> "Munro's historical reasoning on the revenue to be demanded from such potentially troublesome landed groups was intended - *without disclosing this to his superiors* in Madras and gaining their approval - to win landed magnates over to Company rule. In this he succeeded" (*ibid.* p.72*).

These landed groups were *jenmi* tenure holders, linked to rajas, sometimes by mediation of a territorial chief. Munro was removing the latter from the picture, and winning the confidences of the former. The effect of this alone would be to enhance the *local-ization* of the Kanarese political economy, fragmenting it into ever more and smaller "kingdoms". The winning of this alliance, in Kanara and elsewhere (e.g., Ceded Districts) was done with his strategic *inam* policy, in which he granted or

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been found, even though Munro had ordered that they all be placed in taluk offices. Presumably insects or fires, as usual, must have taken their toll... (*ibid.*, p.69). Mackenzie, a contemporary of Munro, had complained of a lack of documentary sources in the area.

Wilks did report a type of Kanarese text, which suggest Munro's object but do not seem to have had quite the function he allocated them: "*cudduttum, curruttum,* or *currut*, a long strip of cotton cloth, from eight inches to a foot wide, and from twelve to eighteen feet wide, skilfully covered on each side with a compost of paste and powdered charcoal. When perfectly dry, it is neatly folded up, without cutting, in leaves of equal dimensions; to the two end folds are fixed ornamental plates of wood, painted and varnished, resembling the sides of a book, and the whole is put into a case of silk or cotton, or tied with a tape or ribbon; those *in use with the lower classes*, are destitute of these ornaments, and are tied by a common string: the book, of course, opens at either side, and if unfolded and drawn out, is still a long slip of the original length of the cloth. The writing is similar to that on a slate, *and may be in like manner rubbed out and renewed.* It is performed by a pencil of the *balapum*, or *lapis ollaris*, and this mode of writing ... is still universally employed in Mysoor by *merchants and shopkeepers*. I have even seen a bond, regularly witnessed, entered on the *cudduttum* of a merchant, produced and received in evidence.

This is the word *kirret*, translated ... *palm-leaves* in Mr. Crisp's translation of Tippoo's regulations. The *Sultan prohibited its use in recording public accounts*: but altho' unable to be expunged, and affording facility to fraudulent entries, it is a much more durable material and record than the best writing on the best paper, or any other substance used in India, copper and stone alone excepted..." (in Wilson 1828:65*).

[7] Bentinck, the Governor of Madras in 1806, was greatly impressed by Munro's reports: "Canara... became the great landmark by which I hoped to trace out those principles and regulations which might be applicable to the [as yet] unsettled districts.... I have reason to believe, though I cannot speak with any positive certainty, that the same tenures as in Canara, existed originally *throughout every part of the peninsula.* In other parts... individual rights have been trodden down by the oppression and avarice of despotic authority..." (*The Fifth Report*, v.3:467-8*). Marx also came under the influence of this south Indian story.

recognized vast portions of the cultivated lands as concessionary holdings to those he wanted as political allies.[8]

Such silent settlements had long been a feature of the cathexis of land and state in south India. Munro's brazen use of it, however, renders rather amusing the didactic expletives directed against the fraudulent practices of *karnams* and *mirasidars*.[9] Munro's complaint about the Permanent Settlement in Bengal, meanwhile, is expressed neatly in a letter of 1805:

> "They [Company government in Bengal] hurry great Provinces off their hands as if they were private Estates long before they can form any judgment of what they are worth.... The *moment* that the Country is divided into Estates *the door of investigation is compleatly shut*. It is really an extraordinary method of proceeding - first to deprive yourself of the means of acquiring information, and then to sit gravely down to pursue your research" (in Beaglehole 1966:76-7*).[10]

Munro wanted the colonial gaze to have continued access to the information helpful to the business of increasing the revenue. Intermediaries were seen as self-aggrandizing turncoats, *a la* Kautilya, so Munro reckoned that direct *inam* grants to dominant people would at least gain valuable political alliance, and possibly even cost less than the amount that local bribes forced to disappear from the King's hands.[11]

Munro's rhetoric against the interloping intermediaries treated them as giants instead of windmills. The structural telos which governed his rhetoric was the *raiyatwari* ideal that the "Cultivator" would have a direct relation to the State. Munro noted that there were pretenders to dominion over most of Kanara, claiming displacement due to Haidar and Tipu; he spurned them as opportunists with cheap turbans. Nonetheless, administrative structures would necessarily exist, in the form

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[8] Clive, Governor of Madras in 1800, approved of Munro's reports, especially in their depiction of Haidar and Tipu as tyrannical. He also approved of Munro's method of settlement, although he was puzzled by the extent and meaning of the *inams*; Tipu had resumed them, and the Company was nominally the successor to the rights exercised by him. Munro dealt with this puzzlement simply, by never responding to them (*cf.* Stein 1989b:67-8).

[9] From South Arcot, 1806, Ravenshaw instructed his Sub-Collectors: "[t]he corrupt and fraudulent conduct of the curnums [*karnams*] is well known; and yet it is on the word of these people only, that the settlements have hitherto been grounded. It is true, surveyors have been employed to check their accounts; but it is equally true, that where they have proved false, in the proportion of more than 150 per cent. the surveyors have not discovered, one per cent" (*The Fifth Report*, v.3:216). For an example regarding "the extraordinary degree of vice in [*mirasidari*] Tanjore", see Harriss' 1804 report in *ibid.*, pp.341-43.

[10] Munro's vitriol against the Permanent Settlement noted that the *zamindars* - "who do not actually exist" - were "a kind of contractor", and thus the precise entity to be avoided. "The zamindar undertakes to pay every year exactly the same amount of public revenue to relieve the public servants from the fatigue of thinking about it, and to settle with the ryot in such a manner that *Gov't shall never hear anything about them*" (extract of Letter from Munro to BOR, 15 August 1807, v.8866:120-28). Munro understood the structure of the gaze, perhaps better than anyone, but the results of his policies turned the gaze inside out.

[11] Munro believed that Brahmin accountants privately collected vast sums for favouring certain people in the valuations of their lands and settlements due to the Mysore government. He reckoned that this caused a loss of revenue more than twice as much as the concessions he granted; besides which, he felt that *raiyats* would save money to bribe Brahmins rather than using it to increase cultivation (*cf.* Beaglehole 1966:21-2). An important question is where the money given to *karnams* went; did it end up circulating again in a local "re-distributive" pool? We know that under colonial rule it did not.

of the collection apparatus, and this would necessarily form intermediary links to the larger State. Hodgson, Munro's greatest adversary in the settlement debate, scorned the latter's claims about "private property", noting that the existence of the pretenders indicated that rents were paid to *zamindars* and rajahs; and anyway, "[t]hey now pay their rent to a tehsildar, and not direct to the collector" (*The Fifth Report*, v.3:560).[12] Munro's political geography of revenue introduced two key structural changes: first, spatially, the abolition of intermediaries and the settlement with dominant cultivators contracted the size of "localities"; second, ideologically, whereas the (ill-starred) ideology of Hindu kingship governed the idiom of the pre-colonial kingly polities, the colonial state observed nothing of the sort. Concessions were granted to dominant locals for reasons of political arithmetic, essentially as official bribes to ensure the maximization of the rest of the revenue. The relations between official cultivators and the colonial State were, on the whole, prebendally commercialized while the prohibition of a "fifth" was removed from the optative lexicon.

The *raiyatwari* method eventually gained official paramountcy in the Madras presidency, although in practice it was not until late in the 19th century, under quite different and imperial circumstances, that it began to operate even remotely as it was designed. At an early stage, Munro himself even suggested that no system was perfect, but *raiyatwari* was the best "in order to raise up active, energetic and intelligent [European] *collectors*" (*cf.* Stein 1989b:164); it is almost as if the *raiyatwari* system was defended as the most attuned to the formation and maintenance of colonial pedagogy for its own (no doubt crucial) sake. Rewarded with the Governor-Generalship of Madras in 1820, Munro began to change some ideas. He had long deplored the *zamindari* settlement which had covered over 40% of the Company's territory, and argued that there was no need for a European style gradation of native rank to be canonized by the government. In 1805, for example, he had written to the Board of Revenue against the idea that *zamindari* settlement helped in creating and maintaining a stable social hierarchy:

> "The want to a due gradation of ranks in Society in this country is more imaginary than real for what is effected in establishing such a gradation by property in other parts of the world is accomplished here by the distinction of casts [*sic*] and the Manners of the people. The lower, the middle and the higher classes of inhabitants preserve mutually as just degree of respect and Subordination as the different orders in England" (in *ibid.*, p.127).

In his passage from agent to King, so to speak, his tune shifted, displaying a relevant change in perspective on this point. No longer was the indigenous achievement of

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12 It might be speculated that it is the replacement of the old intermediary with the new Company-appointed tehsildar that, somewhat like the Mutiny in north India, was at the root of some of the rebellions which rocked the west coast. Mappila rebels generally held *kanam* tenure, not *janmi*, and hence they were devastated by Munro's settlement.

ordered social hierarchy trusted; in 1820 he lamented that "our code of regulations" had "already ruined many ancient families" - a remarkable shift in mood from the day when he referred to polegars (many of them now *zamindars*) as so many simulations of Timour the Tartar...! "[T]he operations of our present institutions", by which he means the limbs of his own child, *raiyatwari* itself, threaten to leave "nothing of native rank left in the country" (*ibid.*, p.261).

Everything happened as if everything changed upon donning the King's glasses.[13] No longer could there be a spontaneously indigenous base of Manners to guarantee the colonized eternity. "Local habits and customs" were to be maintained, but there grew a sense that they needed to be buttressed by sanctions of the State. The solution for the colonial government was nonetheless to push everything possible into a category of "the social" which would be understood to be self-regulating, and then intersect with this domain only here and there. *Zamindars*, often ex-polegars, were invited to become more king-like, while protecting their property remained a high priority throughout the 19th century.[14] Strategies of domination, so long as they were expressed between subjected groups, would be considered "customary" and naturalized into norms, and often as not the law as well.[15] After a bloody riot during a temple festival in an Andhra town, Governor Munro issued a minute rejecting the view that the courts should be left to determine how, where and what public ceremonies and processions should be conducted. Instead, he advised that no changes should be permitted in the established ways and punishment be meted out to any who transgressed this frozen form, now defined as "usage" (*cf. ibid.*, p.264). This usage was defined in caste terms.

In de-valorizing both the ideology of kingship and the spatial politics which could undermine that ideology, the early Company effectively abolished the very constitution of the King's gaze; henceforth, "untouchability", the landless "fifth", was included in the positive list of customary institutions. In separating out the laws of

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[13] After the long career of his harangues about the traditional structures of property in south India, as Governor-King he suddenly announced that "[W]e are certain that the Hindoos had no one uniform system" (*cf.* Stein 1989b:265), a valid enough point but rather peculiar from Munro.

[14] In his famous minute at the end of 1824, Munro wrote: "[i]t is not the arbitrary power of a national sovereign, but subjugation to a foreign one, that destroys national character and extinguishes national spirit" (*cf.* Stein 1989b:292). He maintained the Orientalist perspective ("arbitrary"), but recognized a potential problem in immanent large-scale revolt. Hence he supported the dignification of *zamindars* and others in order to give the appearance of sovereignty. Compare this to his claim in 1797, that the separation of judicial and executive power, as a means of protecting the liberty of the people, was irrelevant, since the people were already "under a foreign dominion, and can look for nothing more than the preservation of their own laws and customs, so far as they are compatible with the security and authority of that Government" (in Beaglehole 1966:32-3). There is really no change, only a recognition that invented forms of simulated deference to appointed icons of a "public" which, simultaneously, is held not to exist (and certainly repressed at every irruption).

[15] For example, village headmen - an office reformulated by the Company and the *raj* - were given the right, in cases of "abusive language" to confine in public stocks those lower caste offenders - "on whom it may be so improper to inflict so degrading a punishment" (Regulation XI, 1816). In 1903, the High Court in Madras ruled that Shanars [now Nadars] belonged to lower cases, and were thus punishable by confinement in stocks (*cf.* Thurston 1906:408-10).

custom from any intrinsic territoriality, the colonial state achieved in an unprecedented style and magnitude the fulfilment of Dumont's reading of the normative ideology, which "ignores territory as such"[16]. Such a separation had two effects: ideologically, it promotes rituals of purity, and, economically, it led to a general contraction of all "localities,"[17] re-defined as the colonial unit of the "village."

The labours of slavery, perceived by some as a function of "untouchability" (the "slave castes", according to colonial sociology), directly experienced some of the ramifications of the Company's indirect attempt at non-change. In 1825, Governor Munro enunciated his non-policy on slavery, as previously cited:

> "a numerous class of slaves have not the free disposal of their own industry, but are in a *peculiar* state of servitude. Their condition may... *be regarded as capable of being improved by Government. But* the consideration of the measures proper to be taken... is a matter in which more good is to be expected from the gradual operation of justice and police administered in a spirit favourable to personal liberty than from direct interference on the part of Government" (in Kumar 1965:70-1*).

Although Munro was long the exponent of the de facto colonial union of the executive and the judiciary, here he relies on the latter to forgive the inertia of the former.[18] It is hard to obtain a clearer indication of Munro's imperial vision of change, of his deliberate bracketing of the State as a direct agent, and thereby his simultaneous tolerance for peculiar distortions as the debris of another age which will gradually wash away. In deferring agency away from the State, he mandated a social base. If the kingly discourse that "there is no fifth" might be said to have tried to hope the fifth out of existence, here Munro basically tried to hope his concept of a "social" into existence. In his early days, Munro the junior officer (King's agent) tried to evade the Company's mail spies by sending his (usually highly critical) letters back to Britain via friends (*cf.* Stein 1989b:18)[19]; as Governor-General of Madras, he slid onto the other side of the discursive mirror. Slavery is appropriate in this regard, as

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16 As Hodgson arithmetically speculated in 1808, "... all lands are within the known boundary of some village. The total boundary of all the villages of a province, forms the whole landed surface of that particular province" (*The Fifth Report*, v.3:550).

17 The contraction of the locality is related to the "decapitation" of pre-colonial "little kingdoms" (*cf.* Fuller 1977). The ideology of purity is not Kingly, but Brahmanical; the King's head has not been cut off, though, since the colonial state is present. Rather, the King's gaze has had its head cut off: there is no ideology prohibition the fifth; instead, the encompassing structure of colonialism suggests that "the royal function" as replaced on the newly local level is one of *artha* does as *artha* can.

18 This inertia is quite related to the lack of the kingly ideology: "there is [shall be] no fifth." At any rate, government officials frequently exchanged runaway slaves back to the space of their domination, hardly "a spirit favourable to personal liberty" (*cf.* Kumar 1965:42 & 67-8).

19 The covert transportation of goods and words is noted again by Engels, who mentioned that many of the British soldiers had become quite rich in the looting of Delhi and Lucknow in 1857: most of the British officials preferred to use natives to convey the valuables. Many of them also tendered their resignations even before the military tension had subsided (in Marx 1959:133-6).

it was abolished in 1843, and so was assigned to the colonial "zone of contradiction." In 1884, the government in Madras still issued memos reminding its participants that "slavery having been abolished in India, a reference to slaves in official correspondence is objectionable and likely to cause misapprehension" (in Kumar 1965:74-5). This editorial policy, regarding matter that might reach the "King's" eyes in London - where there might be very little "understanding" of the customs of localities - is remarkable as an explicit acknowledgement of the difficulties of "following the (ideal) rules," although in this case one senses that an excuse is implored in the idea that India is "different" and hence liable in translation to be "misapprehended."

As suggested above, the gaze and its mood-shifting contradictions jumped up to a higher, more spatially extenuated level: the relation between the British in India and the British in Britain, in which the former were somewhat like "agents." In the late 19th century, there were allegations that "a daily insufficiency of food" was almost normal for huge numbers of people in India. An investigation and account was called for from the higher echelons in *England*; Madras received a confidential minute from the Government of *India* pleading for "any information of a positive character" on the "condition of the poorer classes in India." The response won its author, a Brahmin from that ultra-orthodox den of the *mirasidari* delta, Kumbakonam in Thanjavur District, the award of the CIE[20], an empty *nazar* for his protection of a colonial administration grovelling for something to could pass off as good news for their good King. On a vaster note, during World War II, Churchill ordered the Cripps mission to palliate the Congress agitations in India; "it mattered not so much that something be done as that some attempt should be *seen* to be made."[21] Upon Cripps' return, Churchill congratulated him as having given a convincing proof of the British "desire" to reach a settlement: "[t]he effect throughout Britian and in the United States has been wholly beneficial" (cited in S.Sarkar 1983:388). It is almost as if the British were playing the *mirasidar* to the U.S.' burgeoning imperial desires; it also reveals that, under colonialism, the entire sub-continent had also become, as it were, a "locality" in the sense used in this chapter: a zone of contradiction.

Academic Gazing.

- There are three countries speaking English: Australia, Africa, and Europe.

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20 The author was S. Srinivasaraghavaiyangar, and his work, *Memorandum on the Progress of the Madras Presidency During the Last Forty Years of British Administration* (Madras: at the Government Press, 1893), was a 685 page tome arguing that there were problems, mostly due to famines throughout the century, themselves largely brought about by the greed of the Company. The damage done could not easily be undone; however, there were two bright spots: 1) the Empire had taken over; and 2) Munro's compassionate policy, although it had been cruelly ignored after his death (*cf.* Stein 1989b:355).

21 Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, p.156. cited in S. Sarkar 1983:388*.

- What about England?
- No, no - there are too many different Englishes in England. It all depends on these three.
- conversation overheard in Ammapatti.

Another case involving the silent compromise of the gaze appears in the form of Mencher's (1974) article on "the caste system upside down." Her essay asserts that "*the* caste system" has been one which facilitates the exploitation of low-caste labour. This is hardly controversial, except for some semantic dispute over the notion of "exploitation". However, I have tried to suggest that "*the* caste system" is an uninformative signifier, as "castes" as such can operate and relate in various different ways, including the almost "Melanesian" style of the old dry zone. Mencher's usage of the totalizing and homogenizing turn of phrase reflects the perception of a colonial artefact: the separation of the "social" from, and the bestowal of analytical priority over, the political spaces which co-ordinate human relations. It is precisely the constitution of these spaces by the topography of the official polity which determines the mode of hierarchy and of the systematicity of "caste"; hierarchy is a function of spatial closure, of the politics of space, rather than some categorical emanation of an eternal cultural template which prescribes social forms. Mencher assumes a social base, allegedly defined in "Marxian" terms, as existing outside and prior to a relation to Government or the State; motifs of the recalcitrant "friction" of customs serve to explain how the liberal State is unable to modify this. This "social", however, is at least greatly a construction of, or at any rate radically inflected by the State, especially in its colonial incarnation, which filled a dominated space with itself in honouring the *local*-ization of "custom."

It is relevant that Mencher's actual research was in Chingleput, a highly-irrigated *mirasidari* tract where her critique might apply. In her article, she recruits to her defence Kumar's study, which itself had followed the 1795 assertions of Lionel Place, who had noted that labouring servants in Chingleput district were prohibited from owning land. Kumar elaborated:

> "[i]t is clear that at the beginning of the nineteenth century the *pannaiyals* [attached/unfree farm labourers (in Chingleput, this translated with monotonous regularity to untouchable Paraiyar)] *in some Tamil areas* were in a condition of servitude. They were born into servitude and they died in it.... They could not leave their master's land; this was so generally recognized that in the early years the Collectors would help[22] to catch runaway[s]" (1965:42*).

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22 The Collector of Trichinopoly in 1830 wrote to the Collector of Salem, asking assistance in bringing back 10 Pallar labourers who had disappeared from their master - to whom they were not in debt: "[t]hey are slaves of the soil and as such are not at liberty to leave the estate to which they belong. The owner of the estate, a Brahmin, is quite unable to cultivate the lands without their help, and if he be not assisted in recovering his rights over them, the land must lay waste *and the Government be losers*" (in Kumar 1965:42*).

Mencher cites this as historical evidence for the age-old and inflexible system of oppression that is "caste"; in so doing she neglects to tell us that Kumar had at least indicated that the Chingleput region was an extreme case of a slavery-like situation[23], articulated in the language of hierarchical caste. In the same moment of her argument, Kumar had noted that in Madurai district, some of the Pallars often owned and cultivated their own land, and that nobody seemed to be born into slavery, bits of evidence which Mencher discards (*ibid.*, p.44). Mencher imposes the deep structure of a homogenized social tradition on the spatial vicissitudes of political history. The conversation at the Ammapatti tea stall was more careful.

Kumar at least hinted at the existence of dissident evidence (which she considers encompassed, within the parameters of her methodology, as merely "differences in social and political history rather than in the mode of production"), but Mencher does not. Mencher's general picture is plausible for the Chingleput scene, but she specifically suppresses some stories from the dry zone; this is important, for in trying to generalize to the whole of the Tamil country, to erase traces of other spaces, she loses *sight* of the role of State power. In her case, of course, she is rather like the "good Agent", telling the negligent "evil King" that "there is a fifth!" This re-positioning, a sort of inside-out reversal, seems a trope of those historical and ethnographic accounts which presume certain truths about colonialism: basically, that it was a thin veneer weakly pasted on rural society - that it was never more than an apparatus which, however cumbersome, did not effect some presumed socio-cultural uniformity, itself dissipated in the ever out-of-reach locality; and that, if anything, colonialism achieved a massive administrative integration of diverse regions under its governmental gaze, which in turn was a positive legacy for the idea and becoming of India as an independent nation-state. The twin poles of this historiographical paradigm converge in declaring as a pervasive but local tradition the eternal machination of caste-wise subjugations of labour, heterogeneous to modern State formation, colonial and since: a new form of denial.

Europe's "private" past.

> "It was the age, indeed, in which the sons of Popes were founding dynasties." - Jacob Burckhardt *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*

Given the techniques of negative reading, focussing interpretation on the rhetoric of denial, a comparative comment is possible. The invocation of Europe's own tradition of political discourse is especially important, since it is from that repertoire that India

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[23] In 1819, the Chingleput Collector declared that "these persons ["slaves", "serfs"] are not in any way attached to the land but are the property of the individual and may by him be called away" (cited in Kumar 1965:44).

has been so often imagined; colonialism converted that imagination into a reification, reciprocally enabling a self-forgetfulness. Long before Montesquieu had penned the concept of "Oriental Despotism", and even before Bacon had written in 1632 that "nobility attempers sovereignty, and *draws the eyes of the people somewhat aside from the line* royal" (in Wink 1986:1-2*), there had been noises regarding institutions in Europe analogous to those in India. In 1567, the apparent age of feudalism and its "three orders", Du Bellay wrote to the King his *Lengthy Discourse to the King Concerning the Actuality of the Four Estates of the Kingdom of France,* in which he pointed out that there were *not three* estates, but rather four. The actual foursome consisted of the clergy, the nobility, and the urban commercial elite, followed by the "popular rabble", i.e., workers - work again being "vile and abject" (*cf.* Duby 1980:355). This development[24], apparently emerging far from the vistas of the King's highways, appears in discourse in a fashion analogous to the prohibition of a fifth *varna*. At the same time, rather than conspiring in denial by shifting linguistic moods, Du Bellay *reveals* to the King the social facts of his kingdom.

It is interesting to note that this was written just before a period of massive centralization which led to the high life of the absolute monarchy - indeed an occidental despotism, and perhaps the real signified behind the later critique of the signifier "oriental" despotism. Such a centralizing regime also constructed a notion of the "social" as a mass of material to be motivated and disciplined in terms of a new order, an order intent on eradicating the very idea of a relevant "locality". In other words, it may have been precisely the greater success and realization of despotism in Europe (France) which proferred the sufficient conditions for the recognition of a new category of person in the realm. The Revolution in France, as Tocqueville suggested, might better be seen as the final eradication of any "locality" as its own sovereign space, the completion of the centralizing process through the forming of an "administrative despotism".[25] The motivating ideology of the Enlightenment

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[24] The development may in fact have been the recognition of the emergence of a labouring class who found their social positions increasingly dependent on the orbit of *money*, a development due to the increasing demand of the palace for cash (as opposed to the "feudal" demand for the contribution of military manpower). Duby notes that fear of the common man was on the rise, as peasant class differentiation intensified. In the realm of courtly debate, however, "what interested the intellectuals was not the question of whether the workers should or should not be hauled out of the mire to which they had been consigned by general agreement. Debate centered on the following issue: to deserve the appelation 'courtly' rather than common, was nonproductiveness sufficient qualification?" Labour was inserted with greater exaggeration into Christian rhetoric as a form of salutory punishment. See Duby 1985:322-355 for a fascinating discussion of the feudal imaginary in France; see also Le Goff 1988.

[25] Consider the following comments by Tocqueville, in my mind the hidden forebear of Foucault: "every central government worships uniformity" (1961:354); and, regarding his vision of the compromise between "administrative despotism" and the sovereignty of the people entailed in the electoral paradox: "the nature of him I am to obey signifies less to me than the fact of extorted obedience" (*ibid.*, p.382). In moments when the despotic tendency of the mentality of centralization prevailed, the result is different from the tyranny of emperors. The latter often abused their power, but their objects were few: "it was violent, but its range was limited"; administrative despotism, however, would be "more extensive and more mild; it would degrade men without tormenting them" (*ibid.*, pp.379-80; see Todorov 1990 for an analysis of Tocqueville's contradictory views on

functioned as an effort tantamount to universalizing the eyes behind the King's gaze, producing the Panoptic notion of civil citizenship, considered by Foucault to be a regulatory norm signifying the subjection intrinsic to the notion of the individual as a "subject." In 1567, however, there was a remarkable similitude between the situation in France and in India; the opposite resolution, which had only begun to find an elite voice in 1567, were in part surely configured by the act of colonial conquest itself, and the subsequent development of the idea that Indian subjects lacked a "public" and hence were not "ready" for self-government. The evidence from Europe's private past, however, suggests that the recognition of the actuality of a lowly "fourth estate" was not written with the sense of a moral prohibition of excessive subjugation, but rather was inscribed as a new category wedged into the body of the people; the question was rather to whose custody their domination should be assigned. It was this sort of ambient from which was cultivated the bibliography of political theories upon which the British in India drew: there was less space for metaphor, including the *metaphor* of despotism.

The Sweetness of Speech.

> "Utopia wants speech against power and the reality principle which is only the phantasm of the system and its indefinite reproduction. It wants only the spoken word; and it wants to lose itself in it."
>
> - Baudrillard (1975:166-7)

In *The Religion of India*, Max Weber set out to explain, for India and indeed Asia, a catalogue of "lacks" or absences, including an alleged failure to achieve "professional rationality" and "economic rationalism", *alias* capitalism. As part of the

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colonialism). These last two comments are echoed by some of Munro's later musings, in which he feared the extinction of spirit in the south Indian population subjected to colonialism; e.g.: "[i]t is not the arbitrary power of a national sovereign, but subjugation to a foreign one, that destroys national character and extinguishes national spirit" (1824; in Stein 1989b:292). Also, see his 1817 letter to Hastings, lamenting that "none of them [natives of British provinces] can aspire to anything beyond this mere animal state of thriving in peace... The effect of this state of things is observable in all the British provinces, whose inhabitants are certainly the most abject race in India" (*ibid.*, p.224). It is this abject silence, due to colonialism, which in part led the colonial rulers to endlessly pursue "knowledge" about their "subjects", which was used to fill the governmental category of the "social." See Baudrillard 1983a for a similar argument about *all* administrative despotisms [perhaps especially the USA]. Marx had indicated this, in his remark on "the formation of the political state": "... Man as a member of civil society - *non-political* man - necessarily appears as the natural man... Egoistic man is the *passive, given* result of the dissolution of society , an *object of direct apprehension* and consequently a natural object" (1964:29-30*).

It might be appropriate to define "colonialism" in terms of the way in which the knowledge of the human sciences is obtained. Colonialism inherently construes its knowledge of its subjects in an objectivist manner - this is not simply because that reflects its base intentions, but also reflects the refusal to participate on the part of the colonized, itself a testimony to the inachievement of "hegemony". In 1771, the Abbe Dinouart (a contemporary of Sade!), published his *L'Art de se taire* [*The Art of Keeping Silent*], which proposed silence as a social strategy, i.e., a form of action. The Abbe catalogued different forms and modes of silence, a listing analogous to Sade's 600 passions, or Nietzsche's limitless number of the multifarious manifestations of the will to power. Weiss observes that the Abbe intended his book as a guide which would not aid us to govern others (the ancient task of the rhetorical arts), but rather to escape the others' grasp - a new rhetoric (*cf.* Weiss 1989:x-xiii).

interpretation, pre-figured as it largely is by his paradigm of plenitude versus lack[26], he suggested that there was a lack of "national" feeling; in the course of this argument Weber made the interesting comment that "[t]he Asiatic culture area *lacked* in essentials a *speech community...*" (1958:340*). The notion of a speech community underlies much of western political theory; materialized in history it would represent the plenum of voices who are permitted to speak to each other: an ideal civil society from which ideas discussed without the privileges of power are allowed to percolate through the governmental filter of legislation. This, ostensibly, is a clue to the "rational life methodology" which, according to Weber (*ibid.*, p.340), informs the official structures of European polities, and apparently the ideal republican social fabrics from which those states are woven.

This is all fine if it works. Kant, whose influence on this philosophical stance is enormous, wrote in 1784:

> "For enlightenment of this kind, all that is needed is *freedom*. And the freedom in question is the most innocuous form of all - freedom to make *public use* of one's reason in all matters.... The *public* use of man's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men..."[27]

The main tenet of this point of view holds that, while the employment of private reason *may* be engaged for various *actions* of civil life, *speech* in the public square of the State *must* always be permitted. Although neither Kant (nor Habermas, nor Bourdieu) contend that such a state of affairs has been achieved, they do, by various paths, contend that it is a sort of categorical imperative: an ideal which it is logically self-contradictory to deny.[28] This ideal projects a homogenized social topography, one levelled of all distinctions between citizens - in the moment of their speech. Just as the modern state canonizes, legitimates and enforces a distinction between a civil society and the personnel of a State, the idea of a speech community severs, suppresses, and demands the end of a relation between particular speech and particular action; the latter is to be permitted only when the former is accepted by the whole. The history and destiny of this *epistème* is not the subject here.[29]

Weber's contrasting presentation of India relies on the notion that geographical localism and the separatisms of caste hindered the development of such a speech

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26 *Cf.* Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Post-Coloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?", paper read at A.N.U., 1990 (MS: esp. p.15). This inspiring paper influences much of this section.

27 The passage continues: "... the private use of reason may quite often be very narrowly restricted, however, without undue hindrance to the progress of enlightenment" (Kant 1970:55).

28 Bourdieu modifies Kant's argument for a priori categories into a challenge for a "*realpolitik* of reason" (*cf.* Bourdieu 1990b).

29 Kant perhaps anticipated much of it. "The best way of making a nation content with its constitution is to *rule* autocratically and at the same time to *govern* in a republican manner, i.e. to govern in the spirit of republicanism and by analogy with it" (1970:184). The ideal ruler of the enlightened and ideal simulacrum of a republic, suggested Kant, was Frederick II, at the moment installed and close at hand, and equipped as he ought to be by having "at hand a well-disciplined and numerous army to guarantee public security" (*ibid.*, p.59).

community. To some extent the same features are reflected in the model of the King's gaze presented above; however, I have tried to see geography as a political category and, by derivation of the semantics and literal size of space, hierarchical subordination of "caste" as a system is also a function of politics. This has entailed the identification of points wherein discourses were altered by reversal or inversion, which in turn suggests that the construction of space was different from that supposed by European political ideas - speech, for instance, was most salient not in the intimate square of citizenship, but when it was sent across the boundaries of power expressed spatially *vis-a-vis* the polity of a King. "Untouchability", a prohibited institution, might be defined as the repressed position of those denied access to the megaphone which communicated to the ruler. That denial was a product of their spatial enclosure, their local-ization, a strategy of domination on the part of those who would seize that voiced relation to the King. Tiruvalluvar, the Paraiyar who wrote the *Thirukkural*, expressed the awareness of this:

> *"Better than spending with a happy heart is to carry on sweet speech with a happy face"* (# 92; translated by Nayagam 1970).

There are at least two modes through which this statement can operate. One notes that the strategically obsequious flattery of one's political superiors produces more than the fruits of one's own labour, thus demonstrating a critical awareness of the practices of the *mirasidar* elite in keeping the King's gaze out of their localities - a practice which in turn rendered their (untouchables') labour inferior. Another proposes that untouchables valued speech most of all: speech with a "happy face" rather than one covered by the hand in deference to the other's fear of one's own pollution - in short, a speech which, fully within the "conditions of *its own* felicity", transgressed the boundaries of dominated space. Valuing speech over consumers' rights suggests that "untouchability" was felt most not as a social or religious problem, but as one of political discourse; the former were derivatives of the latter. In this sense, a similar value to that embedded in the figure of the "speech community" appears: that speaking rights would promote an enlightened polity (open to the ideal gaze of sovereignty) not dissimilar from that promised by the Enlightenment's modernity; *neither were delivered*, which damages both co-ordinates of the Weberian paradigm of occidental plenitude and oriental lack. Compared to a palmyra tree with no shadow, untouchables' voices also had no space, and hence no echo; their gaze was one locally defined and maintained through (spatial) domination as power-less. This font is transcribed as radical impurity: the contrast is produced *vis-a-vis* the King, not to the Brahmin whose figure is the deferred expression of its opposite.

Where there was no King, nor the ensuing official division of space from its human territoriality that glossed over the fact of local resistance to the King's gaze, there was not the foundational mode of semiotic production which would coalesce in untouchability. The dry *palaiyams*, more or less, operated in terms of an alternative political formation until the advent of colonial rule. Colonial rule imported both the European versions of state domination over totalized territory, and the modernist separation of state and society. By derivation from the latter, "castes" were construed ambiguously as unsolicited but "native" forms of civil society. As "social", they were to be kept in order; and, as *peculiar* social forms, their political status in the official polity was never clarified.

One quasi-untouchable group, the Shanars, rose through merchant success to higher status under the name Nadars, a process in which the colonial government wanted to avoid participating; the Raj's eventual recognition of the new name and status, however, proved crucial. This ought to be kept in mind in reading the words of Rajendran, a Nadar mill-worker in Madurai: "Before Independence, we were not given freedom of speech, but there was no need to talk: everything was *given*" (in Hardgrave 1969:252*). The members of this particular community might feel this way, but for the same reason others wouldn't: in the despotic structure of colonial rule, the jockeying for status in the "society of castes" was, in itself, a zero-net game. Yet this ex-untouchable community formalized its uplift by dint of *speaking to* the despot, gaining at last the elusive sweet speech. Like many other untouchable groups, their caste association was keenly loyalist (*cf. ibid.*, p.131),[30] - partly, I think, for this reason: the simulation of a promise to be heard, the arrival of the good King! This traditional structure, however, had been supplanted by the formal modernity of colonial sociology, which did not prohibit untouchability or "the fifth." Eventually, Gandhi and the Congress party took up the mantle of that aspect of the Hindu ideology; today, the Congress generally does well with Harijan votes - precisely by declaring that there *is* a fifth (the "Scheduled Castes"), although there *ought* not to be. Rajendran, commenting on life after the Raj, observed: "[n]ow we talk much about everything, but it has no meaning" (*ibid.*, p.252).

This emergence of the totalized social as a regime of castes is the glove to the hand of the colonization of spatiality itself: as Srinivas' oft-cited saying put it, by stripping away all competing polities and other sovereign spatial formations, British

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30 The Nadar Sangam resolved that anyone in opposition to the government, and most certainly the Crown, would be removed from the caste association. In their voting practices under the strict franchise system of dyarchy, this meant supporting the Justice Party. In Tirunelveli, the dominant Vellalars occupied high positions in the Justice Party, and so the Nadars there tended to support Congress. Kamaraj, meanwhile, was a Nadar who became a huge figure in the Congress Party; this outraged the Nadars, especially those from his own locality (Virudhanagar), who stoned him at his appearances in support of the Non-Cooperation movement. In 1937 he won the Sattur constituency after a Nadar Justicite withdrew from the contest - the area was dominated by a rural majority of *non*-Nadars (*cf.* Hardgrave 1969:185-7).

rule "let the djinn out of the bottle" (1962:16). Having homogenized territoriality in its conquest of space, the colonial juggernaut re-arranged the land into administrative units which closely hugged the contours of what were known as "village communities." These were then entrusted to naturalized intermediaries who were largely indulged in achieving the de facto status of village renters. This especially influenced the ex-*palaiyam* zone, where the idea of regularly extorted revenue and the ossification of political position was new. Here the spatial closure effected as an administrative convenience produced all the conditions previously constitutive of a "locality". The terms of settlement polarized labour as the object of exploitation for ownership to bear fruit; besides which, there was no idea that the importation of the dead's secret inner life - untouchability - was prohibited. These two forces conspired to produce a "fifth" in dry land Tamil country - a "fifth" which had to be innovated, but shamelessly, like colonialism, without secrecy.

The Village Retrouvée.

Although there is a danger in re-finding any "Indian village", as the image tends to be awash with the sense of a continuity beyond and beneath what was after all a very "limited Raj" incapable of dealing with the cultural intransigences of the subcontinent, it is a key institution of colonialism. While the "locality" need not be given any particular autonomy *vis-a-vis* the State - at least in the almost ontological sense intimated by the symbol of the "village republic" - it needs to be kept from its equally totalizing eclipse. In this chapter, the locality has been construed as the "other side" of a discursive position, when those positions are appointed (or listened to) by a dominant State voice. When a King or the colonial State sets out its structure and its agents, then regardless of whether their central governmental intentions are successfully executed or not, they have dramatically altered the range of possibilities and likelihoods for human organization in the field now mediated by the frame built around the royal gaze. The colonial State was very partial to its hallucinations of village republics everywhere. Part of this was strategic, such as the imagining of a sort of socialism-on-the-cheap, and much of it was conditioned by intellectual needs: how to integrate the violence of its own conquest with its now embarrassing vitriol against "Oriental despotism".

The Tamil kingly tradition and ideology wanted and required, if rarely obtained, that space be opened to its gaze; the colonial state operated a mutation here by the myriad spatial closures imagined and imposed on the "village community." Having done this, and used the myth of little republics as an apologia for its emergent despotism, the colonial state interpreted the obstacles it met to its direct and transparently applicable rule as due to a "social" base that was somehow peculiar, yet common to the re-figured localities. Policy dictated that customs and religion were

not, however, to be interfered with; but by creating and consolidating this new categorization of what was customary, a fantastic mandate was created: powers in the localities, influential land-owners and the like, were able to import new ideas about social organization from other regions. Much of that cultural trade flow went from the irrigated paddy fields of Chingleput and Thanjavur to the dry millet-sown plains of Madurai. Dubious labour practices that Munro had surmised would slowly die out in fact migrated all over the place, assuming new forms, but generally adopting more and more the terms of "caste" (as the subjugation of low castes as landless labour), if only because that was an idiom understood by the British to be inextricably and entirely one of customary usage, and hence rewarded with a virtual guarantee of immunity from State intervention. This is precisely the opposite of the kingly tradition prohibiting a fifth *varna*. The administrative appropriation of the "village" for the geography of revenue provided a supreme case of spatial closure[31], the condition for increased hierarchical domination. As Appadurai notes, the myth attached as a charter to this policy - that of the village community as politically self-sufficient (although economically dependent) - is:

> "the most direct expression of the contradiction in British rule.... it reflects a desire to avoid the responsibility of dealing with conflicts generated by British disturbance of agrarian relations through a stubbornly high revenue assessment..." (1981:153).

It is now possible to return to Weber with some incredulity; when he proposed the lack of a speech community in Asia, it was immediately after asking whether "the strong closure of local culture [can] be viewed as a form of 'nationalistic feeling'?" (1958:340). In importing Western notions of space as the Land of an absolute desire, the ground of a unified territory, he asked the wrong question. However, as the colonialist ideology did precisely the same thing, by ramifying that "local closure", his suggestion can be re-appropriated as a contribution to a critique of colonial rule. Not only did that tenure actively prevent the modernist project from developing that "public" space whose opening would be a requirement for an "ideal speech community", but also, by breaking down the forms of speech which made for the sovereignties of different spaces, thereby cleared those fields for the revamped structures of "social" domination.

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31 It might be said that *raiyatwari* was precisely not a "village settlement" - however, I think that it was in terms of local politics: revenue *collection* was done by Munro's "strong village establishment", and labour was forcibly immobilized. See the next chapter.

"The village represented," wrote Srinivas, "a distinct olfactory world" (1976:332). "Only in villages does this caste system exist," complained some of my informants of the Paraiyar *jati*, linking up to the metaphor of "stench" invoked in the preamble of this thesis. Another, from K.N.P., that peculiar village, observed: "when I'm in my village I'm a human. When I go outside, I put on pants. That symbolizes the encroachment of outside culture." Not long after, a visiting friend told me that he didn't see any "villages" in Cumbum Valley - rather, the whole place made him think of Los Angeles.[1] That there are as many "types" of "Indian villages" as there are of pleasures, silences, and wills to power now functions as a platitude in the ethnographic literature, although to what end is unclear. Recently Marguerite Robinson addressed the kaleidoscopic problem with the quip that "Mallannapalle [Andhra Pradesh] is not a 'typical' Indian village; in this respect, it is like all other Indian villages" (1988:15). The tale, saga, legend, epic, myth, or documentary of the "village" in India could go on and on. I am reminded of Chinnathevar's hermeneutic explanation of proverbs: "you put many languages in, then you see what you want." As a proverb, then, the image of the "village community" promises to be fertile; this surely is one reason for its prominence as a "watch-word of Indian patriotism" (Dumont 1966:67). Nonetheless, as Bernard Cohn mused, "[i]n some sense it might be argued that the British created the Indian village" (1987:198).[2]

The protocol of caution (where it is honoured) would demand a more differential approach to the question, with notions of the state and market's uneven penetration and incorporation following a frontier. The results of such analysis would no doubt be crucial, but - and especially in the erstwhile *palaiyam* areas - the initial impact of colonial rule was harsh, quick, and structurally dramatic. Incumbents of nodes of power positioned above the level of individual settlements were, by 1810,

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1 Indeed, the 1971 Census map considered vast swaths of the valley to be urban, although it de-classified (from 1961) certain sites (e.g., Kombai and Thevaram). Basically, if a demographic criterion alone (> 400/km^2) is used, the population density lends itself to the label "urban", but the economic criterion entails that 75% of the male working population should be in the non-agricultural sector. Uthamapalaiyam, the taluk headquarters, was up-classified, which reminds me of what someone there told me was the difference between a village and a town: "to be a town, more government officials are needed..."

What my visiting friend was really on about, I believe, is the impression of people moving about: the bus systems in Tamil Nadu are prolific; the main road through the middle of the valley also connects Madurai to Kottayam in Kerala, and so is constantly busy, throughout the night. To go from Uthamapalaiyam to Cumbum, for example, would never require more than a fifteen minute wait. That makes it *different* than Los Angeles, come to think of it...

2 The preponderance of quotations in this paragraph may strike some as pernicious or absurd. Without wishing to defuse such sentiments, that preponderance might seen as having some distant formal analogy to the trope of the "village" itself. Walter Benjamin (who reportedly wanted to compose a whole book of nothing but quotations: the "dialectic at a standstill") observed that quoting a text implies interrupting its context, and compared it to its speculative origin: *interruption* in epic theatre - here that might be said to be a sort of deliberate over-determining of Orientalism, so as to assure that its collapse is not forgotten. (Benjamin: "Epic theatre... does not reproduce conditions but, rather, reveals them" [in Wolin 1982:150-51].)

dead, pensioned off (dying), or adopted into territorially defined and State-sanctioned *zamindars*. Sites of settlement were made into "villages" - a term which, for all its social content and innuendo, was quite literally a revenue term for the English, a short-hand denotation of named (or numbered) spaces from which money revenue would be extracted. The construction from within of village life by villagers themselves occurred as an involution within the frames allocated by the official map. The curling of the blanket of territorial space into an enclosed locality acted as a shovel, digging a ditch which articulated a new form of domination; the local sanctifications of the borders of this colonial cognition filled the ditch with the symbolic effluent of untouchability. This custom, the peculiar servitude of south Indians, reflected the depths of the mirror which refrangibly revealed the face of the Raj. Efforts made much later by independent India's central government to install the *panchayati raj* over India's villages, ostensibly to collapse that echo-chamber of the King's foreign voice, are largely seen to have failed, suggesting that although State power may have, as Cohn proposed, created the "village", it was nonetheless not in its own image. In the dry zone, the colonial creation followed the detour of the delta bias.

Thus when I was in Ammapatti, the *panchayat* drummer-announcer presented me with apparently the one script for his performance: a message proclaiming the inaugural empowerment of the village *panchayat* itself. He wanted to re-enact it for me, he said, as a "one-act play." The stage on which he played was a languid "public square" in the village; the theatre, I think, was built by dominant locals in order to dramatize the republican nature of citizenship: that is, according to the rules that their dominance laid down. The man who played the polluting drum was from a tribal group known as Veduvar, and his was the only such family in Ammapatti. He had originally come from Coimbatore, in times of famine, in 1947. With such a resume, and with such capital, he was integrated with pollution in his hands, precisely in that iconic admixture of "tradition" and the "public": a village servant. Thus integrated, he was free to be a coolie.[3] He went through a process quite like some of the other less fortunate of the village, experienced his residential incorporation in exchange for his acceptance of a demeaning and degraded task [*thozhile*] which itself entailed subordination to a hierarchical valorization of the idiom of purity - precisely the delta virus which had come to the interior districts. The acceleration with which he went through this "citizen"-making process illustrates two ramifications of the colonized space of the village: 1) he is not socially marginalized from the village (people often exchange pleasantries and buy him arrack, etc.) as are other groups; and 2) those who are, such as the families of the Paraiyar *jati*, are so precisely because they do not

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3 The drummer's one-act play with its highly self-reflexive character sense existed as the echo of its function: that of enshrining dominance, not of facilitating Kantian debate...

accept any such role. In a sense this resistance redoubles their domination (as landless and hated); it also suggests that they were not historically privy to the peculiar customs of servitude suffered by the "Pariah."

In this chapter I must discuss several things. First, the literary history of the "village community" and its representation, noting how, even amidst elite disagreement, "it" was still constructed historically and held at arm's length as an object whose problematic was how to be "administered." Second, the question of revenue and judicial impositions from Fort St George on the settlements which it taxed will be examined over time. Third, various methodological commentaries on "the village", such as Dumont's rejection of its significance. Finally, a discussion of the forms which, when space is called a village, trace the servitude and the functional meaning of the concept and status of "untouchability."

Trope, Debate and Contest: The "Village Community."

Many of the earlier colonial officers tried their hand in the discourse of the "village community," which was later one of the passport symbols of the nationalist movement. If Munro, Marx, and Gandhi all spoke in often repetitive terms of this image, it indicates not so much the actual sociological importance of "the Indian village" as it does the semantic role it occupied in their various versions of elite political theory which had a fundamental consensus that the real subject of history lay elsewhere.[4] Mahalingam opined in a way that had been paved for decades:

> "The *foundation* of any *state edifice* in Indian *administration* must necessarily be the village not merely on account of its great antiquity but also because of that fact that people living there are known to one another ultimately [intimately?] and have interests which converge on well-known objects. Even so late as the early nineteenth-century British *administrators* in our country were so impressed with the vitality and *usefulness* of the Indian village communities that they have showered encomiums on them" (1977:94*).

This rather usual commentary is exemplary in its thorough bracketing of the notion of politics in favour of the colonial mirage of "administration" - especially ironic given the stereotypes of "village *republics*" which began the debate in English. According to the technique used by the colonial state to maintain the fiction of its distance from the local fabric of society, the villages were (to be[5]) politically autarkic, thus relieving the

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[4] They all denied the glories of State-ness. Marx thought the village would be crushed under the incursion of "market" forces, Munro wanted the State to be a restrained despot, so as to continue its existence into the remotest possible future, and Gandhi seemed to view the State as a kind of "gate-keeper" of the "modern" world's alleged forces of dissolution. Only Marx took a negative view of the village (which he wrongly construed as an autarkic economy); Gandhi rhetorically glorified it, while Munro and the colonial government constructed it as a nemesis but an invaluable one, productive of the deferred structure which modern states claim to need (an "other": civil society, etc.)

[5] Here is colonial desire expressing itself in the optative mood.

foreigners from duties other than maintaining a modicum of order so that the primary process of revenue collection could go on. This is an indirect method by which colonial politics lied, managing to see "tradition" where in fact their own shadow lay. Mahalingam is accidentally right in indicating that, by and large, the "village" has been talked about, rather than with.

Much of the debate, as Dewey cogently showed, was referential to European intellectual history and concerns, not the least of which were the constructions of national mythologies intended to explain the respective forms of the modern state which France, Germany and England sensed they were adopting. Interestingly if unsurprisingly, changes in the interpretation of what the somewhat floating signifier "village community" meant occurred most furiously as various scholarly patriots tried to recover from their respective "national" military losses, such as the Napoleonic Wars, and later the Franco-Prussian war (*cf.* 1972:304-5). Given this, it is no surprise that Indian nationalism also should have hitched some of its ideological wagon to the village star; it is apparently something that the voice of "nations" do when they are trying to justify, rationalize and explain their aspirations to state-ness as a transparent magnification of values shared from common, and therefore local experiences. Immediately, then, it is somewhat surprising that colonial discourses should set out on a course that would involve the symbol of the "village", rather than aim to suppress it.[6]

By and large, the basic framework for arguments posted by early English officials revolved around three basic interests, all very much *ad hoc*, in the senses of "at hand" and "espeically for this purpose": 1) techniques of political pacification and control[7]; 2) apprehending structures of maximally efficient revenue extraction[8]; 3)

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6 As the colonial reports of the early 1800s were written long before the Franco-Prussian war, and before the German school had published the findings of its quest for identity after Napoleon, perhaps the idea of the "village community" was not known to augur any such destiny. This brings out the relevant fact that, in the end, symbols of community, or at least the "village" one, are indeterminate in and of themselves. The nationalists employed it more like the Germans, as a way of (re)construction from (a rhetorical) "within", while the British in India historically constructed it from (a practical) without. Indeterminacy suggests that nobody really knows what they are doing: e.g., the British hardly could know that their totalization of space would effect any transformation, since they had a particular idea of "oriental despotism". Gandhi, meanwhile, was consistently frustrated at what real villagers did. In both cases, the invocation of "history" would seem to be a symptom of a certain uncertainty on the part of the elite speakers' will to power.

7 This was particularly true for south India and the dry zone, where, as Stein observes: "[t]he experience of the earliest [British] administrators was essentially military, and the formal campaigns against the well-organized field forces of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan and the Marathas were probably less influential on the views held by these soldier-administrators than the bitter, little battles with 'poligars' and other local magnates whose forces consisted of peasant peoples fighting on and defending their own lands and rights" (1980:438). As the *Thirukkural* (499) notes, in the section called "On knowing the *place*": "A people may not have either strength or strongholds; still it is difficult to fight them on their own soil."

8 Much of the debate hinged on "efficiency", as the goal was common enough. Thus Munro, in most senses the key figure in this debate, could say: "[i]t is too much regulation that ruins everything; Englishmen are as great fanatics in politics as Mahomedans in religion. They suppose that no country can be saved without English institutions. The natives of this country have enough of their own to answer every useful object of internal administration, and if we maintain and protect them, our work will be easy. If not disturbed by innovation, the

providing a sort of colonial theodicy for the conquest, begun so accidentally but prosecuted with systematic and forceful vigour. Politics meant stability, economics demanded extraction, and ideology entailed claims to being a new and improved "good king"; these were the fundamental coordinates. Ideally, if flimsily, the investment into and output from each of these were to be minimalized by the trading Company.

Given such a rubric, arguments were bound to disagree, but only within a certain consensus shared by those who intended to supervise the distribution of the spoils of military conquest. The issue of the specifically colonial divide, however, did serve as a major axis of signification in the debate. Dewey outlines the basic disagreement in the early 19th century between "conservatives" and "radicals"; the latter were laissez-faire ideologues at a time when their dream policies were insecurely installed in England itself. In that era, both polemical groups were in agreement that political practice ought to be the same across the board, in England and in India; the difference was whether the village community was to be lauded or derided. During that debate, the symbolic value allotted to the image was largely that it upheld "social order" in its proper and hierarchical way. By the late 19th century, the situation had reversed: now "the system of economic freedom" had more or less officially triumphed, and English conservatives did not want them to prevail in India as well, while radicals tended to argue that they should cease in England, and/or begin in the Indian colony. At this time it was not possible to have the same attitude across the colonial divide. In this stage, the radicals employed the "village community" image as one of a world of social justice and egalitarianism (*cf. ibid.*, pp.292-5). Munro's personal career, in ascending from agent to King, epitomized the shift: at first a radical, later a conservative, in terms of the "social" rights reserved for *zamindari* estate owners.

The classic image of the "village community" in India, which survived almost a century of polemics with its substantive structure more or less intact, is usually attributed to Metcalfe,[9] but he was already part of a tradition sprung from Munro's "Report from Anantapur" in 1806, which Dumont observes as "the original that will be endlessly copied and varied" (1966:71). These two, and Elphinstone, make the core of the colonial stereotype, so I shall cite parts of their exemplarity.

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country will in a very few months settle itself" (cited in Beaglehole 1966:9). That Munro of all people should say this is astonishing, but he said it in 1818 at the height of his defence of the *raiyatwari* system, which he had already presented in the guise of "historical" custom. What in a sense is "hidden" is that by 1818 he had decimated the most established threats to the Company, an erasure whose forgetting was aided by Munro's claim that they had been un-historical aberrations and so on. In the dry zone, at least, his policies ratcheted the structure of the official polity and its revenue apparatus ever further down spatial levels - at any rate this was a big change, and in many sites it was a revolution, since they were not part of a nested set of "levels" of official space anyway.

[9] As Dewey notes, although Metcalfe "(a brilliant stylist") built on an existing tradition, his product ended that tradition: "it evolved no further: Metcalfe's eloquence encased it like a fly in amber" (1972:296).

1. Munro. 1806. *"Report from Anantapur."* [dry interior Andhra]

> ""Every village, with its twelve Ayangadees as they are called, is a kind of *little republic*, with the Potail [*patel*, usually "VHM"] at the head of it; and India is a mass of such republics. The inhabitants, during war, look chiefly to their own Potail. They give themselves no trouble about the breaking up and division of kingdoms; while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred: wherever it goes the *internal management remains unaltered*; the Potail is still the collector *and* magistrate, *and* head farmer. From the age of Menu [*sic*] until this day the [revenue] settlements have been made *either with or through* the Potails."[10]

2. Metcalfe. 1830. *Minute*. [near Delhi]

> "Thinking so highly as I do think of this system [the *raiyatwari* system, against which Metcalfe was arguing] as a Revenue System, it may naturally be asked why I do not propose its universal adoption in our unsettled Provinces.
>
> The reason is, that I admire the structure of the village communities, and am apprehensive that direct engagement for Revenue with each separate landholder or cultivator in a village might tend to destroy its constitution. The village communities are little republics, having *nearly everything* that they can want within themselves, and *almost independent* of any foreign relations. They *seem to last* where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to revolution; Hindoo, Patan, Mogul, Mahratta, Sikh, *English*, are *all masters in turn; but the village community remains the same*. In times of trouble they arm and fortify themselves: an hostile army passes through the country; the village communities collect their cattle within their walls, and let the enemy pass unprovoked. If plunder and devastation be directed against themselves and force employed be irresistible, *they flee to friendly villages at a distance*; but, when the storm has passed over, they return and resume their occupations... A generation may pass away, but the succeeding generation will return. The sons will take the places of their fathers...; and it is not a trifling matter that will drive them out, for they will often maintain their position through times of disturbance and convulsion, and acquire strength sufficient to resist pillage and oppression with success. This union of the village communities, each one forming a *separate little state in itself*, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the *people* of India through all the revolutions and changes which *they have suffered*, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of *a great portion* of freedom and independence" (*cf.* Dumont 1966:69 and Dewey 1972:296-7*).

3.a. Elphinstone. 1821. *Report*. [Bombay]

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[10] In Dumont 1966:71*; the version in *The Fifth Report* is almost identical: "[u]nder this simple form of municipal government the inhabitants have lived from time immemorial. *The boundaries of villages have seldom been altered...* The inhabitants give themselves no trouble about the breaking up and divisions of kingdoms; while the village remains entire, they care not to what power it is transferred *or to what sovereign it devolves*; its internal *economy* remains *unchanged*; the Potail is still the head *inhabitant*, and still *acts as* the *petty* judge and magistrate and collector *or renter of the village*" (also from Dumont 1966:71; emphases indicate differences from Munro's original). Note the omission that the inhabitants look chiefly to "their own Potail" - "*during war*", and that the head *farmer* has become the head *inhabitant*.

> "These communities *contain* in miniature *all the materials* of a State within themselves, and are *almost* sufficient to protect their members, *if* all governments are withdrawn."

3.b. Elphinstone. 1839. *History of India.*

> "... though under a settled government, it [the village] is *entirely subject* to the head of the State, *yet in many respects* it is an organised Commonwealth" (from Dumont 1966:72-4*).

It is interesting that all the three descriptions anchor the imagined meanings of their insights on what happens in one of the villages during war[11] - i.e., the so-called "transition" to colonialism.

There is in these excerpts the expression of a logical progression in the colonial mentality during the formation of the village community as a symbol in the discourse on colonizing India. For example, Munro first claimed that the villagers "care not" about contestants for state dominion; Metcalfe then noted that actually they sometimes flee their homes and wait out the "occupation"; finally, Elphinstone confessed that actually, war was not the only context in which villages find themselves, and that their "entirely subject" status *vis-a-vis* a State rendered their potentially republican features unto the colonial Caesar. For Metcalfe, "the people of India... have suffered", but were somehow naturally separated from any participation in the "mastery" which was constantly tumbling down anyway. The basic structure of these little pedagogies is based on the notion that pre-colonial history was simultaneously *political* anarchy and yet *social* eternity. This bit of depoliticizing *tropisme* was crucial to the British in establishing themselves as fit to rule, if not as improvements on "rule" itself. As the "village" was represented to be a capable internal polity[12], the result was that it might be immediately isolated from the context of its external relations with State power other than that of "administration" (in the guise of revenue collection); this emerges yet again as the axis or "foundation" in Mahalingam's prose long after Munro stopped, as Munro himself put it, "going about the country here in my military boots..., enormous hat and feathers, frightening every cow and buffalo" (in Stein 1989b:238).

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11 Marx also hinges part of his derision of the Indian village on their relation to war: "We must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism... We must not forget the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some *miserable patch of land*, had quietly witnessed *the ruin of empires*, ... the massacre of the population of *large towns*, ... itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all... [etc., etc.]" (Marx 1959:16*). The lamentation for "the ruin of empires" is quite unexpected, as is the particular dear-ness of burghers. Marx finishes this passage with his famous simian trope, in which "man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey..."(*ibid.*, p.17).

12 It is interesting that the symbol of the village community does not seem to have emerged as a category of discourse until after the Permanent Settlement in Bengal. Most of its invocation occurs in the context of arguing against the furtherance of the *zamindari* mode of settlement; the debate then remained between village-wide settlement or *raiyatwari*. Were those Bengali villages placed within the huge estates seen as being political autarkies?

The political harnessing or inflection of the "village community" obviously varied enormously. Although the image was politically neutralized by the end of the 19th century in Europe,[13] it lived on in India:

> "[t]he perversion of the co-operative movement and of panchayati raj by village oligarchies are only the most recent examples of the waves of illusion and disilluion that the village community's changing images have been able to inspire" (Dewey 1972:328).

Throughout its contestation, the trope of the village community has been a function of elitist politics, both at the state and "local" level. As the sign of a problematic, it has sustained the structural notion wherein the village is construed as having an administrative relation with the State, and not an intricately political one. In this simulation of deference to the "village" as an internality, the colonial definition of space endures, retracted into the smallest possible compass. As an internality, any peculiar practices of domination are tolerated, provided the "public" peace is kept. Ironically, the more the image is used to mobilize an ideology which promotes even more State deference, the less likely is the "community" to "respond" on its own with an agenda of citizenship. In the words of a Telugu man, "there is no one at the receiving end" (*cf.* Robsinson 1988:272).

The "village community" is an image within elite discourse, albeit an ambiguous one; it has, nonetheless, functioned to homogenize and extend the notion of the separation between administration and politics which is a characteristic ideological structure of the modern State in general (*a la* Tocqueville). The State edifice, when founded upon such symbols, constructs the conditions for what Frykenberg referred to as "shadow forms of power" in his notion of the "anti-State", which

> "denotes a kind of political system which, residing within a state, disperses its power and proliferates itself to the detriment of the State and acts in such as way that it not only opposes but actually prevents the State from functioning properly" (1963:136).

He considers this as endemic to "premodern" India, although his own research shows a flamboyant example during the Company's tenure in what is now Andhra.[14]

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[13] The conservative H.S. Maine had his evolutionary (status to contract) model of private property in land backfire when it was used by Irish radicals (again indicating the indeterminate destiny of the symbol). This prompted revisionism throughout Europe. In India, Baden-Powell finally inverted Maine's model, claiming that joint villages were results of laminated political rights, which themselves supposed prior "individual" rights. In Europe, Maitland killed the conversation by the turn of the century: "[c]o-ownership is ownership by individuals" (*cf.* Dewey 1972:316-28).

[14] Studying an 1840s colonial detective operation in Guntur district, Frykenberg found that "[a]lmost invariably, the original village accounts were separated from those which were spurious - there were often three sets: one for the Zamindar [or tehsildar in Sirkar lands], one for the State, and the true one - years of unauthorized collections, extortionate rack-renting, and extensive bribery would be uncovered [by investigators]. Attempts to palm off fabricated accounts were the rule. Some falses accounts had been written and kept ready for years, ready to be shown on the right occasion. True accounts were found in wells or tanks, torn up or burned, buried, hidden in

Analysis in terms of such an "anti-State" is well-suited to any State and its relations, and perhaps particularly to early colonialism. If this undergoes any change in the dry zone of colonial south India, it is not so much because the system is made cleaner; rather, the colonial government displaced the fundamentally political relation between a "village" (e.g., the shrunken remnant of a constellation once participant in a *palaiyam* formation) and the State with the latter's discursive and institutional distinction between official, executive politics (monopolized by the British), and the "social" (offered free of charge to Indian subjects), exemplified in the very "debate" about the "tradition" of the village community itself. In doing this, they introduced a wholly new idea of collaborating with local influences; these local influences were created by the structure of the State, and if the latter were even construed as merely "administrative" by the government itself, this is not the way in which locally dominant powers utilized it. A vicious circle began, in which the more official polity designs did not work, the more it proved the existence of some "social" fabric, and hence the more it spurred the English on to imagine that there were "traditions" which, if they could grasp and recognize, would cease to hinder the functioning of the Raj that they imagined. Positions of official influence in the countryside became doubly valuable, not merely because of the opportunity they provided to extort revenue from neighbours and foes, but because they were given as an accidental consort the State-sanctioned rights to invent or at least inflect the meanings of "local custom", especially of the peculiar and time-immemorial garden variety. Life in the nineteenth century in dry south India was somehow better if one were the friend or relative of the local *patel*. What was discussed in the cool sanctuaries of colonial bungalows as a trope and a debate, was being decided in a contest for domination in the rural relations which went on outside of the purview of the image, outside of the King's gaze - just as the discourse said it always did. The "village community" in the colonial forge became, in practice, "hyper-real".[15]

Madras: The Village Under Colonial Rule.

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grain, or otherwise disposed of when an inspector came too near. Once, a whole house was set ablaze to destroy damming records. The inspector got out. The records didn't" (1963:133; *cf.* also 1965, *passim*).

15 The term is borrowed from Baudrillard. "It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle" (1983b:25).

"This would be the successive phases of the image:

-it is the reflection of a basic reality

-it masks and perverts a basic reality

-it masks the *absence* of a basic reality

-it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (*ibid.*, p.11).

From the retrospective view of the untouchables who were constructed along with the "village community", this succession could just as well be reversed.

> "Every attempt to compel Government into a compliance with just or unjust desires at the expense of the Revenue must be positively forbid..."
> - The Board in Madras to the Collector of the Jagir[16]

It is interesting that the image of the village was not revised after the 1830s. By this time, the forms of revenue settlements for the different provinces had been chosen (although their implementation in practice is a different question), and so one of the problematics which invoked the image was finished. The other two continued: pacification, and theodicy, two projects which by their very nature could never be truly completed. Clearly the latter did not succeed. On occasion, such as in F.J. Richard's 1918 edition of the Salem District *Gazetteer*, there appear approving (and unembarrassed) allusions to a static continuity between the 1790s, when Munro described the area, and the 20th century.[17] Although the village idea was part of a "machine for the suppression of time", it does seem that this operation was only a kind of speech therapy for the relation between the British and the British in India. At any rate, the seizure of the image by the nationalist movements suggests either a recognition of the failure of the British to maintain their own creation, or the indeterminacy of the ironic image of a *republic* under direct colonial subjection.

The idea of *Pax Britannica*, meanwhile, is clearly over-rated; it refers only to the fairly successful effort to disarm the subject population, an operation of some cost. For example, the Rani of Ramnad was forced to sign a contract promising to deliver all arms of every description which might be concealed in her domains, and to prohibit the commercial passage or the making of pikes, spears, or any weapons, including the manufacture of saltpetre in her *zamin*.[18] This was shortly followed by the Agnew Proclamation at the end of 1801, announcing the need for the polegar country residents to surrender their weapons and offering rewards for those who turned then in promptly to the Company officers, as well as to those who gave information on resistors to the act. A price-list of "gifts" for those who "surrendered" their weapons was composed.[19] The Company declared that some polegars and others "support[ed] peons as a *hereditary* mark of distinction," and for these a definite number of peons, with pikes alone, would be allowed - the pikes, however, were to be obtained from the Collector and to bear the Company seal. More peons were to be permitted to those polegars noted for their "attachment and fidelity" to the Company.

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16 cited in Irschick 1982:225.

17 *Gazetteer*, v.1, part I:251-260, part II:83-6. Dykes' *Salem, an Indian Collectorate* (1853) had been critical of Munro; *cf.* Stein 1989b:354.

18 It is strange that even today in the western fringe of the Ramnad area, around Sattur, the major industry is the manufacture of matches; much of the materials for this currently finds its way into country bombs used by the Pallars and Thevars in their struggle for supremacy. The reference for the disarmament is to *Correspondence*, 1873:55-8.

19 For a musket, Rs.10, for a *gingal* [?], Rs.8, for a *sarabogu* [?], Rs.6, for a matchlock, Rs.5, for a pistol, Rs.2, for a pike, Rs.1. (*Letters from the Board*, vol. 1189:455-8; Dec.1801.) Rewards were also offered for the persons of many of the leading "rebels" (*cf.* Rajayyan 1971:265).

Despite the rhetoric of an already "hereditary" right, the Company announced that the polegars ought to concentrate on the peaceful occupation of agriculture, and to help them with this, the principle of permanent settlement would be introduced - "the polegars *thereby* becoming *zamindars* of their estates."[20] These new creatures would be permitted their own private armies, which they would often need to extract the revenue from their "hereditary" domain, (spatially) constructed from outside. As for the rest of the Sirkar lands, they remained militarized, *with Company troops*; the department of public works was a military wing into the 1840s.[21]

"Pax Britannica" denotes the military protection of the revenue machine of the State, that veneer over what it claimed as its "other": the "village." What happened within those now tiny localities? Srinivas noted that Pax Britannica "had not percolated fully into the village [Rampura]" at least until the 1920s, making for a "subterranean layer of violence in the social life of rural Mysore" (1976:223), something anyone will gather from talking to rural Tamils. Those leaders who enjoyed a reputation for violence *beyond their own villages* were termed, "half-jokingly": *palegars* [Kannada]. This cursed label here represents the awareness that the villagers had that the polegar was the icon of that form of sovereignty which the colonial state would try to annihilate. Violence beyond the unaltering boundaries of a village was liable to be seen and contested by the state. With*in* this unit, presumably, violence might be exercised with impunity: a traditional if peculiar servitude of those it subjugated.[22] At any rate, the hiding of this sort of semi-illegal activity was hardly

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20 Agnew Proclamation, *Letters from the Board,* v.1189:460.

21 *Cf.* Washbrook 1981:662n52, and 662: "[g]roups of sepoys and auxiliaries attended the day-to-day operations of the bureaucracy. The qualities which they brought to economic relations are well caught in such documents as the *Report of the Madras Torture Commission* (1855) which found physical intimidation and violence to be routine elements in the revenue system." This commission found various measures ranging from compelling a person to eat human excrement to the insertion of straw into the urethra, or putting a burrowing beetle within a half coconut shell on the scrotum. On one of the techniques, involving forced physical contortion, a colonial officer wrote: "[t]he stooping posture enforced by the leg and neck being held in proximity no doubt must be highly inconvenient, and to a plethoric Englishman might almost amount to torture, but to the supple cold-blooded native I should hesitate in describing the enforced attitude as one of torture." These practices circulated regionally (from delta to dryland) with the expectations and ideas of the Company's mobile establishment, rendering particularly powerful such techniques as "putting a low-caste man on the back of a man of higher caste" (*cf.* Thurston 1906:407-21).

As for the general role of the military in India, Washbrook reckons that almost 1/2 of all of Indian revenues were spent directly on the Army's maintenance, besides which what few infrastructural development policies that the Raj ever pursued (railways, medical services) were in its interest: the army "represented the single most important reason why the British held India." Another interesting view he proposes is yet another way in which "South Asia paid the price of liberal Britain's prosperity and progress": the British Indian Army's existence relieved the British taxpayer of heavy military expenditure and kept democracy safe at home from the influence of any "feudo-military reaction" (cf. Washbrook 1990:480-81).

22 Dumont recognized this, noting that "in the past" and "in the not so distant past", a dominant caste maintained its relative prominence by "superior *physical* force" (Dumont and Pocock 1957:33). Just as he marginalized territory, however, he marginalizes the "village"; I would say that physical force functions most in a confined space - so much so that it hardly needs to be exercised. The spatial confinement helps sovereignty inhere in the body and person of the dominant. "When the citizens of a community are classed according to their rank, their profession or their birth, and when all men are constrained to follow the career which happens to open before

difficult; Srinivas notes that villagers had plenty of time to arrange their posture for an official visit before 1947, and if necessary

> "to take to their heels as soon as they heard the blowing of the horn (*kombu*), trumpet (*kahale*) and the tom-toms which heralded the visit of the mighty Amildar. The horn and trumpet could be heard a mile away" (*ibid.*, p.224).[23]

The image of the village community was instrumental in maintaining the myth of the Pax, for it gave a clear message to local elites that within allocated spaces, clearly marked and fore-warned, the Pax need not operate. It functioned both as plenitude and lack, whose "implementation[s are] made in the cosmological topography of the polity," in Tambiah's words. Its invention was the transference - from the delta to the dry lands - of the "zone of contradiction" which incarcerated the site and its subjects in a vastly restricted version of "administrative" space: the "locality." By 1924, the colonial government could and did enjoin with force its rule that "[t]he map shall not be altered."[24]

Populating "the Village."

Although colonial rhetoric was content and determined to pin the butterfly of the village as the entomological centrepiece of their administration, the precise content of its invocation had to be defined. In taking over political dominion and trying to make it pay, the East India Company discovered for itself the vaunted diversity of south Indian villages. The two major views in the definitional debate were Ellis and Munro; as usual, their representations reflect the respective areas of their work, the wet and the dry, although the rules of the contest allowed only one image of "the" village. Munro's version has been cited in part already; the main element of his

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them, every one thinks that the utmost limits of human power are to be discerned in proximity to himself..." (Tocqueville 1961:37).

23 The headman, of course, had bravely to stay. The reason for villagers' fear, he notes, was not just that of taxes or of the memory of consription, but also due to the much-ness of things to be concealed: fights, murders, encroachments, water-thefts, etc. The VHM and the karnam had the most to hide (Srinivas 1976:224).
Chinnathevar told me that: "before, when police came to Ammapatti, everyone was nervous. Now nobody gives much of a damn. Before, when police arrived, everyone used to move away from the road. The police would have to call everyone back, themselves suspicious now. Nowadays, only the accused escapes, nobody else pays much attention. Because he is the only one, the police don't notice his elopment..."

24 *The Madras Survey Manual*, 1924, v.1:135. The only records needing charge are the field measurement books, field register, etc. - in short, all the scribalized versions of space; the register of fields was defined by the Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency as *"in fact the topographical map of the village reduced to the form of a statement"* (MacLean 1885:165*).

This is a great contrast to the diffuseness of territoriality in the dry zones of south India; "... historical sources for premodern India have very little to show in the way of *maps* and very little to say about *boundaries* between larger systems of power. Certainly *great kings liked to note* the number and size of their provinces, districts, and villages; but these notes were either vague or otherwise abstract. Indeed, with the exception of occasional boundary disputes between villages, we know virtually nothing about the boundaries of dynastic systems. Even villages have shown a distinct aversion to fixity of boundary markers. Of great cities *where power was centralized* and its splendor made apparent, such as Tanjore, Viuayanagar, Hyderabad and Poona, we can be sure. *But of frontiers, we can only grope in blind uncertainty...*" (Frykenberg 1963:136-7*).

petition was the vast importance of the *patel*, or village headman, envisioned as the natural link between the cultivating raiyats and the collecting state. The "Potail" somehow found the power to be the local collector and magistrate, while somehow also finding the time to be a practising farmer as well - a concatenation of roles and governmental functions which made its fit to the "republic" image rather ungainly.

Ellis noticed the proliferation of images and proposed a correction in his *Treatise on Mirasi Right*, a report from the Chingleput Jagir around 1816:

> "The Indian villages or town-ships have been represented as constituting small republics but this description in strictness is true only of the Tamil village, to which the term commonwealth may be applied in its literal meaning, and not to the townships of the Mahratta, Cannadiya [Kannada] nor Telugu people, which, in their constitution, though, I believe, not in their administration, resemble a monarchy rather than a republic.[25] The former have... *no chief*; his duties are discharged by the village senate, *Gramapravartacam*, by which all the affairs of the community, *internal and external*, are conducted: in this assembly every proprietor [*mirasidar*] has a seat and a voice, each possessing a right to the management of the general business of the community, as to every other privilege, in proportion to his share in it" (in Dumont 1966:76*).

What Ellis noted was that there was no *patel*-like "monarchist" headman, at least in the wet district villages he knew (which he generalizes as "the Tamil village"). Munro was working in the dry interior of the Ceded Districts (in what is now southern Andhra Pradesh). The former area had long been devoted to paddy cultivation, and long a part of kingdoms and empires. As a *mirasidar* formation, with the involuted spaces I have called "localities"[26], it is no surprise that Place had also claimed of the same Jagir that "every village considers itself a distinct society."[27] This is not a case of the "Tamil" village as compared to the "Telugu" or "Kannada" village, but far more dependent on ecology, kingship, and the economic style inflected by them both. Social organization in Thanjavur, for example, would resemble that in Chingleput, while in Madurai, it would be more similar to Munro's turf. At play in the colonial representations is the homogenizing of differences, which served to thoroughly distort the south Indian countryside, not without some

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[25] Ellis' description resonates with Kant's claim in his essay "What is Enlightenment?", *viz.*: "[t]he best way of making a nation content with its constitution is to *rule* autocratically and at the same time to *govern* in a republican manner, i.e. to govern in the spirit of republicanism and by analogy with it" (Kant 1970:184).

[26] Today, Chingleput District remains remarkable for the high density of its "Scheduled Caste" population (24%), of whom 94% are Paraiyar. It is here that Moffatt (1979) did his fieldwork, and argued for the structure of consensus and replication governing (or ruling autocratically?) the internal segmentation and ideology of "untouchables".

[27] "Report", 6 June, 1799; in *The Fifth Report*, v.3:166-7. Place continued: "... and its general concerns, the sole object of the inhabitants at large; a practice, surely, which redounds as much to the public good, as to theirs." It is appropriate that the "village" is considered as a whole "self", whose inhabitants devotedly work together. "Where there is integration, elites are never far away," wrote Adorno, asking whether the symbol of "cultural crisis" was not a stand-in for "the problem of the formation of elites" (1981:38). In the wet zone of south India, the *mirasidari* dominance was allowed to remain as an established elite formation, hence there was no crisis: here the "village" resonated with the colonial agenda.

frustrated recognition. The search for "the tradition" of "the people" thoroughly eliminated precisely the differing influences of the wet and dry zones, insofar as they were constructed in the contexts of their specific relation to ecology, economic practices, the political organization of production, and the history of the State's desire - in short, all the political rainfall described in an earlier chapter. Munro's polemics in favour of his *raiyatwari* vision, stressing individuated property rights (*vs.* elite *mirasidar* corporations), during which he constantly hammered on about how such an arrangement was "the way it really used to be" (as evidenced by the purloined "black books"), served to conflate the various political formations of rural society. His urgency and invocation of authenticity tended to stress that there even was a single way it really used to be. The imaginary temporality of a hidden history took precedence over the presence of inconvenient spatial variation.

A quick example of the differences between wet Chingleput and the dry interior emerges in the reports of two forms of behaviour noted by Place and Munro, both of which bear directly on cultivation practices and something like ownership. Munro himself in 1802 noted that from April to mid-July, the agricultural off-season in the dry zone, poor peasants deserted their holdings and looked for better terms, often leaving their taluks altogether. They sought out better "cowles" [Tamil: *kavul*, agreement] from other village headmen [VHM]. This adventuresome departure is hardly resonant with Metcalfe's myth of the eternal return, but Munro corrected that deviation by instructing all VHM and *karnams* [accountants] that no cowles were to be granted to any non-resident cultivator at lower rates than standard (*cf.* Stein 1989b:114). Munro wanted cultivation to be maximized, and deplored the effects of such frequent desertions on his image of improving the land. In fact, the competition for cultivators served precisely as a means of extending the agrarian frontier (*cf.* Rajayyan 1966:71), as well as indicating that a clear-cut domination of "ownership" over "labour" was not plausible or accepted. Again, being a land "holder" was not deemed spectacularly advantageous to peasants in these dry districts; there was plenty of land about anyway. The crucial value was the congeniality of a political relationship, and in these the very fact of such seasonal migrations indicate that the VHM could not marshall a human domination on any great scale.[28] There was no "untouchable" entity here. Nor were there "villages" at all, in the unchanging terms of the colonial discourse.

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[28] In fact, in Dindigul, revenue requests were scaled according to residence - but the highest rate was demanded from those who had been there longest. A lower rate was asked from those non-resident *raiyats*. Lower yet was that for which the "newly established ryots", the *parakudis*, were obliged. (*cf.* "Report of Collector of Dindigul, 24 April, 1808", *The Fifth Report*, v.3:345). The goal of polegars was to attract people, what Wink (1986) calls "drawing" cultivators away from other polities. The Dindigul report suggests that the *putkut* cultivators, those with the most interest in the village (and highest revenue dues), were also wont to emigrate, and their position and lands might be taken by the newer *raiyats*.

Not so in the wet zone. There the Paraiyar, for example, were not only theoretically barred from owning land, but Place in Chingleput in 1795 could not find a single example of one who did; they were designated labourers of one sort or another. The land was rich and irrigated, and so valuable as such; land "holding" was precious, hence the *mirasi* right spelled dominance, and the low castes were the categorical opposite of owners, i.e., labourers. In Thanjavur, the situation appears to have been worse; there the same *parakudi* tenants whose freedom was courted in the dry zone forced to pay higher rent (*cf.* Gough 1981:127). A colonial officer remarked that "[u]nlike almost everywhere else in the world," these tenant servants had to supply not only their labour but also the stock to work the fields, rendering their lot vulnerable to calamities which might affect their animals: all this for the right to keep a tiny portion of the crop.[29] Desertion was unthinkable for one of the owners of these lands; land was valuable, and it was the objectified idiom through which political control was articulated.[30] Labour, meanwhile, was coerced on terms whose quotient of servitude is a matter of semantic more than substantive debate (*cf.* Hjejle 1976).

The arguments about the village community were based on the appropriate measures by which to collect revenue. The cornerstone of that procedure was the demand that ownership rights be clarified. In the wet zone, although ownership was messy in its corporate appearance, at least to colonial eyes the basic idea was present - especially in its clear demarcation from abject labour, which was an untouchable assignation. In the dry zone, individuation of holdings appeared to be present, but the solidity of "ownership" was found wanting - hence Munro and the Company set to immobilize those cultivators in their native villages. The category of labour was similarly treated, as Kumar pointed out, in the returning of labourers to their respective originary villages. In the dry zone, spatiality as a dimension of peasant

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29 "Report of Mr. Harriss, to Committee at Tanjore, 9 May 1804", in *The Fifth Report*, v.3:341-2. Harriss claimed that, whereas in some Sirkar lands he had found that such tenants were usually to pay less than 5% of their produce to the owners, "sufficient as an acknowledgement that they are the owners of it, and may resume it when they please", in Thanjavur the *parakudi* had to give over 50% of their produce.

30 Land was valuable, and revenue payments (from *mirasidars* to the State) were a bane. Part of the reason the revenue demand was so high was that *mirasidars'* mode of protest was to have false accounts prepared, with fictitious entries for cultivators, such as the names of persons living elsewhere, or those of the long deceased (*cf.* Irschick 1982:229). For Chingleput, Place reported in 1795 that "[i]t was no unusal thing to keep the name of a meerassadar upon the accounts, who had been dead perhaps fifty years, because it gave an opportunity for his successor to claim a higher share, under pretence of being only in trust of his meerassee..., whilst at the same time, this successor was his son and heir, and being known as such among the inhabitants of the village, lost none of his fees. The excuse given for this was, that it was mamool to keep the name of the deceased upon record" (*The Fifth Report*, v.3:159-60). Today, Gough and Mencher both report that *binami* occultations of land from the Land Ceiling Acts operate in almost identical ways, with acreage assigned to dead or distant relatives, or, more creatively, the names of pets. Harriss, noting that the *mirasidars* did not fit into the normative categories of "labourers, farmers, or landlords," noted an "extraordinary degree of vice in Tanjore"; part of the complexity of these tight *mirasi* "locality"-empires was symptomized in the "irregular" records kept by *mirasidars*, which were kept even after sale, and which were usually complemented by "a false set, depreciating his property, and omitting his plunder, ready to show, when called upon to answer a charge of embezzlement" (*ibid.*, pp.342-3).

activity had to be denied, repressed, and immobilized in order to populate the village. The village community symbol came in handy for this project, and the clarification between labour and ownership borrowed heavily from the delta models, where they were found as customary. This homogenization of diversity was not only an eaerly step of the Company towards bureaucratic centralization, but also the beginning of its "internal trade" in the political market of south Indian "culture", for which the delta provided a fertile paradigm.

The Foundational Ambiguity: "Headmanship."

The basic equivocations in the classic renditions of the "village community" trope centred on the "headman." The figure of the VHM was to serve in colonial representations as the medium and mode of the relation which was to be made to prevail between the village (a space condensing a source of revenue) and the State. Dumont (1966:72) cites various statements by Elphinstone which convey the problem.

> "Though originally the agent of government, he [the VHM] is *now* regarded as equally the representative of the ryots, and is not less *useful* in executing the orders of the government, than in asserting the rights, *or at least making known the wrongs*, of the people" (*Report*, 1821*).

Later, in his *History*, the same author wrote: "The headman settles with the government the sum to be paid for the year and apportions the payment among the villagers according to the extent and revenues of their lands," and, in the same text, "[t]hough he is still [as in Manu] regarded as an officer of the king, he is really more the representative of the people... he must possess the confidence of both." In these passages a rhetoric of temporality (originally/now, -> still) effaced itself to operate and effect a structure of deference (regarded as/ is really) whose imposition simulated the distinction between State and society, ostensibly in order to protect the latter; this freed (or abandoned) the ensuing "social" to become a critical category for the colonial "administration" of its own executive presence.

Typically, in the first statement, written from the position of advising a settlement method, Elphinstone noted that the headman's office was a "useful" bridge between government and village, economically conflating legal and presumably revenue-apportioning roles in one. In his scholarly chronicle, written after the provincial settlement decisions, Elphinstone implicitly conceded that the headman is effectively a renter, but insisted that the "confidence" which he was held by his own villagers assured that the assessment on his village is shared rightfully and proportionately. In 1807, Munro had already been in agreement with this colonial hope, claiming that "[e]very village is, in fact, a small collectorate; and where the potail does his duty, the collector has only to confirm what he has already done" (*The*

Fifth Report, v.3:204). The presence of "legal" mediation, or executive posturing, was suppressed - the urge was to construe the King's agent *transparently*, so to speak, as the chosen leader of the social.[1] Or rather, perhaps the relation (as one of the "rule of law") was abandoned; the village headmen in the dry zones were new to their direct relation to the state, as previously they had been but parts of spatially extensive *palaiyams* and these spaces' proper culture of shifting alliances. These were new peasant collaborators of the State, and had few points of common interest with the Company or later the Raj.

> "Connection to the government was important to them less because it drew them into a wider state structure than because it could be used to prevent the state from interfering in the locality. Local powers could block external influence at the *boundaries* of their localities and do what they pleased inside."[2]

In the narrative development anticipated by Elphinstone's passages, the village headman's role as a bridge for "government orders" had been elided; what, then, was his position effectively? The answer seems to be that, as intended or not, the VHM was the renter of the village, a de facto tax-contractor - in Weber's terms, very much a prebendary, and, better yet (for him), construed by the colonial sultanate as in fact a "representative of the people," hence a "bridge" over an earthquake. He would manage his leased belonging as best as he can; one might query in this light what it means for there even to have been a discussion of a "village republic." Clearly the colonial gaze has decided that its own purposes were more or less exhausted with the obtaining of (high) revenue extractions, and could only imagine that all was toward in the peculiar "social" behind the curtain - not the blanket - its structure wove. "Republic" in this case meant something inscrutable, "self-managing" and hence not to be interfered with; hence, why need a bridge? Here re-emerges what Elphinstone's lexicon of "though", "yet in many respects", "if" and "all the *materials*" hid but nonetheless evoked: the virtual commonwealth which *ought* to exist so that the

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1 Recall that it was this author, Elphinstone, who had told us that villages' proto-republican features disappear in their entire subjection to the head of State of a "settled" government. It would seem, then, from what follows, that the Company and later the Raj was more often than not in a state of war with the people...

2 Washbrook 1976:332*; he continues: "[b]y 1870, the net results of British rule had been to fragment the political integrations achieved by the warriors [as little kings and polegars] and to bury effective political power deep in the localities from which the state had been all but completely excluded." This is clearly reminiscent of the type of "locality" which, in pre-colonial times, had existed in the deltas. Writing on the period 1870-1920, Washbrook cogently observes: "the rise to supremacy of the rural locality had a crucial impact on *the spatial dimensions of political power* in South India. With the demilitarisaton of the warriors, the restrictions on the use of government troops, the smashing of local-state connections among administrators and the combination of powers in the office of headman, coercive force to back up political power was available only from inside the rural locality... Revenue control could be exercised only through the 'revenue' village [*firka*] which was usually no more than one or two hamlets with a population of one thousand or so. Police control could be stretched a little further, to areas of settlement which fell under the practical suzerainty of a headman's terror machine. But these had to be easily accessible from his headquarters. Members of the next layer of government officials above 'the village' might be enlisted to help or to turn a blind eye to a rural-local boss' activities" (*ibid.*, p.163*).

government need not concern itself with local order.[3] This "ought" was not achieved, and the distinction between state and society was thus not one of deference. The colonial space of the village became the site of despotism, a transparency of colonialism itself.

The village was cut loose in all but one respect from the State, that "respect" was the unilateral one of revenue. Insofar as the State invests no other characteristics in its link with its village shadow than that of negotiated extraction, the relation with the prebendary headman might be seen as one of tribute; the debate about whether land revenue was a "tax" or "rent" went on through the nineteenth century, but was perhaps stymied by the un-reality both terms proposed. The nature of property *vis-a-vis* the sovereign of the land, the East India Company and later the imperial Raj, was kept unclear by the immanence of the tribute-like relation, governed by the powers which fought, as Rajayyan stresses, in a "conflict between the forces of exaction and those of evasion" (1982:160). This conflict, however, was encompassed by the ideology of the colonial government, not only by the practical fact that its enemies in this battle were its own appointed agents, but by the fact that they had been represented as ambassadors of "the social" which was contracted with in the orderly fiction of an exchange represented in the civil language of "tax" or "rent". As a fiction, like that of the "village republic" itself, it could be read *differently*, depending on *where* one stood[4]; but also, as a fiction, at least so long as revenue was more or less delivered, and so long as violence and "disorder" was contained within official boundaries of space (the "village"), the fiction could continue as the encompassing definition of the situation. Nonetheless, as the *Thirukkural* (# 709) asks: "Of what avail is the eye, among the organs of sense, if it does not note another's intentions?" Exit the King: space became a vacuum - the colonial gaze was turned inside out.

It might be supposed that the *raiyatwari* settlement structure, theoretically connecting each individual cultivator to the state, would have rendered this localization of power impossible; the individuation of property, in its ideal mode, would suggest an almost "Panoptic" system. However, the reality of the practice of

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[3] And so Dumont wrote in his critique of the "village community" image: "The *idealization* begins when the dependence on the State is *forgotten*, and the village considered as a 'republic' in *all* respects" (1966:74*). It is the colonial state, hardly in the tradition of south Indian kingship, which was forgetful, and considered this to be ideal. For this reason, the image of the "village community" *is* ultimately important - not so much for what it tells of "traditional India", but for what it helps explain about colonial domination and the structural changes it provoked in the "social."

[4] "The single most important fulcrum around which South Indian political history revolves is that of land control and the point at which the dichotomy [between state- and local-level cultures] becomes apparent over most of South India is at that of land control. The groups on both sides of the divide were locked in battle for control of the same agrarian surplus. *But, being in different relationships to the modes of production and operating within very different politico-cultural frameworks, the way in which they perceived and conducted this battle, and the resources which they called in to aid them, were very different.* For one, victory meant closing off the locality to outside intrusion and exercising a deep and direct control; for the other, it meant fully integrating the locality into a wider political system. It is impossible to render intelligible the political history of nineteenth-century South India unless this *difference in purpose and meaning* is recognised" (Washbrook 1976:22*).

this means of direct taxation (or renting) did not really take effect until the latter half of the nineteenth century (*cf.* Baker 1979:28-9). Even Munro recognized that *raiyatwari* could not simply be imposed by fiat, as he wrote in 1817:

> "Our Government rests entirely upon the single point of military power; there *is* no native one which rests so exclusively upon it. *Where there is no village establishment* we have no hold upon the people, no means of acting upon them, none of establishing confidence. *Our situation, as foreigners, renders a regular village establishment more important to us than to a native government;* our inexperience, and our ignorance of the circumstances of the people, make it more necessary for us to seek the aid of regular establishments to direct the *internal* affairs of the country, and our *security* requires that we should have a set of *head men of villages* interested in supporting our dominion" (in Beaglehole 1966:116-17*).

At this point he was in an elevated position as advisor to the government at Fort St George, pushing for the final triumph of his *raiyatwari* method. Interestingly, he alluded to the extant possibility of there being no "village establishment" (having just visited Thanjavur), implying thereby the importance of buttering up whatever and whomever looked like they could represent at least a skeleton of one at least, in short, of inventing one where necessary. Munro correctly noticed the *direct* relation between military power, security, the "Pax", and the very idea of the village pseudo-republic, to whose spaces the war would be transferred. His rhetoric here cogently related the fact of being "foreign" and "ignorant" to determining instances of the Company's political formation - the construction and support of a strong "village establishment" would be a weakness forcibly turned to advantage. It is noteworthy that this entire passage, paradigmatic of Munro's strategic ideology, is configured around the acknowledged contrast and distinction of (the very idea of) a "native government."

The Supplement's Apprentice: the Karnam.

In his fine essay, "Madras Headmen", Baker begins:

> "In much of rural British India, where the writ of civil servant ended the regime of the village officer began. In 1807, Thomas Munro wrote of the village headmen: 'whoever rules the province, they rule the village',"

and on the next page adds, "[v]illage officers were in no way creations of the British" (1979:26-7). Yet in the wet zone of Thanjavur, there had been no VHM, and, in much of the dry zones the creation of the British was perhaps not the "officer", but instead the "village" as a spatial unit of administration. At any rate, it is certainly true that the British were not the first to devise ways of collecting revenue from rural south India, and existing institutions were thus somewhat modifiable to fit British needs. In the deltaic localities and those mixed-zone spaces previously under kingship

(not *palaiyams*), the *karnam*, or village accountant, was a regular feature. Frykenberg noted that for Guntur District there was recorded evidence for the history of appointments as *karnams* dating back over a millenium. The list begins with goldsmiths, Buddhists and Jains, then through a long series of Brahmins of different persuasions and origins (Benares, Hoysala [Kannada], Tamil, and more), Kayasthas, and various others (1963:124). The most substantial group were Maratha Brahmins, who came initially in service to the Deccani Muslim sultanates, and then stayed on in the Maratha bid for peninsular hegemony, and continued to stay on under the British. The saga of Guntur District in this respect is exemplary for the history of south Indian polities as a whole, in two important ways: 1) it suggests that the various bids for State power (kingship) in the region involved appointments of local revenue officers of *different* extraction than the local villagers themselves; and 2) it illustrates the way certain groups, most notably Brahmins, proved most successful at these appointments, due to their flexibility to deal with different masters, and their culturally hoarded literary skills. In the chapter on the King's gaze, I noted that the appointment of Brahmins as government agents served to economize a certain bind in the sacrificial rhetoric of high Hindu kingship[5], and to maintain its attachment to viable and expanding regimes.[6]

When the British wanted to know about local land-holding patterns and rights, they relied on these local *karnams*, often as not Brahmins.[7] The fact that the British

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[5] For an excellent description of how the VHM and the *karnam* were related in the local practices of ritual hierarchy [in 18th century Maharashtra], see Fukazawa 1972. The order of precedence there is quite reminiscent of Srinivas' story about the VHM and the Brahmin priest (1975:73-4; .

[6] This was especially so among the Marathas (*cf.* Wink 1986, Fukazawa). The restored Hindu kingdom of Mysore spent the early part of the 19th century with this equation clearly in mind; vast portions of revenue were alienated for their *inams*, and they became hugely influential in revenue farming - not without revolt from the ex-*palaiyam* zone of the drylands southeast of Mysore, where particularly Marathi Brahmin tax-agents did not find their status as Brahmins enough to prevent their own hanging (*cf.* S.B. Chaudhuri 1955:137-41, and Stein 1985, *passim*; see also Rajayyan 1971:102-11 for an account of a "rebellion" in the same area at the advent of Company rule). Although in the native state of Mysore, the uprising was put down by Company troops in the early 1830s.

[7] Frykenberg (1966:573) shows the relations between community and position in the higher echelons of the collection hierarchy in 20 districts of Madras Presidency as of 1855 (H.S: "Head Sheristadar"):

Caste	*H.S.*	Dep. Coll.	Tahsildar	Total
Maratha Brahmins	17	20	117	154
Other Brahmins	2	13	68	83
Other Hindus	2	3	45	50
Native Xtians	0	2	3	5
Muslims	0	0	13	13

The importance of the Marathi Brahmins in Madurai is suggested by Francis, who states that when the English first acquired the country, "hardly anyone in rural parts except a few hereditary village accountants and headmen seems to have been able to read and write, and the Tamil Brahmans in the towns were so ignorant that, as elsewhere, Marathas and other foreigners had to be called in by the Government to do its work, *the records were kept in Marathi*, and this tongue became *almost the official language*" (1905:175*). The first communal order regarding government jobs involved, unsurprisingly, the revenue department, and came from the BOR in 1851, ordering that a certain percentage of tahsildars in every district be recruited from non-Brahmin communities (*cf.* Irschick 1987:30). Notably, this is a communalist policy installed by the Company; imperial Britain promulgated many such policies in Madras after 1858, starting immediately with military recruitment (*cf.* Dodwell 1922:15-6).

"retained" these local officers is already the first major deviation from the south Indian norms of dynasty change; usually the sign of a new rule was the importation of its own official and revenue staff. Yet the colonial officers feared the *karnams*; Munro bluntly instructed his subordinates in the fundamental axiom that "the curnum's accounts are always false." In order to work around this, he suggested, that as "there is always a great deal obtained from discharged curnums who wish to be restored," they be used to induce an accelerating dialectic of jealousy which had the effect of maximizing the estimated revenue potential.[8] Five years later, he alerted the Board of Revenue to a technique he skilfully developed, that of playing villages off of other, neighbouring villages. Because the revenue was a joint liability (over several villages) in practice if not in theory, *raiyats* would have interest in arguing against their cohorts in other units.

> "Wherever individuals, or villages, object to their rent, it is always the most expeditious and satisfactory way of settling the dispute, to refer it to the ryots of other villages, who do more on such occasions, in half an hour, than a collector and his cutcherry, in a whole day" (1807; *The Fifth Report*, v.3:206).[9]

Again, the effect is a deliberate one of localizing the functioning space assigned to the *karnam*: those efficient "indigenous" debates were now to be co-ordinated in terms of official spaces (the "village"), which were simultaneously arbitrarily differentiated *and opposed* to each other. In order to complement the foreigners' need for a strong VHM, a new role for the *karnam* was fabricated.

By and large, what the British found in the Tamil country was that in the wet regions like Chingleput and Thanjavur, the headman either did not exist or was a position held by a corporate group of *mirasidars*, while the *karnam* was a clear and important position.[10] Meanwhile, in the dry upland areas, powerful chiefly figures

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[8] *Cf.* Munro, "To the Collectors of the Ceded Districts," 30 September, 1802, in *The Fifth Report*, v.3:212-5. Munro also noted that there were various un-named "persons without employment residing in the different villages" who were also useful in this regard; this suggests that in much of the dry zone, the precise role of the *"karnams"* was unclear. It is also clear testimony to the double labour of colonial patronage: not only did it win allies in the project of rural control, it also cynically inflated the revenue demand.

[9] Frykenberg's research has shown that this technique did make possible the silent erosion of revenue concocted by alliances over villages by the colonial liaisons. In one form or another, this "principle of the white ant" was practised widely over the Madras Presidency, I think, but more often than not it involved a collusion and domination which not only "cheated" the state but more generally involuted against residents on the "inside" of their domains; caste-alliances were important in this, and as many of the *karnams* were Brahmins, a different language evolved as to the nature of the "caste system."

[10] On the Kaveri in Trichinopoly, for example, the post of VHM warranted a health warning on the label, largely due to the new demand for revenue in cash (a usual practice in the dry lands, but not in the wet zone). In 1811, the Collector Travers offered a man named "Ganga Pillay" (*Pillai* is the name for a very high-status Vellalar subsection which often provided *karnams*) a VHM-ship (i.e., in fact, the rights to rent the whole village - in cash terms); Ganga Pillai was terrorized by the farmers and fled within the first few months of a four year contract, with his "life in imminent danger." Travers went through "much trouble and inconvenience" in finding a replacement to impose upon the *mirasidar* village. He pleaded to Madras for the rights "to exercise some little degree of authority to make an example of two or three of the principles of the village," again revealing the relation of colonial military force to the model of the village into which the subjected society was now to fit. The

existed which could be fit to the colonial tailor's image of a headman, while *karnams* were fairly thin on the ground, either in fact or in stature (Baker 1979:27). Baker feels that the British tarried in having an effect on this diversity:

> "Nor did the imposition of British administration bring about a much greater level of uniformity. Until late in the nineteenth century, the British schemes of rural administation in Madras provided only a loose framework in which a huge variety of local systems could persist side by side. This variety makes it difficult to generalize about the position of the village officers, but at a reasonable level of abstraction, and with considerable concessions to local diversity, it remains possible" (*ibid.*, p.27).

Perhaps the great telos "uniformity" did not materialize with a touch of English, but that does not mean that the "diversity" remained the same; to the contrary, British collection and settlement patterns wreaked havoc on the rural fabric, particularly in the vast dry zone outside the purview of regular kingly rule, where the shortage of *karnams* was rectified by inventing them in order for Munro's "strong village establishment" to find its objective correlative. True, it was not until late in the 19th century that revenue systems became more effectively bureaucratized[11], but the "local

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corporate *mirasidars*, including the hated "principals of the village" (i.e., precisely those who were supposed to be stout republicans in Munro's image) were an anathema to the Munro camp, and Travers suggested that those who refused to enter into "just and equitable engagements for their lands... be expelled from the district" (*cf.* P.B. Mayer 1982:9). Here the spatial rhetoric of expulsion is used *vis-a-vis mirasidars*, whereas the rhetoric was one of immobilization in the dry zone.

[11] I only argue that the paradigm of political relations (once intra-rural: now "local") changed quickly with the historical implementation of *raiyatwari*. It is true that it awaited the imperial Raj to consolidate the organization of its execution, but the *definition of the terms* of tribute/"revenue" transactions had already taken root with the spatial inflection of the early practices. "What had been a variegated administrative landscape composed of districts with their own peculiar traditions disappeared forever, as departments devised set rules for official work in all districts, enshrined in the 1855 *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*." The Survey and Settlement Departments which undertook a more rigorous cartography of colonial space forever altered the *style* of peasant interaction with the State. The books and maps they reified were placed in the cities, into urban official hands. "Officers in district headquarters would never again contemplate bizarre local weights and measures, never again travel to villages in order to find out who owed what tax and who owned what land. At their desk bureaucrats could study books of uniform records, which enabled men to perform revenue and other duties of state anywhere in the presidency." (Ludden 1985:119,121 & 122: imperial records are comprehensive on wages, prices, and yields, "but [contain] little local color and almost no descriptive prose devoted to routine local affairs. Once again we find that dramatic change in the character of historians' raw material accompanied structural change in the agrarian system within which peasants work their land.") *Raiyatwari*, the "Munro system", at the moment of its culminating realization, no longer had the feel of what Munro imagined, as Stein (1989b) observes.

This urbanization of revenue records hardly grasps the "logic of [native] practice"; "...the logic of practice can only be grasped through constructs which destroy it as such, so long as one fails to consider the nature, or rather the effects, of instruments of objectifications such as ... maps... [and even] mere transcription in writing" (Bourdieu 1990a:11). That recording practices of the colonial state altered the structure of practice was realized even by H.S. Maine in 1871: "[u]sage, once recorded upon evidence given, immediately becomes written and fixed law. Nor is it any longer obeyed as usage. It is henceforth obeyed as the law administered by a British Court and... the vague sanctions of customary law disappears" (in Kessinger 1974:82). That Maine had an agenda often goes un-noted; he was dissatisfied with the British practice of conveyancing, in which there was no public record of landed property nor its transfers; he praised the *raiyatwari* revenue administration in colonial India with its system of public transfer as "one of the greatest legal achievements of the nineteenth century" (*cf.* Rothermund 1978:41).

The results of this again makes a travesty of the idea that the colonial state gave any "boon of property" to Indian society. Where in fact lay despotism and prebendaries, contract and competition were supposed, and a

systems" were, again, not mere reiterations of timeless traditions. The very fact that does make it possible to generalize about the position of the village officers is colonialism itself.[12]

Excursion: the dry interior of the Dindigul Country.

Indeed, there was a long wait between 1802, when the terms of the Permanent Settlement were proposed in Madras, and the age of the *raiyatwari* grid. In the Dindigul country (including Cumbum Valley, all initially comprised in "Madurai District"), for example, there were numerous polegars who had refused the terms of that Act. They went on paying a fixed tribute (*peshkash*), on which they frequently fell into arrears. In 1930, 41.8% of the land in Cumbum Valley (Periyakulam taluk) was *zamindari*, while for Madurai District as a whole, the figure was 26.7%, suggesting that *raiyatwari* was hardly the overwhelming pattern anyway.[13] There had peviously been an even higher incidence, as befits the fact that the whole area had been a *palaiyam* zone prior to colonial rule. As noted, some estates were confiscated in the first decade of the 19th century, for political reasons. In 1815, there were numerous *palaiyams* which were not "regular and legal" since no polegar had agreed to the Permanent Settlement; as they had not signed, the Regulations of 1802 regarding confiscation for arrears could not be enforced,[14] although the Company tried to administer them through its own *raiyatwari* servants. After Munro's method of settlement had become official policy for the whole presidency, these "unsettled pollems" were rips in the colonial map. At least thirty of these unsettled spaces remained. From 1816 on, efforts to allow the polegar a *malikhana* allowance of 10% of the net revenue of the estate in exchange for its confiscation to the Company continued, but evoked little interest. In 1840, the Kannivadi polegar tendered payment of his arrears and demanded full control over his estate, now a *zamin*. The Government was shocked but as he had never formally resigned his territory, returned

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market in land imagined. When more landlord rent was demanded from peasants, this was construed as a sign of a free market: "a system of simulation was established which reflected the actual situation in a distorted way. The whole process could be compared to that of the faulty translation of a text from one language into another whereby the mistakes are of a fundamental nature but cross references are made which are apparently meaningful and lead to further confusion" (*ibid.*, pp.49-50; also, *cf.* Washbrook 1981). Much of this "cross-referencing" was *spatial*, and spread the deltaic presumption that untouchability and/as abject labour was an indigenous norm.

12 If Baker's image of "traditional" south India stresses diversity and the stereotype of "localism", then the general features he can tell about the VHM under the Company and the Raj are evidence enough that they were in large parts "inventions" of colonialism. The fact that this may *take some time* to develop into a positivist focus should not be taken as evidence of any sort of timeless continuity; the terms were changed quickly after the military destruction of the polegars, in what amounts to a rupture in political epistemology - what Foucault would call an "archaeological" break.

13 *Cf. Madura* 1930:25. In 1903-4, the Dindigul section of Madurai District was 29.8% *zamindari* (*cf.* Francis, 1905:116).

14 G.O. (Revenue) 2730. 10 November, 1865, which adds "[t]he public demand upon these lands not having been fixed in perpetuity, no one will buy the lands because the assessment on them is liable to alternation at the option of the Government."

it to him. To obviate similar demands from other unsettled (but now "attached" to the Company Sirkar) *palaiyams*, the Government demanded that all would-be polegars either pay their arrears or formally surrender once and for all their *palaiyams* on the condition of receiving *malikhana*. If neither option was accepted, the *palaiyam* was to be sold by public auction for their outstanding arrears (*cf.* Baliga 1960: 360-61).[15]

These areas were irregularly assessed, and over half were not considered profitable even by Madras in 1838.[16] Kombai, the home of the defiant Appaji at the turn of the century, came up for review in 1842, when it was formally surrendered.[17] Although it was considered marginally profitable in 1838, the polegar claimed that the neighbouring Tevaram *zamindar* had assumed some some lands after a boundary dispute, rendering the *peshkash* unfairly high. This the British deemed dubious, since they found that their map did not show the particular lands on the original record of Kombai - indicating that, regardless of the shifting formations of power in the *palaiyam* zone, the colonial state had already objectified territoriality into space and might apply this retroactively at any time.[18] Even so, the Board of Revenue in Madras had to be reminded again in 1851 that the estate was in fact incorporated into Sirkar land. Parker, the officer, observed that a mixture of *zamindari* and Sirkar land was very prejudicial to the management of the Government land, as by giving low "cowle" [*kavul*] the proprietor might draw off the Government *raiyats*.[19] In short, this *palaiyam* remained committed to its prior sovereignty, which made the cultivation of holding an open career.[20] Three things might be noted from this: 1) the revenue

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15 Leach noted that the best way to establish sovereignty over an object was to give it away; here the colonial government effectively did this and managed to *sell* it as well! The main thing is that they set up terms on which the *palaiyam* territories were *already* considered *zamindari* estates. At any rate, the question of permanently settling the estates came up again in 1865, when it was found that 18 of the original 30 *palaiyams* remained unsettled, and the polegars remained present and influential in them (*cf.* Baliga 1960:360-1).

16 *Cf.* Blackburne to C.R. Cotton, 29 October 1838, "Distinction between Ryotwari and Zamindari" (*MCB*, vol.5334:374-9).

17 Meaning: the (now) hereditary polegar pleaded to revive his enthusiasm for revenue payments, but rejected responsibility for the balance of debts accrued during his minority.

18 Occasionally the colonial a priori notions of space did not work so smoothly. In 1857, the *zamindar* of Tevaram sued his relative, the *zamindar* of Bodinayakkanur, over a cardamon estate on the western slopes of the Ghats. The suit raised the issue of whether the lands even belonged to Madurai District (To the Board from Cockerell, 9 November, 1857, *MCB*, vol.5353:p.110). In this case, the uncertainty was more frankly expressed by the government since the conflict was between two established landlord *zamindars*.

For Kombai, however, as an unsettled *palaiyam*, there was no clear colonial definition of its "size" and extent; here (1795) one reads that Kombai "contains" 5 villages (while Tevaram had only one), while there (1851) one reads that it consists of only 2 villages. (See, respectively, "Collector's Report to Board", 24 November 1795 [after the rebellion], *MCB*, v.5160:233-4; and "To the Board" from Parker, 4 December 1851, *MCB*, v.5347:447-52.) This suggests again that the issue is one of the power that may be mustered between members of a "tribute" relation, and only secondarily had a "rental" aspect of a definite piece of land; the language of the latter disguises the former.

19 "To the Board", from Parker, 4 December 1851, *MCB*, v.5347:447-52..

20 It is interesting that in the 1989 caste-conflict, there was no incident in Kombai or any of the proximate villages or hamlets. The ex-*zamin* Tevaram, meanwhile, is one of the centres of the conflict, along with Bodinayakkanur. The descendent of the polegar, Appaji Raja Kumar, helped to keep the peace. The latter claimed that there was no "untouchability" in the villages (of Kombai), only a problem of "high" and "low".

demand, as is well known, was simply much too high; 2) the demand functioned pragmatically to consolidate the colonial Sirkar's structure of incarcerating peasant practices on its own terms and in its own direct territories; and 3) this in itself was a political effort continuing to erase the possibility of the erstwhile sovereign formations of the *palaiyam* polities, in favour of enclosing spaces as localities and thereby promoting the conditions for the political involution of caste as the idiom of domination and hierarchy.[21]

The "village" was construed as having a number of "officers" or "village servants", each to occupy some particular role in the micro-polity; Munro referred to the "twelve Ayangadees." Many Tamil villages did have these various roles, including those that were the prerequisite for "untouchable" castes, designated as "Vettiyans", and "Mataris", usually related to death and funeral duties. In villages in the mixed-zone under kingship, concessionary *maniam* [*inam*] ties were the perks for the performers of these tasks, and represented their direct appointment by the King, who sought to protect his subjects from invisibility. In rich *mirasi* villages, where the King's gaze was excluded, the subjection of "untouchable" labour was powerful enough to do away with granting them access to capital; they still were to perform these polluting functions, however, and it seems they were granted in exchange some pittance at the harvest.[22] In the dry *palaiyam* zone, however, the construction of this symbolic economy of ritual stigmas and subjugation awaited the colonial shovel. It was the category of the village-space which prompted the ditch, the boundaries, and the symbolic walls which signified the impurity of those who would be forced to cross them.

This construction took the first half of the 19th century. In 1861, Nelson reported that, in Madurai District, *maniam* lands for "village service" were generally held as the remuneration for certain official duties, for which there were eight categories, ranging from the *nattanmei* [VHM], the *karnam*, to the *kavalkaran* and, the *mathari* [untouchable, grave-digger]. This is the archetypical set[23], and one can only note that, unlike Thanjavur, at least land rights were reserved for the "untouchables." But a reporter from Dindigul and western Madurai in 1811 noted that in most of the villages there, a *maniam* is granted to three descriptions of people, denominated: "cavalgar" [*kavalkaran*], *totis*, and *tandels*. He defined their duties as

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21 The same fate befell those *raiyats* who emigrated from the official space of the Tevaram *zamindari* to form a new hamlet, which was promptly seized upon by the colonial gaze as yet another "village" on the pink part (directly ruled) of the Sirkar's revenue map (*cf.* "To Mr. Seerelang, from J. Sullivan", 9 December 1856; *MCB*, vol.5352:241).

22 This was called *kalavasam*, or *tuntu* ["remnant"], and will be discussed later. Under colonial rule, it varied from 1.6 - 2.6% of the harvest, over which the state still fought for possession (*cf.* Irschick 1982:222)..

23 See Nelson, *Madura District Manual*, 1861:9. The full list of 8 that he gives is *nattanmeikaran* [VHM], *karnam / kanakkapillai* [accountant], *thandialkaran* [person in charge of collecting revenue from the *maniam* land (to distribute to maniamdars)], *nottakaran* [?], *tottai* [*tothi*, village messenger], *mathari* [grave-digger], *kavalkaran* [property-guard], *madeiyan* [?].

follows: 1) *cavalgar*: have always been considered to watch over crops on the ground, to guard them when reaped and be present at the threshing and measuring; 2) *toti*: required to convey letters to and from the village, to watch for bursting and breach of different tanks; and 3) *tandel*: is the person in charge of collection of revenue from the *raiyat* in the *maniam* lands.[24] There are none of the icons of the stigma known as "untouchability" in this description; this is not surprising since, to refer back to the gaze of the god in the temple, there was nothing in these areas to block out, - the sacrifices offered, while Hindu, were not "Sanskritized". It was only with the rise of the colonized village - the colonial enforcement of restricted spaces in lieu of territoriality - that the stigmas and subjugations historically perceived in the delta began to encroach in a dry zone.

Resting the Lever: headman, karnam and late colonialism.

Only after the village had been constructed and then abandoned to sort itself out in its new and confined space, was the apparatus for the real implementation of *raiyatwari* completed - the meticulous field surveys on which the settlement relied, were completed. This occurred between 1864 and 1895, and entailed the centralization of records in district centres under the Collectors' proximate eye: the map becoming the territory. With this, the ever suspect *karnams* had their autonomy drastically curtailed, and with it their opportunities for patronage. They were brought under the formal bureaucracy, transformed, in Baker's terms, from "arbiters" to "functionaries" (1979:30). Competence regulations were set up, proficiency tests instituted, and schools and workshops for revenue accountants were begun. Many failed and were duly replaced by others more subject to the centre. In 1867, a colonial official lamented the split axes of power between the VHM and the *karnam*, "[t]his divided power constantly breeds discord... There is no fulcrum on which to rest the lever," to which Baker adds: "[t]he new [but still *raiyatwari*] revenue system was a strong lever for prising wealth out of the rural areas and it required a substantial fulcrum" (*ibid.*, p.29). The government obliged by propping up even further the VHM, endowing him with the office of *munsiff* (village magistrate), allowing him to become more often than not the official head of the village police, and assuring the position's hereditary status, while simultaneously strapping his main rival, the *karnam*, into the glove of centralization. As a result of this colonial improvement of "administrative" efficiency, the headman could often find himself as "accuser, chief witness and judge". Devolution of judicial operations to the resurrected "local" *panchayats* reveal

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[24] I found this in Varghese's notes, with the following note of reference: "To the Board", 5 November, 1811. The source and volume were omitted... See Baliga 1960:362, whose list of village servants for Madurai, based on the reports of the Inam Commission which set to regulate them, does not mention any of the standard "untouchable" offices/tasks, although he uses an "etc."

how the glorious republican style of the VHM was a more materialized version of the "monarchism" perceived earlier in the dry zone. In this colonial incarnation, however, there was no distinction between the "constitution" and the "administration". The hyper-real village now matched the face in the mirror.

What to the village seemed a mirror was still ostensibly supposed to be a window for the state. District collectors now scarcely needed to leave their desks, but they did, annually, make their gazes portable during the *jamabandi* ritual. During this performance, the Collector or a senior assistant would visit each village to listen to grievances of the people against the village officers, that elite republican guard, while checking village accounts against their own urbanized records. Baker, in his caustic style, observes:

> "This peculiar peregrination possibly holds more significance for the cultural anthropologist than for the student of economic or administrative history. In 1883, J.H. Garstin called it 'unnecessary and but little more than a farce'" (1979:33).

Baker seems to imply that the obsequious and fatuous character of the *jamabandi*, at least *vis-a-vis* the material function which it was designed to represent, means that it was meaningless - hence fit for students of "culture." He fails to stress that it is yet another example of the governmental pomp which the colonial state enjoyed endowing itself with, and that it is a careful construction of the place of the unseeable; the "friction" which inhibited its positive function is a classic case of how the King's gaze could have predicted its own shortcoming as it marched through villages "*en fete* with the temple music, umbrellas and all the rest of the paraphernalia, the erection and decoration of elaborate pandals."[25] Like the trumpets which announced the King's spies in colonial Rampura, the whole stage was an idealized forgetfulness. Under foreign rule, however, the prohibition of "the fifth" was no longer even a desideratum to be denied; for its subjects, colonialism rips away the optative mood, and leaves only the literal - "the fifth" was naturalized in the dominant imaginary's sight - the site of the other.[26]

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[25] L.M. Wynch, 1913, cited in Baker 1979. Waiting for "gifts" [*nazar*!] the *jamabandi* officer and his clerks "sit in the place like a flight of locusts", complained a Tamil to the government in 1914 (*ibid.*, p.50n43). "Bribery and corruption are the chief outstanding features of this so-called Jamabandi or checking of accounts, in fact no checking of accounts is made excepting the festive celebration," wrote another in 1938, and listed in detail the prevailing rates payable by each official to his immediate superior. Baker notes that the *jamabandi* was "the occasion for the village officers to buy their immunity from higher authority" (*ibid.*, p.35). The BOR tolerated this, observing in 1929 that "[i]t is too much to expect the Revenue Inspector to be able to make a detailed examination of the receipts in the possession of ryots..." (*ibid.*, p.31). Inside the village, VHM were well known to claim extra fees from *raiyats* under the pretence that it was needed for the *jamabandi* (ibid. p.31).

[26] The equation of untouchability with normative landlesness would be eagerly sought after by dry zone elite, in order to dominate the places from which to be heard by the colonial state. "Until as late as 1919 the rules for assignment of new land (*darkhast*) ordained that the established landholders of a village would have first claim to the deeds (*patta*) for any land newly brought under the plough; and it was the village officers who recommended assignments. This in effect meant a labourer, even if he cleared a new bit of land for himself, was likely to find that the village officers or their friends acquired the patta for it and he had to remain as a labourer or tenant on the

The Depression marked an end to an era. It hit the VHM hard, especially because many of them were still de facto village renters, paying the revenue from their pocket and collecting it from their villagers according to terms which they tried to enforce beyond any tedious *raiyatwari* principles. In dry areas, especially, the VHM were reported as ruined by the Depression: "impoverished", "very poor", and dependent entirely on their "meagre honorarium" which the government still gave them (*ibid.*, p.42).[27] When the Depression made them insolvent, they were sacked by Collectors according to their understood policy not to risk having VHM with property of less value than a year's revenue on their demesne. After 1937, they became largely Congress' problem, especially with the blurs in the King's gaze prompted by dyarchy. If various attempts since Independence to devolve power on localities, animated by the myth of the "village republic", are *seen* (by the State) to have failed, it is because of the re-territorialization of space by the rural non-elite, escaping the internality implicit in the fiction of a republic, and lighting up with country bombs the screen to be seen by the official gaze.[28]

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holding. At sales of land for arrears of revenue, the village officers again enjoyed a privileged position. The village officers conducted the sales, and were allowed to bid at them. It was folklore that such sales were rarely publicized and that the prices fetched were derisory; in other words, the headman could virtually assign the land to himself or his friends" (Baker 1979:31). Tremenheere, the Collector of Chingleput in the 1890s who pushed for Paraiyar land rights, wrote: "[t]he one question that can bring a smile to their care-worn faces is why they did not apply for land [on *darkhast*]." They reply, he told: "what is the good... of applying for this [land]? The *mirasidars* will take it up merely to keep us out" (cited in Irschick 1989:488).

27 The government had gladly taken over the role of paying the *karnams* in order to control them, but preferred to imagine the VHM, especially in dry districts like Madurai and Ramnad, as men of the "strong village establishment" and hence of autonomous origin with natural "social" influence. Hence they were not given a salary but an honorarium. The congruence of the VHM's understanding of the relation with the colonial one may be measured from the fact that they protested loudly (and successfully) when other village officers, such as the *talaiyari* [watchmen], had their salaries raised above that of the VHM. This was an insult to the VHM's "honour", despite the fact that as a big farmer he was meant to get his income from elsewhere (*cf.* Baker 1979). Before the Depression, the Raja of Ramnad noted that people would pay Rs. 5,000 to get the post of a VHM, although the official honorarium was "only a handful of rupees" (cited in Baker 1976:95); the fact is that they "owned" the village in the colonial definition of ownership - they often paid the whole village revenue, and collected from the inhabitants arbitrarily. Rajagopalachari compared them to "nothing short of Hitler" (Baker 1979:46).

28 This appears as a "caste" war in the dry zone around Madurai, which, positivistically, it is. The more everyday aspect of the struggle revolves around activities like making and selling arrack. In 1989-90, arrack was illegal, so it was a mobile business; arrack, quite literally, is made in liminal or un-organized spaces: wasteland, the forests, or, as in Gough's Kumbapettai, in the old *agraharam* [Brahmin quarter, hidden by sanctification] itself. In late 1990, however, arrack was to be partly legalized, which means there will be a patronage market for government licenses, etc., and it would not surprise me if repressive measures were to be taken by the State against those who try to stay on illegally in the home-brew business. It is quite likely that the Thevars (amongst whom there is a strong alliance with the DMK political party [now no longer in power - 8/91], which announced the legalization measure) will benefit handsomely while the Pallars will be stripped of yet another opportunity. The Thevars are hardly at the top of rural class relations; by and large, the Thevars and Pallars are both on the wrong end of the owning/labouring divide in the agrarian sector. When it breaks into fighting and the exchange of bombs (e.g., in Sattur), the State cannot help but intervene, even though it has abolished the "caste system" (*cf.*, e.g., Baechler 1988:132-38). Both of these communities felt colonial rule in a drastic way: the Pallars became degraded untouchables in the dry zone, and the Kallars suffered long under the Criminal Tribes Act.

The "Village" and/as Method.

> "Nobody here is innocent. That's why it's not a village. Or vice versa." - Ramanan, in Ammapatti.

Crucial to Dumont's assertions that "caste" is and has been the ultimately determining force in Indian social formations is his rejection of the "village" as a sociologically significant unit. This argument came at a time when village studies were the rage in Western studies of India.[1] Dumont wanted to temper the effects of these studies, which both understated the relation of the village to state power, and created false harmonies of reciprocal services between the alleged division of labour by caste. Where Dumont seeks to find a *sui generis* reality in "caste", I have chosen to stress his correct recognition that it is also the relation between village and state that makes the "village" a false environment if seen as a whole; however, false in this case, to me, means exogeneously determined (by the State), and hence nothing but mediations.[2] This view, and this determination, was very strong during colonial rule, a time and a presence for South India if less so for *Homo Hierarchicus*.

The chimera of the "village *panchayat*" has been the choice target for Dumont's corrective viewing. This is a spurious entity to him, because he finds these village assemblies to have been always "first and foremost a matter for the dominant caste" (1980:171). Whether they bother to consult the dominated, or arrange to secure the collaboration of the constituencies they scarcely represent, is quite secondary. And this allows him to note, regarding the village, that: "[w]e cannot observe a kingdom, but we have in the village a reduced version of it: the principle of the royal function" (*ibid.*, p.161). For Dumont, kingship is encompassed by the Brahmin, but in matters of power, ambivalence reigns, and the Brahmin is meant to relinquish his supremacy. Dumont writes, in his section "From power to authority":

> "When, in a village, members of a dominated or dependent caste come to ask a notable of the dominant caste to settle a difference, they recognize his authority as arbiter or judge. Thus we pass here from power to authority. If force becomes legitimate by submitting to Brahmanic ideals, and thus becomes power, then ... power is invested

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1 Most of these studies came from the USA, and one might say that they replicate what Dewey saw as the beginning of a split between English and American anthropology, articulated in the differences between E.B. Tylor and L.H. Morgan. Morgan saw the village community in a positive light, or rather, as the possible ancestor of the democracy he envisioned as soon to come, in which "[a] mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind" (cited in Dewey 1972:315). Tylor, meanwhile, saw property as a touchstone of civilization and its proprieties (and for that reason he might show an appropriation of Burkean motifs that now there is nothing to new about morality), hence he had some distaste for (the images of) villages. Ironically, for India they should have reversed posiitions! (That they didn't is telling of the contradictions, both political and epistemological, of the colonial divide; *cf.* Dewey.)

2 "In the first place, the elements of truth must be restored to their place in the setting of dominance... Further, the situation in the village is not independent of regional political circumstances: 'despotism' is often reflected to some degree in the village chiefdom, which not only represents local interests vis-a-vis the political power, but also the reverse" (Dumont 1980:160), and: "... any fieldworker has only to think of his proud land-owning

> with judicial authority by those subjected to it. Thus acknowledged, and in some way internalized by its subjects, power becomes equal, in a specific sphere, to authority par excellence, i.e., religious authority: just as the Brahmans have authority in religious matters, so the dominants have authority in judicial matters" (*ibid.*, p.167).[3]

Caste rakes across the village, leaving it only a site. At the site co-exist various caste-communities, related by "domination and dependence." When disputes need to be settled, those who by dint of those relations are "lower" castes, turn to some "notable" from the dominant (n.b., not intrinsically "higher") caste, whose judgement will be accepted without further quarrel, due to the sanctions they can enforce and no doubt come to embody. The location of the principle of authority which all village subjects have internalized is found, claims Dumont, in this necessary invocation of "higher" castes; this renders synonymous the relation of dominance and "higher". There are plenty of look-alike examples in the ethnographic literature, especially where the main (usually untouchable) labouring caste seeks the intervention and judgements of the dominants.

In those ethnographic castes, however, one finds things less simple than Dumont suggests. For Gough, in contemporary Thanjavur, *any* person of substantial means quickly becomes the *individualized* figure of authority, at least for the purposes of dispute resolution. The extreme example in her book is that of the accepted respect implied in the consultation of the immigrant Nayakkar who was becoming rich on selling illegal "Madurai potion" arrack; he had even bought a house in the Kumbapettai *agraharam* [Brahmins' street] in which to store his ingredients, presuming that thus they would be safe from the gaze of the police (*cf.* Gough 1989:274-5,319). In a Ramnad village inhabited entirely by Paraiyar and Pallar, Deliege suggests that Dumont's model used to apply, but now the Paraiyar he studies will not look to the dominant Kallar for judicial solace; all interactions of any sort have been dramatically reduced with the Kallars over the past century - even the village seems a recent instalment on the ground. However, the Paraiyar do not have any effective organization internal to themselves (in Valghira Manickam, near Devakottai), and hence dispute settlement often simply doesn't happen at all (*cf.* Deliege 1988:40-44). Yet it does seem that quite often somebody does go to *one* of the nearby Kallar *individuals*, and pleads for the latter's intervention in their case. There is little ambiguity here about "intervention" meaning the threat of violence, as Kallårs are generally feared in the area. Meanwhile, the adversary often goes to yet

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peasantry to realise that the more absolute the dominance the less is reciprocity recognized" (Dumont and Pocock 1957:22).

[3] Bougle, an ancestor of Dumont's interpretation, had written of the alleged absence of "feudal" territorialism in India: "Caste must work against just such local groupings and the superior authority of the Brahman, deriving from sources quite other than the possession of land, must decentralize the whole system and limit the normal consequences of the Rajput baron's authority" (1971:65). Dumont (via Apthorpe) used the model of "encompassment" to resolve this conundrum.

another Kallar, and so it becomes an issue of whose faction is the greater in strength and intimidation.

Both of these examples provide problems for Dumont's model. The first suggests that economic strength, along with its notoriously frequent retinue of "goons", is enough to have an individual instituted into the position Dumont envisions as the one for the dominant (and therefore "higher") caste. The second indicates that the dominant caste as such displays no particular united front *vis-a-vis* the dependent or lower caste, and hence that vertical factions which one need not hesitate calling patron-client spheres of influence are in fact the real articulation of social cleavage in the "administration of justice." Both cases indicate that "force" need not necessarily be converted into "power" for the management of local disputes, and that "caste" as such need not be the primordial idiom of influence (*cf.* Dumont 1980:74, for the use of these terms).[4]

Dirks suggests a resolution of these analytical problematics from his Pudukkottai ethnography, in what is tantamount to a reverse reading of the same sort of dynamic noted by Deliege for Ramnad, another dry area.

> "The *appropriation* of adjudication rights over dependent groups was an important *sign and activity* of dominance. As a result of this appropriation, however, any disputes among or between Kallar lineages often brought about disputes among or between the dominated Pallar or Paraiyar lineages. They were often difficult to disentangle... One of the stratagems of dominance was the *displacement* of conflict. The patrons shifted the unpleasantness of conflict on to a dependent group, thereby avoiding the indignity and messiness of infighting while simultaneously *displaying* their dominant power over subordinate groups (1987:274*).

In this case, the factionalization of the dominant caste by inter-lineage competition amongst the elite leads to an invisible buttressing of caste hierarchy which, however, remains invisible in the vertical "integration" of local society according to patron-client ties. The reported frequency with which inter-village fights, usually over local elites' interests, were fought by untouchable labourers of the same (named) *jati* is less

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[4] Although "caste" is not an inevitable factor directly inscribed in the process of dispute-resolution, that is only one side of the social relations of justice in rural Tamilnad. The other end is the *production* of disputes. Most writers (e.g., both Deliege and Gough) on the untouchable castes have indicated that the latter lack the means (sanctions) of internal settlement, and have for that reason also experienced an "egalitarian" ideology which in fact is a symptomatic expression of that problem - so that they have to seek "upwards" for some authority to settle their internal matters. Deliege stresses that the Ramnad Paraiyar are slowly breaking away from domination by higher castes, but Gough is perhaps more right in suggesting that the withdrawal of patronage, "customary" relations of employment and payment, etc., is merely an instance of dominant landowners acting "rationally." In either case, having to turn "upwards" for help seems to imply the persistence of hierarchy; the sort of group that would consistently have to enunciate this implication would be those whole communities of landless labourers. Hence "caste" would appear at its densest expression at the "bottom" of the system, - something which has often intrigued Western impressions. Paradoxically, this view suggests that "caste" is "substantialized" precisely in step with the turning away from direct (corporate) patronage by the dominants, whether by erosion of the means of control or by preference. This substantialization occurs as a sort of condensation which is most extreme at the very bottom (*cf.* M. and S. Barnett, 1974).

surprising. The organization of power in the village is obtained by patron-client relations articulated through lineages, and in which the lineage structure of the dominant caste is reproduced throughout the system of dependencies.

With his analysis, Dirks re-purchases the "village" as a significant unit of sociological action in Tamilnad. However, it seems to me that it is only to sell it back again to "caste", for his argument is that these patron-client relations are in part a "stratagem" or scheme by which the dominant caste can dis-*place* its own dissension, have their henchmen argue it out, and then intervene at a *timely* moment, on the level of "the administration of justice", at last as a unified group which alone is capable of solving local conflict (which it starts). In a sense, Dirks returns to Dumont, although after having articulated the mechanism of the "emergence" of caste more satisfactorily; for Dirks, caste ultimately comes out over the lineage-factions, or the same thing - structural hierarchy is finally articulated over and above the social formation of patron-client relations.

In my opinion, especially since these Pudukkottai Kallar were King's kin, Dirks might have *contrasted* them more with the Piramalai Kallar of western Madurai, noting the highlighted role played by lineages. What Dumont calls the *nad[u]*, "a kinship grouping *named* after its topographical container" (1986:183*), was in the case of the Pudukkottai village, in fact 'a topographical container named after its kinship grouping'. The relation to kingly appointment rendered the Pudukkottai village a space in the polity, and the dimension of territoriality implicit in the lineal rhetoric of the *nadu* in the kingdom was effaced in the "stratagem" of preferring the resurrection of the more dominant sign of greater "caste" unity. In so doing, the *nadu* was able to comprise an even larger space, a series of villages insofar as they might be dominated by Kallar, as an administrative district of the kingdom. The relation of the state to the village is made manifest, and articulates that, since the relations between Paraiyar and Pallar lineages were hewn into the image of the *lineages* of the Kallar, they were rendered "out of place", they inculcating an idiom which was no longer an appropriate political reading of the social term *nadu*. With respect to the untouchables, and the signs and activities which displayed their domination, the very spatiality of the village was crucial, precisely because they were "tricked" away from recognizing it. That spatiality is a derivative function of state power, which re-christens the *nadu* without changing its name.

The flag of the "village republic" has been taken up recently in an interesting book by Wade, which has the distinct quality of composing the story in direct relation to the state. Wade harshly criticizes Dumont's relegation of the village to the sidelines of Indian sociology. His *Village Republics* (1988) is a study of how some Andhra Pradesh villages are able to create effective village councils which exhibit the characteristics of "collective action." These councils - *not* the official (and often

moribund) *panchayats*[5] - where they exist, must for Wade not be merely forums for dominant caste voices to pursue their interests. Unfortunately, in their composition, at least from Wade's evidence, they seem to be just that; however, he does not give up.

For Dumont, the *panchayat* was not a "proper" of the village because it was not representative of a "public" - i.e., of all the caste groupings in a village - but rather an affair of the dominant caste, to which Wade retorted:

> "But to say that its representativeness determines whether it is to be understood as a village or caste-based organization is a very partial logic. The equally important criterion is what the panchayat does" (1988:179).

Contrary to imposing the requirement that the significance of village councils lies in the settlement of disputes (Dumont's "administration of justice"), Wade finds councils in Kurnool District fastidiously avoiding precisely that form of action, and concentrating on certain issues of resource-use which can be safely construed as "public" goods: e.g., arranging for sheepfolding on the fields, efficiently guarding the fields, and arranging relations of irrigation with both the State and amongst themselves.[6] Such disputes are eschewed,

> "for the good reason that it would involve them [the council members] in making judgements about the allocation of privatizable benefits, and would therefore be threatened by the politicization of the case as the loser attempted to enlist factional support to get a more favourable judgement. Its ability to continue to provide goods and services of vital common interest would be jeopardized. Dumont's sociology of India is remarkably insensitive to the point that homo hierarchicus has to eat. So he has little to say about how people handle those common problems of resource use to which this study is devoted. Hence he is able to preserve the original axiom, that caste ideology is primary" (*ibid.*, p.179).

For someone who criticizes Dumont's "remarkable insensitiv[ity]" (a view I find wholly off the mark), Wade himself is rather remarkable. Despite the rhetoric of "public goods" and so on, he himself had to note: "[t]his is not to say that the benefits accrue to everyone in the village, that they are 'functionally identical' goods for all" (*ibid.*, p.101). A long catalogue of just how un-identical they are might be composed, but an abridged list would include: money spent to bribe Irrigation Department officials benefits owners of irrigated land; money used to support an

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[5] In Kottapalle village, for example, many of the people too young to remember the last *panchayat* election (in 1970) do not know that there is such a thing as a *panchayat* - they know only of the President! (Wade 1988:103-5).

[6] Like many south Indian villages near to the major rivers such as the Kaveri, many in Kurnool District are privy to the benefits of a state water/canal project. For the record, Wade's version of the interventions of colonialism claims that with the arrival of the British, inequality and market relations grew, and "war-lords everywhere lost their military power, and in many places much of their economic power as well. *At village level, however, the existing structure continued...*" (1988:24-5*).

animal clinic is helpful for animal owners; money for helping to construct or improve the school is good for those with children in the school - to which Harijan children are "less than invited." Council money had sometimes been used to finance repairs to Harijans' wells, "but getting the council to release money for this purpose is more difficult than for repairs of 'clean caste' wells" (*ibid.*, p.101). The incidental expenditures of the councils' funds include giving donations to itinerant beggars, provided they be of the "deserving [read: non-Harijan] poor", while never used for insurance or the welfare of villagers themselves. When wandering troupes of puppeteers visit, for example, the council prefers to pay them a lump sum right away, thereby saving the entertainers the trouble of collecting donations from house to house - from the council's interested point of view this is a ploy to get them punctually out of the village, where their loitering makes villagers suspicious (at least those with something to lose). All this makes it quite difficult to grasp why Wade indulges in such polemic against Dumont, but certainly helps to convey a sense of exactly what "village republics" are like if one doesn't have the symbolic or material all-weather capital to be... in the republican party.

Wade's is a careful book. In fact, it has to be so careful because only some of the villages in Kurnool District had substantial village "councils." He is right in saying that in the occasional contexts in which these councils emerge, their function is not directly or "constitutionally" related to caste. However, the interests which govern decision-making about what a "public" good might be are certainly those of landholders, when they can be united. If substantial friction exists between different landholders on an issue, it will probably not enter Council deliberations. The most remarkable, and relevant thing about these locally initiated councils is, to me, not that they are not "first and foremost" a matter of the dominant caste (as such), but that they do re-assert a certain viability of the "village". And why is this? It certainly seems to exist *vis-a-vis* the State, more than it does *vis-a-vis* its own internal dynamics - the republican categories of patriot and citizen are recognized as too privatizable! - or even *vis-a-vis* its relations within the region. Wade notes that the Council's existence is "invisible to the State" (*ibid.*, p.107).

Yes it is, and that is because it is absolutely meant to be - in fact it has to be. For the most part the councils bear every example of what Frykenberg called the shadow form of (state) power. Given that the State tends to auction off much of its delegated opportunities, such as running the sugar-rationing shop, the fair-price paddy shop, and local liquor licenses, as well as the rights to harvest the reeds which grow in the canal, and so on, these councls negotiate within their village domain to assure that nobody competes with each other through the State's corridors. Rather, the council will arrange an individual to bid a low price, uncontested, and collect the franchises, and then generate its own income by auctioning them off internally.

Brilliant - and it is remarkable that these councils are not far more prevalent than Wade found them to be. At the same time, these councils are hardly "radical"; there were no cases of a Scheduled Caste person getting the chance to run a government shop. In a sense, what is usually called *"jajmani"* seems to find its true correlate here: it is not about village-wise "redistribution" but about relations with the King. Village republicans try to monopolize the mediating position of that relation, whereupon and after which a sort of pseudo-redistribution of affairs takes place, with gift giving for the right to perform certain discretely compenated services.[7]

The very idea of government legislation having any "effect" in a village run like this is exceedingly dim. Meanwhile, the basic relation that Munro and Metcalfe envisioned is again foregrounded; the relations between the State and the village are primarily financial, and mediated by the farming out of contracts, which in turn are engineered by covert action on the part of "the village" (i.e., the "principal inhabitants"). The administrative State is oblivious - and as an "administrative" entity in this relation ought not to care.[8] However, one of the byproducts of this deferred relation is a spatial one. When the Government decided to auction off liquor licenses no longer village by village, but by whole sub-districts, a move which did not recognize the shadowy council, a crisis developed. The councils "won", but only in the sense that they managed through boycotting to force the larger sub-district renter to sub-let the local franchise, which necessarily reduced their income (*cf. ibid.*, pp.103-5). Thus the domination of territoriality by the spatial politics of the State, although perhaps accidental, was ultimately accepted by the "village republicans." The need to remain silent forced this acceptance, and this need is not merely about maximizing public benefits; it is also about ultra-local political domination.

In *La Solution Indienne* (1988), Baechler declares that contrary to all other agrarian societies (he cites China, Japan, and Europe as historical examples), "India does not know the village community... The village is the projection of a mosaic of *jati* segments on the ground" (1988:20-1). He contends that villages have no common centre, and are composed of multiple residential sections exclusively occupied by the *jati*-communities, organized so that low castes are relatively peripheralized. This is part of an incredibly general macro-argument about the nature of the "caste system",

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[7] I am largely in agreemnt with Chris Fuller's arguments (1989, & esp. 1977) that *"jajmani"* refers to what was leftover from the colonial "decapitation" of the previous regime(s) or "little kingdoms", and that it is thus not at all a building block for the caste system to arrange itself in the villages. Courtesy of colonialism, this non-system became something like that. One notes that it has been hard to distinguish *"jajmani"* gifts from basically wages or salaries of various workers in the village; the combinations of cash and kind for work done has done much to make people think that there is a vestige of some "traditional" system, which they call *jajmani*.

[8] Although one wonders what might happen when the accountants of the State's coffers notice that certain villages systematically pay less for their franchises than others; they will smell a rat, discover that it is "legal", and presumably re-structure things to as to inhibit the proliferation of the "anti-State." Or, political patronage will transpire to maintain the *empire* at a *local* level. See B. Harriss (1985) for an argument that the state in Tamil Nadu is a mercantile operation, and not an administrative one at all.

which he sees as a case of *jatis* having precluded the realization of the *varna* system - the latter failed along with the durable influence of "stable political regimes." The "social" has adapted itself to the segmentary principles of *jati*, to compensate for the absence of a strong polity and a strong political regime. It is not that there has been an absence of polities, just that they have not "succeeded" in imposing themselves stably over great regions and times. I find this view tiresome, and a bit repetitious of the early colonialists' insistence on the "political anarchy" which was conjured to justify intervention and conquest. Nonetheless, the forms of State in "premodern" India do no seem to have been the sort of bureaucratic, centralized, and geographically unambiguous monstrosities known to occidental modernity; instead, mediations hovering between tribute and contracts of delegation seem to have prevailed - where they did prevail.

From his readings of texts such as the *Arthasastra*, Baechler claims that there have been traditionally four "levels" of polity in India: 1) Imperial; 2) Provincial; 3) Regional; 4) Taluk (he uses *"chefferie"*, indicating 5-100 villages, i.e., a taluk as found circa 1800, although not now). Then he observes, with my agreement:

> "*The village is not a fifth level of the organization of polities, because it is not a polity.* This is, for all that, an important Indian particularity. It is not even a quasi-polity, a virtual little village republic - the morphology of *jati* excludes this solution. But the village *becomes the fifth* level of *the exercise of power* in Indian political regimes" (*ibid.*, pp.75-6*).

Incidentally, the number five returns to the scene: "there *is* no fifth", but that does not mean that the world stops at four. Baechler articulates the relation between the fourth and the "not-fifth" level as the "exercise of power." Thus one notes that, as between the four *varnas* and untouchability, so between polities and the villages - or what I have called "localities": there is no rule, save denial, on the part of the rule-ordaining Centre, on how to conduct relations across this spatial divide. Quite simply, there should be no fifth. Politically, and with some exasperation, rulers must decide to "settle" with the unrecognized and arbitrary (but still worldly) village. The village is a *site*, but not a speaker.

Obviously this could only be true from the point of view of rulership, or "official politics". Moreover, politics were especially "official" in the colonial State, and I think that Baechler's views, although intended to span millenium and indeed to stop precisely at 1857, apply with fastidious vigour to the 19th century, and in large part the 20th as well. There has always been this potential, but the English were the first to throw up their arms and mumble "encomiums" on the "village republics". In large part, as Munro half-wittingly confessed, this was due to a radical "ignorance" on the part of the English; this ignorance has to be a fundamental part of any colonial

relation.[9] The British invented something, not by sculpting it from mud, but by shaping the dust; they invented something to know, with an eye to ruling it, despite the fact that they themselves saw things as appropriating something to rule, and setting out to know it.

"Untouchables" and the "Village".

One of Baechler's cogent reminders is that to think of "untouchables" is to think in terms of the categories of *varna*. It is widely contended that *varna* is absent "on the ground" in India; however, I think this view may reify the spatial locality in which the gaze of research occurs. Cohn suggested that the history of the study of caste has been in turn a history of discovery of "levels of the system", itself related to the methods and presuppositions inscribed in the study. The early Orientalists discovered *varnas*, administrator types and their surveyors spoke of *jats* or *jatis*, while intensive fieldworkers encounter "brotherhoods" (1987:167). Dumont tried to weave both *jati* and *varna* together in a complementary way. Indeed, this was necessary for his strong insistence on the primary of "ideology" and the instrumentalization of occupational hierarchy through the rhetoric of purity. Baechler argues that the two are quite separate, almost mutually exclusive, for "[t]he realization of the *varna* regime [would] render superfluous the invention of the system of *jati*" (1988:46). What he means is that it would have done so, should there have been the myth *manquee* of the stable polity, which would support the *varna* regime. As it were, the *jati* formation is a response to the felt absence of *varna*, "on the ground." But *varna* does not disappear like that - it is a crucial conceptual scheme for those who wish to grasp Indian "society" as a totality. Some today would argue that this ought to be a forbidden practice, but others - in their practice - do not follow these taboos. Baechler asks: "[w]ho could need to see Indian society as a totality?" and speculates: Brahmins, travellers, and... the British (*ibid.*, p.50). The Brahmin, meanwhile, represents an ambivalent figure which may be identified in *both jati* and *varna* systems.[10]

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[9] This inflects Foucault's reciprocal power/knowledge relation in a certain way; in fact, one might say that it makes it especially plausible, and perhaps even possible in the first place. The *episteme* of any "will to truth" in a specifically *colonial epoche* would be an onanistic desire and an oneiric pleasure, like a quixoticism without history: an owl of history complemented by an angel of Minerva.

[10] The example of the "Nayakkar/ Gounder" ambiguity in the Dindigul Country (re: the "Kappiliyar" sect) given in an earlier chapter suggests that it is not merely a question of *varna* or *jati*, or *jati* and sub-*jati*; neither is it merely that the boundaries are unclear - the terms might be harnessed in different strategic moments. In the 1800s, there were countless communities (*jatis*) which became lumped under the "Paraiyar" label by the end of the century. In his *Census Report* of 1901, Francis noted that the term Paraiyan "is now almost a generic one... For example, the Koliyans, who are weavers, and the Valluvans, who are medicine men and priests and wear the sacred thread, will not intermarry or eat with the others, and are now practically distinct castes" (cited in Thurston 1909, v.6:81). The idea of fission connoted by Francis' use of "now" is fatuous; the term Paraiyar was being used as an elite category to represent and dominate others as "untouchable", a usage subscribed to by the Census.

The category of "untouchables" is less ambiguous, but it seems entirely an analytical category. As "there is no fifth", this is not exactly a *varna* category (it is *avarna*), yet certainly does not refer to the classificatory style of the *jati* "system"; rather some *jatis* fell into the position. How then to interpret it? Although organized through specific groups or *jatis*, as an *institution*, it would seem to be the marked *avarna*. In short, the idea of "untouchables" is a term based on a totalitization, or the effective polity that Baechler claims did not exist.[11] Baechler's work has the great advantage of synonymizing "totality" with the "State-centric" view; at the same time, I have already suggested that it is the State or King which should be seen as the voice capable of speaking the prohibition of the fifth. This contradiction is mediated when the State pronounces its legislative order that there shall be no fifth, and yet practically permits "localities" to be "unorganized" (in State terms). State orders are thus mediated by politicized space, and prohibited from "penetrating" the reflective lens of the "village republic", thereby allowing for the optative mood of rule to be subverted by the discourse of denial. Given that the English "showered encomiums" on the "Indian village communities", there was never a time when this arrangement of complicity was more marked than under colonial rule.

Symbol, Function: untouchables "in" villages.

The twin concepts of the "untouchables" and the "village" - both avoided in the ancient texts and both enunciated without hesitation by the foreign rulers of the 19th century, are constitutive of each other. For the old *mirasi* villages, this is tantamount to a sort of return of the repressed of kingship, spatially deferred into the inscrutable localities. This delta virus awaited colonial rule to be posted to the dry zone, where they became positive constructions. I will discuss these contrasting formations after firstly sketching some of the perennial tropes of "untouchables" in "villages". Manu advises the King that, "as he will see that through men's ignorance of the boundaries trespasses constantly occur in the world, let him cause to be made other hidden marks for boundaries...", and goes on to suggest burying various uncorroding objects at boundaries (*cf.* Manu VIII:245-63). In south India, the practice of "running the boundary" was widely used to commemorate and reproduce rights of dominion over space; this task fell to the untouchables (e.g., Paraiyar), who in effect were forging

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11 "Like most categories, the label of untouchability implies that we know more about the lives of the persons to whom it is applied than in fact we do. For we know more about untouchability as a concept than we know about Untouchables as a people. As a concept, untouchability connotes an attitude, a prejudice: it refers to a pattern of relationships seen from the point of view of a person of higher status" (Juergensmeyer 1982:11). However, as it is a *varna*-esque category, and a derivative function of State power, I am not sure that one can approach "Untouchables as a people" (the phrase itself is a concept) except by excavating the history of their construction from *outside*. The term "untouchable" (etc.) was probably inspired by missionaries, from biblical references to the image of the "outcaste" (e.g., Psalms 147:2; Isaiah 11:12). The term was, I think, first used around the turn of the century in the Baroda census.

their own iron cage. Their testimony in village disputes was considered final although this speech was pre-empted by the practice of moving through dominated space: *ellai oti*, the running of the boundary with garlands on the neck and beating a drum (Hanumanthan 1979:94-5).[12] The boundaries run designated the borders of power held by corporate *mirasidar* groups. Although they themselves thus ritually constructed the space of the "village" as a unit of land, the Paraiyar in the wet zone normally lived in *ceeris*, colonies or settlements outside or at the very fringe of the *uur*, and not the residential village proper.

This simultaneous position of defining the boundary and finding oneself excluded from the "owner" of the interiority thus traced, no doubt parallels the explanations often proferred by untouchable groups themselves for their lowness: they were "tricked." The deltaic Paraiyar myth contends that their status had nobody to recognize it, since their ancestor is the elder brother of the Brahmin, suggesting that the position of recognizer is always already subaltern in kingly south India. The compounded versions of marginality, exteriority, and the logical projection of untouchables as "original inhabitants" (now *Adi-Dravida*) makes them ideal funerary officials, cancelling the death of property by legitimating the life of its continuous (*mirasi*) owners. The ambiguous symbolic power of their role, both essential and polluting (by contact with death), helps to explain why old *ceeris* were felt to be particularly auspicious sites for new *agraharam* (Thurston 1909, VI:88). This was a sort of triumph of sacred life over the profane icons of death. The "theoretical" contradictions were partly dealt with by the devolution of their effects to the closed and involuted spaces which were a bane to the King's gaze; the *mirasidari* interiority, meanwhile, banished the polluted ones to the *ceeri*.[13] In another sense, they were not dealt with, which is part of the reason why Tamil kingship (if not Indian stateness in general) relies constantly on expansion - this in turn renders impossible a border of the polity. Orthodox villagers try to grant themselves this border; the enclosed paddy-field was the image of the (elite) body in Chingleput, not the continuing river.

Why this tendency to define and enclose space as a "village"? The acquisition of the spatial conditions for the domination of untouchable labour was one material perk which explains this. The spatial conditions were themselves expressed in the

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12 The stigma of "leather" was added to this, as the drums were made of leather. Another important use of leather in villages with some access to tank or river water was the fabrication of bags which would be used to haul water up and out of the river and into the channels (also, *cf.* Kessinger 1974:60). The Periyar water project made this possible in Cumbum Valley and I was told that the air used to resonate constantly with the humming sound of the water-filled bags in motion; fled is that music...

13 The contradictions are the simultaneous marginalization and the demand for essential recognition functions from the "untouchables." The same occurs in Manu, according to whom the Candalas shall dwell outside the village, and must *always wander from place to place*, while their transactions shall be among themselves - while some also must be employed in burial grounds, despised by all (*cf.* Manu X.39-53*). How can they both be forcibly nomadic and perform ventilation services for the pollution of space? The resolution is found in the discourse of *mirasi* property, which demands a separate pool of labour in order to recognize its own value (some of which is then given in exchange for the deflection of the King's gaze).

rhetoric of sacrifice; Kessinger found (in the Punjab) that he could not define the "village" except through a ritual institution commemorating (through the rights of offering sacrifice) the continued hold over an agrarian space by a kin group.[14] In Maharashtra, the distancing of labour as untouchable again occurred through the equation of the "village" with the sacrificing subject: the untouchable Mahars were given the leavings of the offering to the village goddess, an offering given to ward off cholera (*cf.* Fukazawa 1972:30). The organization of sacrificial rites involves social placement: the construction of a "proper" for the acting group to articulate its orthodox presence or power of existence. The consolidation of this "proper" echoes the degree of absoluteness of property rights. This latter degree was considerably raised in temperature by colonial procedures of recording individual rights to particular bits of land, but in *mirasi* formations the structural divide was present, rendering any untouchables as normatively landless; having built the podium, so to speak, they were surreptitiously removed from the village community. This idea of customary landlessness was topographically generalized by colonial rule, which also intensified the village-ization of much of India. In the Punjab, for example, this was further enforced by the Land Alienation Act of 1900, which limited the right to own land to a set list of "agricultural castes." Although designed to prevent the nefarious "moneylenders" from taking over lands - effectively, then, to protect the "strong village establishment" - the list included none of the names of the region's untouchable communities (*cf.* Juergensmeyer 1982:29).

Mirasidar Villages.

"Water, water, everywhere..."

In the deltaic villages along the Kaveri and Tambraparni rivers and in Chingleput, the trope of the *ceeri* had long found its voice. In the twelfth century, a poet of the devotional *bhakti* movement described himself as from the lowest caste, but nonetheless capable of devotion. He left a depiction of his native *ceeri*:

> "a hamlet of *Pulaiyas* studded with small huts under old thatches overspread by *Surai* creepers and inhabited by agrarian labourers engaged in menial occupations. In the thresholds of the huts covered with strips of leather, little chicks were seen moving about in groups; dark children who wore bracelets of black iron were prancing about, carrying little puppies whose yelps were drowned by the tinkling bells

[14] The Punjabi term most commonly used for village is *pind*: the word is related to a Sanskrit term meaning a ball of rice offered at the funeral ceremonies by the nearest living relatives. *Pind* also refers to the *sapinda* (kin group) considered ritually eligible to perform this oblation. A *pind* fissions off from a "parent" *pind* when its people no longer conceive of their neighbouring clanspeople as appropriate performers of this crucial ritual (*cf.* Kessinger 1974:43-4). This introduces again the spatially diacritical momentum of the sacrificial rhetoric - the "village" in power is motivated to differentiate itself from near and related villages: an acceleration of fission and "localization." On the relation between sacrifice and locality in the Tamil country, see Dirks 1987:120-1, and Buchanan, cited in C.Bayly 1989:27.

> which girdled their waists. In the shade of a Marutu tree, a female labourer (*ulatti*) sent here baby to sleep on a sheet of leather; there were mango trees from whose branches drums were seen hanging; and under the coconut palms in little holes on the ground, tiny-headed bitches were found lying quiet after pupping. The red-crested cocks crowed before dawn calling the brawny *pulaiyar* to their day's work; and by day under the wide shade of the *kanci* tree, spread the voice of the *wavy-haired pulaiya* women singing as they were husking paddy. By the side of the tanks full of warbling birds, the music of many instruments accompannied the drinking fetes of *pulaiya* women who wore on their heads fragrant flowers and ears of paddy-corn and who staggered in their dance as the result of increasing intoxication. In this abode of the people of the lowest caste (*Katainar*) there arose a man with a feeling of true devotion to the feet of Siva."[15]

This sounds a bit like Sarter's prose, and doubtless was likewise adorned for effect. At any rate, Hanumanthan, writing in 1979, suggests that this description is "not far different from that of a modern hamlet of the untouchables" (1979:167), which echoes the Salem *Gazetteer* cited earlier. The "village" in the wet areas seems to have been a relatively continuous formation, *vis-a-vis* "untouchability" at least, across the colonial divide.

In fact, as Ludden points out, it was in these *mirasidar* formations that key families intimately controlled the grain heap, village credit, and local social cleavages which enabled them to constitute the primary links of the revenue chain, about which they had intimate knowledge regarding market fluctuations and the officers of king or state who would come to collect the revenue: "The base of the state financial system was thus built inside agricultural communities, and this, more than any other level of the system, survived intact into the nineteenth century" (Ludden 1985:81). In fact, as the colonial government wanted to collect revenue in cash and not in kind, as was previously the tradition in the irrigated villages, they transferred the agency of many market powers to these *mirasidars*. As channels of competition intensified, this put serious strain on the corporate solidarity necessary for the maintenance of a *mirasidari* formation's iron cage.[16] Doubtless this intensified the exploitation of untouchables' labour, which was dominated and immobilized by the provision of food and clothes from *outside* sources, and mediated by the *mirasidars* themselves in a simulacrum of *jajmani* (*cf.* Gough 1981:187). This view of continuity and of the State's fiscal base

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15 From the *Periapuranam*, translated by K.A.N. Sastri, cited in Hanumanthan 1979:166-7. Hanumanthan declares that this was the work of Nantanar the *Paraiya* Nayanmar (the latter a name for a *bhakti* poet), so the Pulaiyar/Paraiyar names are not clear. *Katan* [root of *Katainar*] occurs in classical texts with the meaning of responsibility, obligation, duty, or debt. "The wide-spaced world has the king as its soul. Therefore, it is neither rice nor water that is the life. To realize that 'I am the soul' is the duty [*katan*] of the king whose army is rich in spears" (*Purananuru* 186; *cf.* Kailasapathy 1968:57).

16 This may have participated in inducing the splitting of the "Brahmin-Vellalar" alliance which long dominated the delta communities of Tamilnad. I tend to think that the non-Brahmin movement which began in the early 20th century as the Justice party found its mainspring in the dry zone, where rich leaders found their ability to keep the colonial state out of their recently constructed private empires on the decline; consequently, they sought for more public office.

founded inside the village, however, ought to be restricted to the irrigated communities, where capital assets and caste were mutually co-ordinating.[17]

Irrigated *mirasidari* villages were defined spaces, well-bounded, and hence able subjects for the sacrificial syntax of *varna*-based Hinduism to predicate itself upon. The holistic model of *purusa*, which is maintained by domination over property (which blinds the King), is a pregnant metaphor, and its progeny the sacrificial remnant.[18] The *avarna* untouchables were tantamount to predial serfs, and they lived outside of the village in their *ceeri*. The *ceeri* itself becomes an intensive symbol, as it is largely conceded that it is a proprietary right of the Paraiyar in Thanjavur and Chingleput (*cf.* Thurston 1909, VI:86-7). It is contrasted spatially and linguistically from the Sanskritic word widely used for village in the Brahmanical delta; the latter is *gramam*, meaning "the *inhabited* place", while *ceeri* (*cheri*) is Tamil, meaning "gathering place" (*ibid.*, p.87). It is as if the theoretical contradiction between the idea that untouchables should have no place to permanently live, and the permanent appropriation of their labour, was resolved even through the expression of different languages. Regarding the King's gaze, it might be said that this is a metaphor to indicate that there is no "fifth" exactly *inhabiting* the locality.

The proprietary function of the *ceeri*, which - speculatively - might intone the auspiciousness which it promises as a site for an *agraharam*, emerges as an important factor in the discourses of modern agrarian dominance. Sivertsen reports a case from the 1950s in Thanjavur. Government, declaring that untouchability was a penal offence, insisted that the untouchable hamlet not be called the Paraiyar *ceeri*, but rather *Pudu Teru*, the "New Street." In the contemporary legal terms of tenure, the *ceeri* had to be owned, and *vis-a-vis* the state it was owned, by the big landowners who combined to obtain its joint *patta* for the agency of the "village": the lands were

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17 Ludden criticizes J.C. Scott (and Washbrook and Frykenberg as well) for depicting a head-on clash between peasant and state moral economies under colonialism. Irrigation, he plausibly claims, bridged the "two" economies before and after 1800. "In dry zone Tinnevelly District...," he continues, "revenue demand remained within customary bounds, while village officials retained customary power. Negotations between villagers and state officials did not comprise, therefore, a struggle between villagers and state power itself, as these and other authors have suggested, but rather a struggle over the terms of a moral and political interdependence betwen village elites and state authorities" (1985:243n38). I don't think that revenue demand was as customary as he thinks, and more importantly, village officials hardly retained customary power. In the *palaiyam* zone, chiefly leaders were simply not accustomed to having fixed terms and strove to have none at all with the kingly state. However, Ludden is right to indicate that dryland villages, although more "peasant"-like than the deltas, did not evince a populist clash against the state. Selected village officials were buttressed by the colonial state, and Washbrook's contention of their "different interests" is more apposite than the veneer of continuing "customary power" proposed by Ludden. The *mirasidar* version of the King's gaze ensued as the growing structure of life in the colonized *dry* zone, once the military decimation of the polegars was completed.

18 "This *Purusa* is all that yet hath been and all that is to be,
The lord of immortality which waxes greater still by food.
So mighty is his greatness; yea, greater than this is *Purusa*.
All creatures are one-fourth of him, three-fourths eternal life in heaven.
With three-fourths *Purusa* went up; *one-fourth of him again was here...*" -*RgVeda* (in Renou, ed. 1961:64*).

then leased out to the Paraiyar in exchange for service or a cash rent. At the same time, these lands could be sub-leased at will by the untouchables. During a strike by a nascent union which managed to combine labourers of both Paraiyar and caste-Hindu denominations, the landlords sought to drive a wedge between the Paraiyar and the rest. They argued that the Paraiyar, as attached to the "village", represented in the site of their residence, had no right to side with any particular party or refuse to work for any particular group in the village. The landowners claimed they would accept the terms of the Union, but not for the Paraiyar who they would lock out from work on their estates. The Union leader argued that all labourers be treated on the same terms. The Paraiyar themselves, meanwhile, argued that the very fact of their relation to the common lands meant that they had a traditional "right" to work in this village, so that any lock-out was unlawful (*cf.* 1963:55,63, 118-133). In order to declare themselves *citizens*, the Paraiyar had to become *patriots* of the "village", which precisely circumscribed their domination and precarious marginalization.

The Dry Zone... but not a drop to drink.

"... and not a drop to drink."

As has already been droned, there seems very little strong evidence for the presence of "untouchability" - considered as the designator of normatively landless, ritually stignatized, spatially dominated labourers - in the dry zone before 1800. How, why, and to what extent, did this change? Chris Bayly makes a suggestion that may be grafted onto any approach to this subject: "[i]n the early nineteenth century,... the spirit of hierarchy and ritual distinction became more pervasive. The British peace speeded the rise of high Hindu kingship, Brahminism and the advance of principles of purity and pollution in the countryside" (1988:157).[19] This hypothesis stresses

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[19] Oddly, Bayly had written just previously: "[k]ingliness and the distribution of honours became *less* important and *less* practicable, while 'economy' and 'good management' were the measure of success for the dependent princes and the landlords of the British territories" (1988:152*). His argument in this section is interesting, so I'll cite it at length: most areas of the subcontinent, he claims, including the tribal fringes, were *aware* of the hierarchical and Brahmanical ideologies, but there were *other* ideologies working against rigidity of caste and hierarchy. "Where such ideologies were fused with expanding movements of peasant colonisation or supported by the sharing and decentralised styles of life of tribal people and nomads, Brahmins were peripheral and the social system extremely malleable and inclusive. Here notions of purity and pollution were at a discount. The ideology and social organisation of settled Hindu society was powerful and adaptable. But a precondition for its expansion to encompass the whole subcontinent was the defeat by the state and the peasant economy of alternative styles of living which were still powerful, and in places still expansive in 1800" (*ibid.*, pp.156-7). In the 19th century, "[p]astoralist and tribal communities lost status..., becoming amalgamated with low-caste village service communities as the market for agricultural labour developed... Princely lineage replaced the war-band as the focus for [e.g.] Rajput loyalty or pride" (*ibid.*, p.158).

"So hierarchy and the Brahmin interpretation of Hindu society which was theoretical rather than actual over much of India as late as 1750 was firmly esconced a century later. The reasons for this were complex. Population growth emphasised the need to control land by the exclusion of rivals rather than control of people by incorporating them from many different backgrounds. The expansion after 1800 of pre-colonial cities and merchant people encouraged the search for status and security which often took the form of a nice emphasis on

indigenous origins for change, with only "Pax Britannica" left as the trace of the novel, foreign, and colonial. The military context certainly obsessed the early reporters on the village republics as well. It is not, however, merely that colonial rule changed the environment by creating peace - a chimera already taken up - but the protection, both military and financial, that the Company gave to those who would be Kings that enabled the rise of "high" *Hindu* kingship. This is surprising at a time when Englishmen themselves were being given titles in various British peerages for conquering these lands! Crucial in this was a mishmash of understandings about what Indian society should be like, underpinned by the basic idea of what "society" as such - any proper society - should be like. "Colonial society was seeing a mirror image of itself when it understood Indian society as rigid and stultified" (*ibid.*, p.156). Foremost amongst these understandings was the idea that the "caste system" could be found throughout south India in ways quite similar to the way observed in the long-held Jagir in Chingleput, where certain "castes" were held in ritual contempt and more or less caught up in forced labour, voided of the right to possess land. This became a powerful influence on the template upon which aspiring *zamindari* kings - almost all of whom were ex-polegars of the dry countrysize - realized that they might build their local kingdoms, with the full tolerance of their Company overlord. True, the revenue assessment was too high and difficult to produce, but fortunately, radical labour practices were going to be allowed, because "Western rationalism" (*ibid.*, p.162) saw that there was, indeed, a tradition of the fifth.

One of the landcaping structures which, in controlled space, conducted the current of untouchability was water. More precisely, it was the appropriation by human labour of water's spontaneous form which mobilized the capitalization of that labour. Kampan, a classical Tamil poet, had observed water's capabilities of

> Turning forest into slope,
> field into wilderness,
> seashore into fertile land,
> *changing boundaries, exchanging*
> *landscapes...*[20]

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caste distinction. The British indirectly stimulated such changes. Early officials began the process of ranking and grading the Indian social order in an attempt to understand and control it. So James Tod's neo-Gothic extravaganza, The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan (1829-32) itself became a reference book for the princes of that region in history and marriage customs. In the same way British law began to dispense to all castes and communities the high Brahmanical and scholarly traditions derived from the seminaries of Nadia or Tanjore. Yet the colonialists did not create this interpretation of India; rather they speeded up and transformed social and ideological changes which were already in train" (*ibid.*, p.158). It is not at all clear to me that these changes were "already in train"; rather, it seems the sovereign formation of the dry zone was on the rise (*cf.* S. Bayly 1989); second, the real motor of the virus here is the notion that a single interpretation might ever have existed without the hiss of arrows; the points might have been "already" honed, but the bow was the Company and the Raj.

[20] From Kampan's *Iramavataram* [a version of the *Ramayana*], stanza 28, translated by A.K. Ramanujan, cited in Zvelebil 1973:210*. Stanza 26 of the same work observes that water assumes many forms and functions: "like Krsna dancing/ on the striped and spotted snake,/ *the waters are naughty*" (in *ibid.*, p.211-2*).

The control of the use and benefits of water inflected property in a number of ways, and for capital projects involving the construction of tanks and anicuts (dams), the invocation of "ownership"-like rights were particularly clear, a point spelled out in numerous pre-colonial inscriptions (*cf.* Stein 1984).[21] These rights were granted either to Brahmins, as an expression of the kingly gift, or to providers of capital who were promised tenure at concessionary rates. Either way it required the presence of consolidated kingly dominion, to sanctify the property as protected by them, a sovereignty expressed in the "gift" of the land or project, also called *maniam* (or *inam*). Included in the net effect of such a project was not only an irrigated field prompting more routinized agrarian practices, including the organization of labour as such, but also the actual construction of the water-works. This was achieved through the process of promising shares (*pangus*) in the eventual produce of the land, allocated according to the labour invested by various groups in the project and its maintenance.

There are various ways for promoting the development project of increasing irrigation; this form relied on a stately provision of property. Evidence for the effect of the colonial production of such forms of property lies, for example, in the case of Bodinayakkanur, a *zamindari* estate in Cumbum Valley. Within a few decades after the permanent settlement of 1802, the Bodi *zamindar* (much loved by the Collector at Madurai at the time[22]), adopted the kingly style and had a dam built across the Kottakudi river which he used to irrigate 4,000 acres of lands on his estate. In this moment of affluence, bestowed by the "rule of property", the *zamindar* spent two *lakh* rupees on a palace, started the car festival, and had temples erected to Subramania Svami (*cf.* Vadivelu 1915:674-5) - the *Brahmanized* name for Murukan, a favourite god of the dry zone. None of this was present in 1795.[23] Although this

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[21] That water and property are essential components of hierarchical caste is suggested by a tract collected by Mackenzie, whose subject was translated as that of the "distinction of castes"; in Tamil it was called *Jati Vellami* - *vellam* is one of the words for water (*cf.* Wilson 1828:clxxxxiv, # 31). Relevantly, a component of the ideology of the polegar zone was that the colonial government turned the rice into *vellum* (see a letter sent by a "rebel", in Rajayyan 1982:212-3), suggesting that the deltaic *"jati vellami"* was not congenial to the political formations and styles of the dry *palaiyam* area.

[22] He was a hunting partner of the Collector Rous Peter, for which he won a gold medal by saving Peter from a charging elephant. The relation between the government and the Bodi zamindar family remained pleasant, as the next Collector lauded the improvements - and noted that *no ligitation had come to either civil or criminal Court of Law during the zamindar's time* (*cf.* Vadivelu 1915:675). This is a fine example of the re-vamping of the structure of the gaze and the colonial promotion of the "locality", wherein the invisible is (positivistically) seen as a fine thing.

Kamula Ammal, a later *rani* of the estate, was lauded for installing five lantern posts called the "Empress Mary Light" in front of her palace in memory of the coronation durbar of 1911. "The coronation was fittingly celebrated by the reading of the proclamation, *the feeding of Brahmins...*" (*cf. ibid.*, p.675*). Another example of the relation between this estate and the Raj occurred in the 1880s, when it was alleged that the Collector of Madurai (C.S. Crole) employed the Bodi *zamindar* to ambush and kill Garstin, a BOR member prying into Crole's affairs (Washbrook 1976:30-31).

[23] See "Collector's Report to the Board", 24 November 1795; *MCR*, v.5160:237-8. "This is a fine pollam," wrote the observer, but had hardly any (310 *chay* - ?) irrigated (*nunja*) lands. At that time, Kombai was the centre of substantially more wetlands, and had two "pagodas" dedicated to Visnu. Overall, however, almost all the area

was the sort of improving activity the government wanted, that government in 1865 launched a sting operation to investigate accounts on the estate; it was determined that much of the estate's income was "occulted" in *inam*, which the *zamindar* granted "to all sorts of people." The government was piqued that the anicut dam had cut off the water from the Sirkar's *raiyatwari* villages below.[24] This was part of an ongoing dispute between the kingly style - which the colonialists promoted by fixing *palaiyam* space as defined and localized property - and the colonial government itself. Irrigation projects were too spatially inter-related, and there had long been calls for the encroachment of regulation on the *zamindars* and *inamdars* who held the main rights in irrigation projects: it was "evidently desirable," noted a colonial official, that what was then "exercised under a kind of common law, should be secured by the more reliable authority of a statute."[25] The result was the forcible encroachment of the colonial definition of property ownership into the re-emergences of the kingly style. When the estates were reviewed by the government in 1938, there were allegedly no *inams* in the Bodi *zamindari*.[26]

What had happened is that the erstwhile division of shares (*pangus*) of the produce of irrigated fields, which was the rightful salary for those who opted for labour, was supplanted by the stately principle of the *patta*, which "brooked no dissent" in the rights of "ownership." The Inam Commission ordered in 1858, which began work in Madurai district in 1863, chose only to recognize *inams* which had been held for more than fifty years, or, for those of more recent vintage, only allowed those granted by the British government itself to continue (*cf.* Baliga 1960:362-3). The irrigation project had been undertaken only after the advent of colonialism, and so these *inams* were rights distributed to labour after the colonial intervention, and thereby falling short of the fifty-year rule. Since the *palaiyams* were autonomous polities from whom tribute was only rarely obtainable, the idea of pre-colonial *inams* is a misnomer. They probably grew with the kingly style and with the shortage of Company rupees in the dry zone after 1802, as part of the fabrication of a distributive system similar to the *amani* system of the delta - a *jajmani* simulation. As submitted in the introduction, this was an innovation in the dry zone, achieved in the colonized 19th century. The disenfranchisement of these *inams* as illegitimate served to

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was unirrigated or "jungly"; the records for Kombai, Tevaram and Bodi show a combined ratio of 8:1 between *punjah* (dry) and *nunjah* (wet) lands (*cf. ibid.*, pp.233-238).

24 G.O. (Revenue), 10 November, 1865. The "sting" operation involved the tahsildar trying to take the *karnams* and the *zamindar* unawares, before they had any opportunity of tampering with the records. How successful this was is unknown.

25 "To the Board" from Parker, 3 August 1855. *MCR*, v.5351:157-8. The original Collectors were instructed by the terms of the Permanent Settlement of 1802 to try to parcel the land into *zamins* so that all lands watered by the same tank shall as far as possible be put into one estate (Chakravarthi 1922:84). This again indicates the arbitrariness of the colonial definition of space and the shifting territorialities which properly grazed the *palaiyam* zone.

26 *Report of the Madras Estate Land Act Committee (Landholder's Statement).* Madras: at the Government Press; part III: p.105.

radically disenfranchise labour as a whole, as a category and class.[27] It also suggests that in its first efforts, the rise of "high Hindu kingship" in the dry hinterland set out to provide compensation for its subjects, but was prevented from doing so by colonial laws and the foreigners' pedagogy on what was "traditional" and legitimate - i.e., everything the *palaiyam* formations were not. Moreover, the colonial gaze understood that *inams* were a function of village service, thereby weeding out their function as compensation for labour and as an integrating mechanism to prevent absolute landlessness for any community. This was utterly overlooked and, again, erased; for example, in Cumbum Valley, the official report of Blackburne in 1838 contended that *forced labour* was so common in all *public works* that no record of the "price" (wages) then given could be available anyway; one could not, after all, rely on the "vague and contradictory recollections of superannuated illiterate ryots."[28] The idea of forced labour was a deltaic one, and not at all evident as such in the dry zone. The labour had been performed in exchange for what amounted to a wage, a wage with a proportionate share in the profit of the project. The perception of the "peculiar servitudes" evident in the delta, however, here served the colonial government to create their "histories" in the dry zone as well. Kampan also "continued" his previously begun stanza:

> *... the reckless waters*
> *roared on like the pasts*
> *that hurry close on the heels*
> *of lives."*[29]

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[27] Other effects of the Inam Commission were to compulsorily enfranchise (into *raiyatwari* titles [*pattas*]) all *inams* not held in the direct line. This both indicates the prevalence of exchange of these rights in a market for service, and served to enforce the notion of these services as "hereditary" ones - a fact doubly evidenced by the practice of re-attaching all "service" *inams* back to their so-called "original office holders" whenever they had gone into the hands of "strangers" (*cf.* Baliga 1960:362-3). In other words, there was a "choice" : for that component of labour which was not to be outrightly disenfranchised, they were free to be spatially immobilized into a novel position in the localized "village community." This is hardly an example illustrating the transformation "From Indian Status to British Contract," (the title of an essay by Cohn 1987 [1962]), but rather: *from Indian contract to British status.*

[28] Blackburne to C.R. Cotton, Esq. 29 October 1838; "Distinction between Ryotwari and Zamindari" [western Madurai]. *MCR*, v.5334:374-9.

[29] In Zvelebil 1973:210*; see note **20** above.

The end of the limited space allocated to this thesis having been reached, a certain shrill-ness of voice infuses the norms of narrativity. Subjected to these, I will try to take an aerial view and seek to draw some conclusions. First, the arguments so far discursively presented will briefly be reviewed. Then the idea of space will be invoked again, this time clad in modernist garb as the idea of "public" space. The goal will be to see how that has - or has not - been constructed under the effects of the colonial gaze. This will lead yet again into the trope of the village community, as the maker of untouchability and thus the false representation of the "speech community" appropriate to a public space. Following that, the issue of the *direct* relation between south Indian "untouchables" and the colonial state will be addressed. Finally, a few closing remarks try to draw the curtain on the colonial imaginary.

A Review.

The orientalisms inscribed in many representations of Indian society have fostered totalizing images, whose effects have been an homogenizing of differences within their objectified subject. "Caste" in India has followed a tangential contour to this general *episteme*; it has been interpreted as an indigenous and splintering grammar, a fissiparous exaggeration of those differences. The polar result is largely the same. It has, however, allowed the imagining of India to describe the differences within Indian polities as *social* differences, analyzed in terms of blood and timeless custom [*dharma*] - what Marriott and Inden (in David, ed. 1977), in their efforts to re-unite the categories in a mis*placed* monism, call "substance" and "code". This in turn has contributed to the effacing of the territorial solidarities which have not been absent from south Asia. The enormous and concerted effort to deny this, partly expressed in discourses of orientalism themselves, testify to this: their goal of erasure is perhaps the very condition of their eloquence. Totalization, as aim, method, and representation, is a condition for this homogenization - in India, an homogenization of a certain style of internal differentiation - and this totality is a confined totality in its colonial subjugation. It is perhaps the confinement rather than the totality which makes and marks the lesson that the critique of orientalism has to offer. To break that confinement is a spatial act.

And so it has always been. The dry interior lands of south India have had a history of spatial sovereignty. This was most brazenly indicated in their plunder of the lowlands, and, when on the defensive, their success in avoiding a regulated relation of tax or rent to the kingdoms of those lowlands. They paid tribute, which passed under the cipher of *nazar*, a term intimately wound up with the idiom of the gaze, and one of the parameters of the nominality of the King's gaze; *nazar*, in practice, was tantamount to a signifier without a sign. This empty diacritic points to a

plenitude within the sovereign formations of the dry zone, a plenitude different from the image of hierarchy so often reported as intrinsic to "the caste system." As the chart presented earlier adumbrates, these different forms were woven into a spectrum of social structures, ranging from the shapes of human settlements and the practices of inheritance to the strategies of marriage and the arrangement of sacrifices. Wefted through all of these structural warps was the immanence of spatility, here indicating an unbounded domain signifed by the word *nadu*, and represented with the blanket. When it confines, a blanket is warm; however, as it is often already warm in south India, people like to sit on an open blanket. *Mariyadei* means both honour and border in Tamil, and orthodoxy proposes that possession of honour goes to the person who can *protect* the border. In the dry zone, however, honour went to those leaders who could *cross* the border: for example, those who would expand the sovereignty of the solidary group, or intrude upon the orthodox localities with demands for their own tribute.[1] In the open spaces of their homelands, there was no room for untouchability.

Within the confinements of deltaic space, property was highly textualized, and the texts of its representation were materialized in stone and copper inscriptions, and later, under colonial rule, the *patta* deed. This confinement was not a legacy of the dry zone, where people did not need to count space before presuming its habitation. The arrival of confinement was announced through a relentless war with the East India Company. After this, peasant cultivators continued to distrust the idea of the *patta*, and refused to accept them (*cf.*, e.g., P.B. Mayer 1982:12), aware that the boon of property they were being offered was in fact its absolute confiscation. Their protest, so definite that they were willing to leave their homes rather than accept this new regime, was suppressed by the use of force, which alone kept them from migrating and which forced them to continue to cultivate (*cf. ibid.*, p.9). Labourers were treated with as much generosity; in places, they were occasionally freed from the relative moral economy of customary ties, but they were not allowed for all that to leave - in the new political economy, Collectors arranged for their return to their "masters".

In the most recalcitrant places, colonial officials imposed the permanent settlement, whose terms were not accepted by the polegars. Nonetheless, they had to pay on an *ad hoc* basis, seemingly like *nazar*, but with a newly stringent frequency of collection. Most importantly, these areas of resistance were forced into the same fixed terms of space; estate boundaries were firmly inscribed on the map. These *zamindari* estates were officially part of an encompassing system of colonial topography, in which spatiality was subordinated to a protected territoriality - a

[1] For some reason, this was called "plunder", while the reverse process was called "tribute"; likewise, in the eyes of the delta-dwelling orthodoxy, *all* dry zone dwellers were barbaric and impure, all of them untouchables. Orthodoxy did not work in the fields, nor do fieldwork.

fetishized replica of a kingdom, which promoted an orthodox reading of *mariyadei*. The forceful construction of "village communities" in the dry *palaiyam* zone achieved a similar result with greater alacrity, creating numerous "localities". Here, not only did a new property regime push political competition onto the level of production, but new ritual forms emerged to sanctify social boundaries through the idiom of space, which came to differentiate the god in the temple itself. In the confined spaces of these colonial sites, orientalism's imaginary histories proved positively prophetic. Part of the homogeneity of its colonially confined totalizations was the category of untouchability, which was allowed to cross borders into the dry zone.

The King's gaze is a metaphor[2] which models the historical relations between state structures and untouchability. It is obviously an analytical construct; in the terms of Braudel, it is a "structure":

> "... a structure is of course a construct, an architecture, but over and above that it is a reality which time uses and abuses over long periods. Some structures, because of their long life, become stable elements for an infinite number of generations: they get in the way of history, hinder its flow, and in hindering it, shape it" (1988:76).

The section of this thesis devoted to the exposition of the King's gaze must perform its task unaided. Here it may be said that the optical rhetoric of the gaze is implicit in much Tamil political vocabulary, such as *kani* [root of verb meaning "to see"], the root of *kaniyatchi*, which was replaced with *mirasi*, which in turn translated as land control. In myths from the wet zone, Paraiyar depict their fall as due to a naming accident, in which the alliterative words *paarppaan* ["to watch"] and *paappaan* [a common term for Brahmins] are mistaken by Siva or the other people, resulting in their becoming untouchables, condemned to play the drum [*parai* = drum; *an* = person] and vowed to be silent [*parayyan*] (*cf.* Moffatt 1979:125-6, and also David 1977:191]. Fuller's presentation of certain spatial relations of purity and impurity in the festivals of village temples also demonstrates the role of the deity's gaze. Ammapatti Paraiyar in 1990 told me that the government's reservations for Scheduled Castes were an illusion: *kan thudiappu*, an "eye-wash."

Trying to vindicate the model as an "emic" one would be futile (and which anyway would be to reify an analytic distinction between inside and outside, a manoeuvre most indecorous for the whole essay). Rather, the King's gaze as

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[2] I feel compelled to make these few remarks (here and in the text) about the model of the King's gaze because it has been presented in a perhaps unwieldy fashion, and because it centres so much on the idea of the "fifth." First, I must say that it does not matter whether Manu is invoked or not; the idea that there are four and four only *varnas* is part of a long discourse with countless emanations. I use *The Laws of Manu* only because they are the most frequently invoked scriptural authority. Second, the reading of the fifth *varna* as a royally *prohibited* category has, I think, the relative value of being directed against the platitudes that the Orient is a Land of tyranny and despotism without even a shadow of what might be called - disregarding the energy and capacities devoted to their implementation - "good intentions".

presented here does offer a structure of *adequation*. It accounts for much of the geographical aspects of Scheduled Caste demography in its contemporary echoes, and even more in the past. The model of reversal and denial of the injunction "there is no fifth" also opens a window of comparison to colonial rule, when there was no such prohibition, and servitude was structurally encouraged. Further, the models of space generated from the King's gaze - and its outside - assist in grasping the effect of the transformation of dry south India into a part of "village India": the simulacrum of a self-reproducing menagerie of village republics. Finally, these spatial models are helpful in addressing one of the projects to which occidental modernity reputedly invites us: the creation of a public space.

Public Space as a Civilizing Mission.

In 1799, just before the generalization of the polegar uprising, Lushington dispossessed Cawmaya Nayak, the polegar of Saptur, for witholding his tribute and "other irregularities". The chiefly leader established himself in the neighbouring hills and maintained his influence. Lushington decided that rather than offer him a small pension and assurance of personal security, the latter's "commission of so many enormities" required that the Company's "image of force and energy" be enshrined by "making no such overtures to reconcilement"; he offered a reward for Cawmaya's person, and "capitally punished" him in July, 1800. This was done, Lushington claimed, in the interests of the "public". He then chose the eldest son of Cawmaya's second wife and appointed him *zamindar*. The ex-*palaiyam* now *zamin* thereupon began to be "comparatively advantageous", and for this reason, it was felt, the Saptur "public" had been well served. Curiously, however, by 1802 Lushington noticed that many of the "principal inhabitants" had fled, and felt "no particular attachment to return", thus making difficult the restoration of the "previously high state of cultivation" undertaken in the *palaiyam*. Lushington touchingly blamed this emigration largely on the alleged "terror" of Cawmaya.[3]

The timeless village republic with its ever-present population is not an image served well by this report, given the ex-patriated principal inhabitants' lack of primordial urgency to return. Presumably, they were antagonistic to the new regime, and perhaps were active in the war that occurred at this time. The invocation of Saptur's "public" seems largely to have served only one ideological purpose, that of justifying the "image of force and energy" which Lushington realized was absolutely crucial to Company pretensions to dominate this area. Lushington's strategy assumed, wilfully or not, that there was a "public"; he merely treated it despotically. Saptur's "public" was a signifier for a space that was to be inhabited by compliant

[3] *Cf. Correspondence*, 1873:48-50, and *The Fifth Report*, v.3:404-5. Saptur was the site of Lushington's remark that *amani* management was not used, cited in the Introduction.

raiyats and colonial subjects; unfortunately, these happened to be in short supply at the time.

Soon they were no longer even invited to participate in this canonization of their own subjection. Two decades later, during the debate over whether or not a free press - even for the English - should be permitted in India, the Court of Directors of the East India Company rebutted Lord Hastings' liberalizing proposals, explaining that the press, being an instrument of influencing public opinion, had no place in *their* India, where "*public* opinion cannot be said to exist" (*cf.* Stein 1989b:284*). The debate was finalized by a submission of Munro, then Governor in Madras, who correctly observed that liberties, including those of the press, were neither the basis of nor consistent with British rule in India - a rule which "should be prolonged to the remotest possible period", and which he himself described as "the domination of strangers" (in *ibid.*, p.285). So, the Company's India had no public, nor had any vision of departure from this arrangement; besides which, Europeans had access to their home press. Upon the scaffolding of Lushington's despotic definition of the Saptur public, there now was erected a denial of any such thing at all in India; this is the trace of a generalized erasure, which also obliterated the history of the *palaiyams* as something other than a turbulent glitch in the smooth screen of an orientalism, replete with an atrocious (albeit emulated) universal despotism.

Munro had, however, added that, in the contingency of that remote day when British rule might have to be relinquished, it must have *changed* its Indian subjects so changed as to assure "a free, or at least a regular government" (in *ibid.*, p.285).[4] A century later, in 1919, the Chief Secretary in Madras specified the means of this education. "A punitive force is the creator of a proper public opinion" (in Arnold 1986:128). The public cynically referred to by Lushington was erased - removed from space - and then offered a lease on an afterlife; temporalized, the public was to come into being under British tutelage.

Elites quickly responded to this temporalization, itself a function of spatial confinement. The Nawab of Arcot, after 1802 no longer equipped with any territory to preside over, retained a pension which he devoted to supporting a substantial retinue, symbolically cohering around flamboyant celebrations of life-cycle events of the ruling *lineage*. Susan Bayly contends that the protected Hindu kings or *zamindars*, whose incomes were made more substantial by being largely freed from redistributive alliance-maintaining exchanges, attracted a wave of Brahmin immigration into Ramnad and Pudukkottai, "with an inevitable emphasis on more

[4] Munro wrote that, in permitting a free press, the Company would be "trying an experiment never yet tried in the world - maintaining a foreign domination by means of a native army, and teaching that army, through a free press, that it ought to expel us and deliver their country" (in Stein 1989b:286). Eventually, Munro worried about how "completely excluded from a share of the government of their country" Indians were under Company rule (*ibid.*, p.224), and his last proposal was for native juries to be given jurisdiction in criminal cases. His successor *Lushington* refused to ratify this bill (*ibid.*, p.307).

exclusive and transcendent aspects of religious practice" (S.Bayly 1989:223,461). As seen, the Bodinayakkanuur *zamindars* were not slow to join in this trend. The emphasis on lineage was the natural expression of the state-sanctioned definition of property as the link between society and official power. This political valorization of property percolated into "social" practice with the same general outline of sanctifying the boundaries of those groups who could claim status as property "owners". That sanctification, alighting on propertied lineages, promoted a great enthusiasm for Brahmins to preside over commemorations of key events such as birth, marriage and death - all of whose orthodox purifications implied the need for pollution-absorbing roles, thus spreading, as Chris Bayly (1988:157) has suggested, the principles of purity and pollution into the dry countryside.[5]

In the dry zone, terms such as *pangali*, intimating "shareholder", shifted with this general move to the lineage. It has become a kinship term, denoting synonymously a rule of exogamy and those who have some access to the property of a group. In Ammapatti, while talking with the one Paraiyar *thothi* mentioned earlier, a young high-caste boy lingered nearby for a moment during which Chinnathambi, the gravedigger, used the term *pangali* to signify his agnatic kin. The mere use of this term prompted a scoff by the high-caste boy, who found it ludicrous that such an abject person should even think he has *pangali*. This is quite paradoxical given that, if there were a *jajmani* system, the task of grave-digging would have to be the property of a *pangali* group - and that property would be forced upon them by the local dominant caste, who would represent that *pangali* group as the whole Paraiyar *jati*. This is not the case, and Chinnathambi is in a wretched position; he is forced to maintain the job, but, as suggested in the introduction, the values of the "system" as in any way integrative are absent.[6] That is because nothing like *jajmani* has ever been

[5] Pfaffenberger notes the same process in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. There, the Dutch encouraged conversions to cash-croppping and defined untouchables as slaves to the Vellalars, as well as importing thousands more from south India. Vellalars, quickly cash-rich, not only sought more lands, but invested in more elaborate domestic ceremonies, which untouchables were forbidden to emulate. Land prices skyrocketed, as its possession signified social existence as well as wealth (*cf.* 1982:44). It is disappointing that Pfaffenberger claims that, "on the highest superstructural level, that of religion and ritual, it is quite apparent that radical change has *not* occurred" (*ibid.*, p.46), despite such a wholesale shift in the mode of production. With increasing institutionalizations of state induced quasi-capitalist property, social organization turns more and more to the lineage, and that entails *domestic* rituals supervised by Brahmins. This in turn implies a decrease in more collective and integrative rituals; in a case such as dry south India, the differentiation of the village deity into multiple aspects according to a spatial axis of purity, rather than a single deity approached by a sequential axis of leadership, *is* a radical change.

[6] Chinnathambi gets a cloth and a small cash payment for each grave; from the dominant Gowders he gets a silk cloth (he has quite a collection). As he is quite an old man, he actually doesn't dig the grave, but sub-contracts local youth to do it, which usually costs him the original payment; he is responsible only to arrange that it gets done. An elder Chettiar man once came by and joined Chinathambi and I; they exchanged pleasantries and were comfortable, and he later asked me - in public - for a photograph I had taken of the two of them together. The Chettiar turned to me and explained that, as Chinnathambi was the grave-digger, he would starve to death if nobody died. However, Chinnathambi earns his living by being a coolie, not by diggin graves. He reckons he gets some preference in being selected for daily labour, as patronage to keep him tied to the locality. Somewhat unusually for Ammapatti, the Chettiar was thinking through the *jajmani* system of ideas, which nonetheless has no relation to what in fact happens.

a time-honoured tradition in this area west of Madurai; moreover, the closest thing to its simulacrum only came into existence *after* the imposition of the property regime which, theoretically, is supposed to contribute only to its erosion.

Frustration at this paradox was also expressed by a group of Pulaiyar in Kotukudi, near Bodinayakkanuur. Many people in this "tribal" group, now settled in government housing as landless labourers for the only other community in the hillside settlement, feel "pressures for Tamil propriety" like the Paliyan described by Gardner (1988)[7]. They told me that they feel that they are somehow supposed to settle into the space of their subjection and subscribe to the new orthodox (but "traditional") sense and usage of *pangali*. "But what's the use... At the end of the day, what do we have? A pickaxe..." If they adopt the new usage, they find that they gain none of the betterment that their complaint clearly indicates that they expect, and so appear ridiculous. If they do not, however, then they are told that they are *adivasi* [tribal] and primitive. Likewise, if Chinnathambi uses the term, he is scorned, but if he were to stop the practice of *pangali*, and his lineage-mates refuse to continue to dig graves, he would be beaten.

This emphasis upon the lineal transmission of property and the sanskritized sanctification of the propertied lineage corresponds to the decline in importance of spatial considerations in determining the idioms of kinship. Regardless of the reports of the early 1900s, today the Tottiyan Nayakkars feel no relation whatsoever to the Kappiliyar Gowders, because the language to represent such a relation has changed. It has been transformed by the state's de-territorialization of property, which promotes a closure of the language of kinship parallelling Trawick's Chingleput Reddiar informants' sense of identity. Colonization changed the dry zone's idiom of kinship exactly as it did the *palaiyam* spatiality itself, inducing a local closure represented as a property to be protected - both from the state itself and from others. This lineal rhetoric has two aspects: blood and time. The stress on blood extends to produce an exaggerated notion of caste-solidarity, so evident in the caste-war occuring in the ring of fire around Madurai. The aspect of temporality serves to perpetuate the colonial erasure of spatiality, which according to the solidarities it generated was once a key component in the political relations between the kingly states and their absence in the sovereign formations of the *palaiyams*.

The above emphases on temporality and the lineage, on the medium and structure of the reproduction of property, may also be the form taken to fill the void

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[7] Exactly how much they feel like the Paliyar is unclear. Most colonial documents clearly distinguish between the Pulaiyar and the Paliyar, with the Paliyar being described more often as "wild" (*cf.* Francis 1905:4-5, 104-5), although the Paliyar are somewhat accidentally seen as high-status and pure by the settled peasantry (*cf.* Gardner 1982).. When the Kotukudi Pulaiyar went to Bodi to register some of their children for school in the late 1980s, however, they were told that they could not be Pulaiyar, since there weren't any - it was not on the list of Scheduled Tribes. They were told they must mean that they were Paliyar, which was on the list. There is some debate amongst themselves now about which they are or should be.

made by the colonial refusal to accept the existence of a public, let alone a public space. The civilizing mission espoused by the scribes of high empire proposed an eventual achievement of political modernity, by Indians, in India, and through empire's burdensome teaching. This valorized the politics of time and development. The content and direction and benefits of this development were contested by those who were in relatively elite positions; pursuing the protection of their property, they drew upon the rites and languages of caste and religion - they obstinately continued to exist despite the "punitive force" of imperial pedagogy. While allowed according to the fiction of non-intervention, these were all declared by the Raj to be signs of unfitness for political self-determination. Recognizing the dominance trying to hide within this claim to the hegemonic definition of the terms of what politics properly was (*cf.* Guha, *SAS* v.6:210-309), and adapting Marx, we may say that just as the imperial state *increased its despotism* when, although it is colonial, it adopted the rhetoric of a civil public domain as a criterion of entitlement to the properly political, so the Hindu, the Kallar, the Reddiar, the Muslim, whatever named group, *acted politically* when, *as a Kallar*, Vellalar, whomever, she, he, or they demanded civil rights.[8] In the dry zone, colonial rule created conditions - of space, property and kinship - in which for the native subject to act according to the interests allowed to them, automatically signified their allegiance to "primordial tradition" and thereby disqualified them from appearing as capable of modern self-rule. Such a capability could only be signified by a denial of the conditions of one's own legitimate private interests. There was, quite literally, no room for a citizen.[9]

Imperial discourse itself was nonetheless optimistic about the reforms it worked in the fabric of south Indian society. Referring to the proliferation of caste-exalting literature, through which various low status groups such as the Nadars [then Shanars] sought to contest their position, the *Report* on the 1871 Census mused that:

> "the uneasiness of the lower castes in regard to the social position assigned to them by Brahmanical authority is simply an *indication* that, *under British rule*, they have *increased* in wealth and *intelligence*, and *naturally desire* to prove that the yoke imposed upon them by the caste system was *tyrannical* and unjust" (Cornish, p.118*).

The communalization of "caste", while antithetical to the elements proper to a public space and confirming of the orientalized notions of India as the land of castes, was nonetheless a sign that progress was underway, progress towards the natural desires of intelligence to assert one's freedom (*cf.* Prakash 1990). This progress was detected in the expressions of resistance to the "social" powers of certain groups. The dry zone,

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[8] In his essay "On the Jewish Question", Marx wrote: "Just as the state evangelizes when, although it is a state, it adopts a Christian attitude towards the Jews, the Jew acts politically when, though a Jew, he demands civil rights" (1964:21).

[9] The two co-ordinates denoting participation in public existence for the modern republic or state would be the spatial one of citizenship and the temporal one of patriotism (*cf.* Smith 1985:10).

however, had not been the site of any such Brahmanical prehistory. By displacing its own tyranny onto "the caste system", colonial discourse re-iterated the double-bind in which it put its decapitated subjects: the natural desires of intelligence were only recognized by the colonial gaze when they took a communalist form, and were thereby unfit for the public space of citizenship.

This literature of exaltation, spawned by caste associations and promulgating ideologies of distinction and caste identity, resembles the pamphleteered "physiologies" of the Paris of the Second Empire. This popular genre of satirical social typification also occurred during a period of state censorship[10], a time marked by "the motley mixture of crying contradictions" of a fabulous passage from Marx:

> "passions without truth, truth without passion, ... history without events ... If any section of history has been painted grey on grey it is this. Men and events appear... as shadows that have lost their substance" (1852:37-8).

In both the temporary despotism of Louis Bonaparte and the more enduring despotism of the colonial state in India, the repressed political expressions of these regimes' subjects returned in the shape of an explosion of classificatory polemic in the body social. Walter Benjamin observed that "the political secret" on which the physiologies in Paris were based, was that "life in all its variety and inexhaustible wealth of variations can thrive only among the grey cobblestones and against the grey background of despotism" (1973:37). At this period in the later 19th century, the grey-ness of imperial despotism was inscribed even in the records left by the rulers, which lost all colour in favour of bureaucratic uniformity, as Ludden has observed (1985:119-22; *cf. infra.*, p.178n11).

In tyrannical regimes, Machiavelli observed, people have "customs", as distinct from *living* memories of liberty (*cf.* Smith 1985:13). Colonial rule, without citizens, was such a regime, and its subjects had only "customs." So far was this understood and imagined by the colonial state, that the "native rank" of Madras presidency, firmly locked in with the permanent settlement, were understood to have been little "kings" according to a logic of consensus or compliance: the people were accustomed to their leadership, and therefore public space was not necessary. The case of Kattabomman, in which his discourse utilised the grammar and references of kingship but in a transgressive way, suggests that the analogy to the Enlightenment norm of public space, based on a paradigm of consensus, was in south India oriented around contestation. If public space has been harnessed to the notion of popular sovereignty in the west, its Tamil equivalent was the sovereignty of space, enacted in the struggle for control over the frontiers of the King's gaze. The existences of

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[10] Banned from politics, publicans turned to satire. The physiologies were caricatures of various social types. The number of these grew and grew and their nuances were ever more scrutably specified while there was no outlet for participation in the public of the monarchy of Louis Bonaparte. See Benjamin 1973, esp. pp.36-7.

laminated rights and multiple tactics, of gifts, tribute and concealment, suggest that political conflicts were most often settled through the silent gaze of *nazar*. These transactions confounded Company officials. "Throughout is collusion," wrote an exasperated Lionel Place in 1799 (*cf.* Irschick 1982:220-1).

Self-appointed to the arbitrary task of tidying this up, the colonial state managed to take the politesse, the metaphors, and the transgressions of countless Kattabommans out of the notion of oriental despotism, which they otherwise left intact. Placing property on a sure footing was an alleged goal of the early colonial rulers. The footing on which they put it, however - as absolutely owned by the colonial state itself in *raiyatwari* areas, and rented out as a set of localizing spaces to "principal inhabitants" used as de facto prebendaries - converted Tamil dryland "tradition" into a caricature of the orthodox delta.

The Peculiar Village Community.

This caricature was summated under the sign of the village community, which came in fact to resemble the *mirasidari* republics of the delta, where property was a prerequisite for local enfranchisement. As the relations between the availability and quality of the land and the value of labour were not enough to give property a value by itself, the dry zone villages needed an impetus to establish the ordering powers of property. This was provided by the colonial state, whose high revenue demands were passed along by "principal inhabitants" defined as naturalized leaders of the community. The tension between these primary owners and the state was largely displaced onto the category of labour, which simultaneously acquired the viral symbolisms of a hierarchical form of caste.

In the spaces of the *palaiyams*, such villages had to be excavated before they could receive the orthodox idiom long recited by the delta elites. If the construction of caste hierarchy took the better part of the 19th century, the laying of foundations was a rapid result of direct colonial policy.[11] In 1801, after the exhausting war against the polegars, the Company knew from experience that the rebels, "though openly submissive, in secret cherished with impunity the seeds of rebellon" would hide in the "impenetrable jungle which surrounded their fastnesses" and managed to "withstand... with too much success the arms of the power against whom they contended," as a report observed (in Rajayyan 1971:279). Not only were the chiefly polities resistant to "the Goverment to whom they owed allegiance," but it was "the

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[11] This forced clearance of the features of the tinai was very rapid. Also drastic in the first three or four decades of the 19th century was the role of the *karnam* and the VHM in his new role as agent of the state: "a case for government by terror could perhaps be made. With the rules of law uncertain, the direction and volume of the flow of resources to the state undecided and large quantities of armed men available to support the judgements of Company servants, bureaucrats and their hangers-on were often in a position to seize what they liked" (Washbrook 1976:41).

security afforded by nature" - the space itself - which assisted them in their "traitorous" opposition to the new colonial regime (in *ibid.*, p.279). Frustrated then at both the people and the places of the dry zone *tinai*, the Company ordered the destruction of the forests of Sivaganga and the Dindigul country, the most turbulent centres of revolt. The next year, each village was forced to destroy all forests "within their limits" and to open a wide space around their settlement (*cf. ibid.*, p.279). This entailed the demolition of the brambly walls which circulated the dispersed settlements, and generally rendering them open to the colonial gaze.[12] The gaze of the state, although finally breaking through the political curtains of the tactics of *nazar*, did so with a fundamental difference from the King's gaze: there was no prohibition of the fifth.

Having thus dominated spatiality by altering the landscape itself, the Company merely administered over the rule of property and let deltaic sociology rush to the new *localities* of the dry zone. As a locality, the elite of each village sought to attach their village deity to the universalist sanskritic gods, and the differentiation of the goddess according to principles of purity and pollution began, leading to the forms described in recent ethnographies and analyzed so well by Fuller (1989). The emphasis on property[13] and thereby the lineage inclined to the greater invocation of Brahmanical sanctification of the ritual life of corporate groups. Class interests were articulated in a religious language with which the state vowed not to interfere, and glossed over a topological idiom of solidarity. The result was a caste system which was hierarchical in nature but shorn of even the idea of the sub-*mirasi* of subordinate groups in the wet zone.

In place of the prevalence of attached farm labourers and the assymetrical exchange relations which maintained local domination in Thanjavur, the landless labourers of the Dindigul country and the Madurai area worked for daily pay [*kuli*] in the late 19th century.[14] This was probably not a change, although the terms for

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12 Concern to expose the spatial transgressions implicit in another practice based on crossing borders, that of *kaval*, was voiced by Munro at the same time; he complained of the tributes thus paid for protection by many settled villages to many polegars' people as merely funding "a number of seminaries for training regular thieves". His language used the rhetoric of concealment and hiding, a language of the gaze (*cf. The Fifth Report*, v.3:426-7).

13 For instance, by 1838 it was already noted that, in Cumbum Valley, gems, gold and silver ornaments, and land, "strengthened by legally executed bonds on stamped paper" and usually only from a person of known substance, were the only securities taken for cash loans. This was recognized to be a change from formerly unattested "notes of hand" by the Company officer Blackburne (to C.R. Cotton, 29 October 1838, *MCB* v.5334:374-79).

14 The *Gazetteer* estimated that 90% of the landless were coolies, and noted the contrast to Thanjavur, where the coolie [Francis uses this word for the delta as well] is bound to serve the landlord "through various obligations". Meanwhile, small-holdings were held by great numbers of *raiyats* from the "agriculturalist" castes (*cf.* Francis 1905:144). When I gave a talk about "coolie" labour in Uthamapalaiyam HKRH College, I was asked what I thought about "their [coolies'] *behaviour*" - this was after the Bodi clash and there was no doubt that the question relied on an equation between coolies [*kulikarran*] and Harijans, even though many caste-Hindus are landless as well.

labour were now set at a disadvantage by the state's high revenue demand, and of course the practice of returning them to their native village. Later, the 1881 Census recorded that a remarkable 95.6% of the population lived in the district in which they had been born (*cf.* Washbrook 1976:81). This further empowered the trope of the village community, which was only pulled into the dry zone by the bootstraps of the nineteenth century, before which intra-rural migration was very common. Despite the colonized novelty of the entire arrangement, the distributions of its stresses and strains were made unequally, with the new category of "untouchables" taking the burden. By the turn of the century, they began to be represented as Adi-Dravida, the "original Dravidian people." This image spread to the area around Madurai and the "timelessness" of the village community trope became transferred onto the low castes, who are even now construed as having always been in the place. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, the landowning farmers consider that it was their own ancestors who "settled" the valley.

Untouchables and the Raj.

This representation of the untouchables as the Adi-Dravida appears to be another aspect of the delta bias. In 1892, the Adi-Dravida Maha Jana Sabha was founded in Madras to raise the "social, moral and intellectual status" of untouchable communities by every means; membership was open only to Adi-Dravidas (*cf.* Sadasivan 1974:111). This organization, begun by some Madras Paraiyar, has had a somewhat geographically determined effect in drawing membership. In the 1931 Census, the majority of people claiming the identity of Adi-Dravida were in the area around Madras itself, especially Chingleput.[15] The motif of original inhabitation is an old one in these areas, where Paraiyar were long excluded from property rights. Ellis defended the world of *mirasi* by saying that under its domination, the Chingleput Paraiyar

> "consider themselves as the real proprietors of the soil; the Vellalar, they say, sells his birthright to the Sanar [toddy-tappers], the latter is cajoled out of it by Brahmins, and he is swept away before the fury of a Muhammedan invasion; but no one removes or molests the Paraiyar, whoever may be the nominal owner or whatever the circumstances of the times" ([*c.* 1814] in Irschick 1989:489n84).

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[15] The majority of Adi-Dravida were once Paraiyar. The ratios of Paraiyar to Adi-Dravida in the 1931 Census in some districts were as follows (this being a function of what people claimed they were, and thus a reasonable index of the spread of the organization [in brackets is the number in 1,000s]). Madras city: 10:63 [73k]. WET ZONE: Chingleput: 10:19 [437k]; North Arcot: 10:80 [362k]; Thanjavur: 10:3 [352k]; Trichy: 10:9 [167k]. DRY ZONE: Ramnad: 10:4 [70k]; Madurai 10:3 {108k]. Madras-wide, the ratio was 10:15, with a total of 2.8 million registered either as Paraiyar or Adi-Dravida (*cf.* Yeatts, *Census of India 1931*:305-10). Thanjavur seems to be an exceptional aberration, and indicates the degree of subjection that Paraiyar there have experienced. One reason why the Paraiyar of Madurai and Ramnad were less responsive is because they were not convinced of their low status; especially in Ramnad, a substantial number of Paraiyar held land from the *zamindar*.

The idea of being the original (and ultimate), albeit reduced, inhabitants of a space is foreshadowed in this tale.

Lionel Place had not been so sanguine, nor was the Collector of Chingleput in the late 19th century, Tremenheere. He argued for Paraiyar land rights and therefore the end or mitigation of *mirasi* dominion, but the Board of Revenue in Madras, which had in 1874 proclaimed that the *mirasi* system was "a great but necessary evil" (in *ibid.*, p.485), contended that there was some evidence that here and there non-*mirasidars* had been able to get some lands, and so "the difficulties under which they [the Paraiyar labourer] labour are by no means insuperable" (in *ibid.*, p.487). All of this would seem to argue that, while not assisting south Indian untouchables, their policies did not suppress them - that was left to custom. Indeed, that is precisely how the colonial state imagined the situation. When Tremenheere suggested that some wastelands be given on petition [*darkhast*] to the Chingleput Paraiyar, rather than be monopolized by contiguous *mirasi* holders as the ambiguous law currently purported, the Board of Revenue again condemned the proposal, expostulating that

> "the British government is pledged to abstain from direct interference with caste and custom, just as it is bound to respect the rights of property in land. Yet the proposals presented for the acceptance of government would *revolutionize the one and confiscate the other*" (in Irschick 1987:157*).

This text clearly enunciated the colonial perception of land control and the customs of caste as operating according to two autonomous systems of value, both of which the government was willing to respect. In short, not only were *mirasidars* to have their property protected as such, but for reasons wholly unrelated to property, the Paraiyar were to remain normatively landless.

By and large, the Chingleput case seems to conform to the argument of Dharma Kumar: while the economic position of untouchable labourers may have declined, there was no structural change. The effects of colonialism did not liberate the peculiar servitudes of the untouchables, but neither did they exacerbate them as such. However, for the *palaiyams* of another time and another *tinai*, the Board of Revenue's statement should be reversed. Here the *revolution* of property imposed by the forcible incorporation of these autonomous formations into the regular revenue map of the Company and the raj, two state structures which brooked no dissent in the politics of space, led to a *confiscation* of the dry zone's version of "caste and custom." The revolution put space into the frame of a bounded village, and the confiscation produced the sign of an absolute pollution; their point of convergence named a site of landless labour seen as untouchable. In a pat symbolic reversal of this development, dominant people in the dry zone have come to represent the untouchable *jatis* as groups who have always been in the place. Here there is no evidence that the low groups consider themselves to be original inhabitants; the representation functions

as a myth to re-assert the fundamental emplacement of the locality, the striated space of custom implemented by colonial topography.

In 1918, when the Raj listened to petitions from various groups regarding the possibility of enfranchisement in dyarchy, the Adi Dravida Maha Jana Sabha announced to the Committee in New Delhi that "[w]e would fight to the last drop of our blood any attempt to transfer the seat of authority in the country from British hands to the so-called high caste Hindus" (in Frykenberg 1987:41). This apparent loyalism to the Raj was a strategy used throughout India by many groups labouring under the pollution stigma, who identified their enemies according to the proximity of their dominant presences; the heartland of this south Indian organization did this as well, construing the Raj as preferable to their immediate masters. In the dry zone, however, the organization did not make many inroads; from these areas sprung the "loyalist" Justice Party and its non-Brahmin manifesto.

In many ways the conflict between the Justice Party and the Congress in the colonial half of the 20th century represents not the social fragmentation of the erstwhile Brahmin-Vellalar *mirasidari* alliance which long dominated the rich Tamil valleys, but rather an expression of the spatial differences between the wet and the dry zones. However, the Justice Party quickly showed its elitism - the trace of its colonized history - by misreading the orthodoxy which had come to mutate the dry countryside. They attacked the figure of the Brahmin as the source of social oppression, and not the *use* of the Brahmin - by the state and, of course, by themselves. During the Congress-led Temple Entry movement in the 1930s, the dry zone elite used their party paper, Justice, to complain:

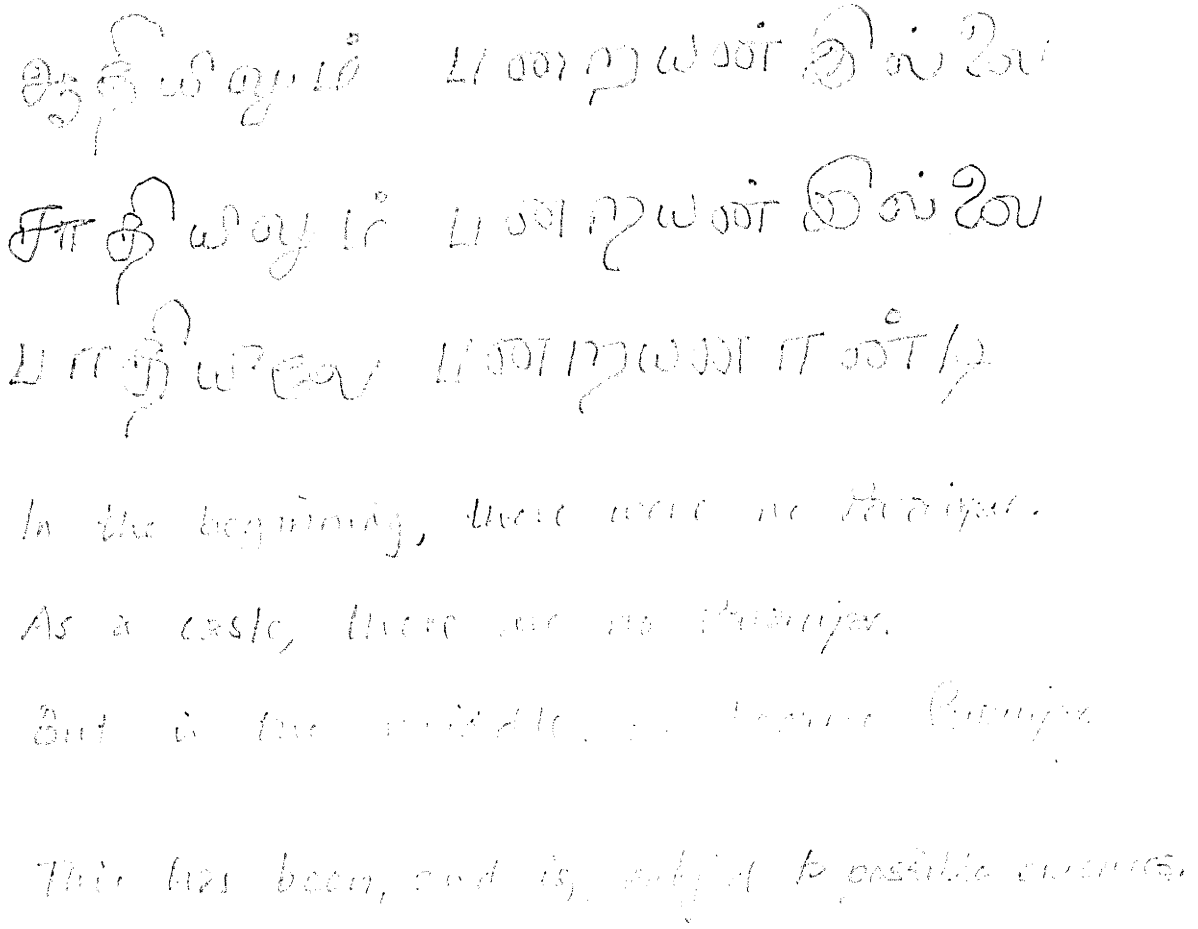
> "For many centuries these peoples, most of whom until recently were Animists, were content to worship at their own shrines, and to try to force themselves into Hindu temples is not... to make themselves popular. Nor can we think that any grave wrong is done by their continued exclusion ... they would be better occupied in improving their own condition than in a violent attempt to assert rights which no one had heard of until a few years ago" (in Hutton 1963:203*).

The low castes were by and large lured into the Congress fold, "Brahmins" notwithstanding.

And this is interesting. The Congress stance on untouchables, once hammered out in arguments between Ambedkar and Gandhi, but now almost unassailable, has been to construct a category in which to include them, the "Scheduled Castes", and to reserve them a quota of seats in parliament and other government jobs. A like policy actually began in Madras Presidency long ago (*cf.* Radhakrishnan 1990; Galanter, in Mahar, ed.1972). The category of the Scheduled Castes, as Harijans, "ex-untouchables" is remarkably similar to a fifth *varna*, hereby given the formal protections of a constitutional order - but, more significantly, recognized by the state's gaze. Whether this form of affirmative action works positively or only

exacerbates the problem by reifying the original distinction is always debatable, in the USA as in India. The classical debate remains that between the untouchable political leader Ambedkar and Gandhi, and it is well known that Gandhi won that debate. This is no space to discuss that debate, or the implementation of the policy; it is, however, noteworthy how structurally consistent the arrangement is with the form of the King's gaze. Under the ensuing gaze of the Indian nation-state, the practice of untouchability is formally illegal, but as the Ammapatti Paraiyar told me, this whole affair is a *kan thudiappu*: an eye wash, yes, and *kan* was also the root for deltaic forms of property as well, which the untouchables' normative landless pollution ritually washed.

Final Comments.



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MCR Madurai Collectorate Records.

MCB Madurai Collectorate Board.

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This rough report is based on newspaper reports, interviews with people in the region and elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, occasional comments heard during fieldwork in 1990, and my impressions. By and large, talking to people of Cumbum Valley about this topic was difficult; they did not want to talk about it, as much tension lingered on, police rule was often in effect, and besides the reticence of those who had to silence their actions, some people were doubtless preparing for new ones. It was thus obviously difficult to get concrete information. By and large, many *jati*-communities and whole villages professed to have taken no interest in the whole affair, expressed no sympathy for any of the participants or victims, and felt this was very normal.

There is a political party in Tamil Nadu called Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), largely a Pallar group whose leader is a man named John Pandian from Tirunelveli district. Since 1975, he has allegedly been involved in "nearly 13" cases, some of murder, without conviction. In elections in 1986, he emerged as a political entity, "when he was assiduously cultivated by a leading political figure of the state," but I do not know whom. When the Tirunelveli Collector and police department took tough stands on caste-based processions and conferences, his power waned; it grew again when he allied with D. Selvin Nadar, with the Thevars as their common enemies. The Vanniar Sangam of the Arcots then wooed Pandian and the PMK; the leaders of this other association attended Pandian's wedding in 1988. The Vanniar Sangam had been facing hostile attitudes from Paraiyar "Harijans" in south Arcot, and it is felt that they wooed the PMK to show that they had friends among the Harijans, too. Incidentally, Pandian's brother was murdered by Thevars, an act which Pandian successfully avenged.

On the 9th of September, 1989, in Meenakshipuram village near Bodinayakkanuur, a 55 year old Pallar woman named Muthupillai was found murdered, with her tongue cut out. Police suspected her husband, when another man named Chokkila confessed; he was declared insane during the investigation. The next day, John Pandian addressed a public meeting in the village, predominantly Harijan, and reportedly said that he would ask for the hand in marriage of the daughter of the panchayat president Raju Pillai - and that if he was refused he would kidnap and marry her. There was widespread feeling amongst the Pallars that their women were abused and that they should retaliate. It is certainly true that Harijan women coolie labourers are coerced into sex by their employers. The high-caste people of the area took great offense at Pandian's speech, and put up posters announcing their disgust, calling for an apology and threatening assault. They met at a temple on the 12th of September, and decided to call for government action - the arrest of John Pandian - by the 15th of September, or they would picket buses on the 16th at various towns. At this meeting, they also decided to stop engaging Harijans for work in the fields *gradually* - and if the Harijans resisted, the landlords would retaliate.

The government was criticized as slow to react, "given the sort of equations known to exist between the two caste groups." The Information Minister Mr. Pon. Muthuramalingam, came to Bodi on the evening of the 15th to cull a peace treaty out of the antagonists, including that all posters displayed for taking action against Harijans be taken down. "One group agreed to drop the agitation plan, while the other said that what Mr. John Pandian spoke at the meeting was unacceptable." The agreeing group was obviously the Pallars, then, although newspaper prose is fastidious in avoiding specific *jati* names; they do use "Harijan" and "non-Harijan" copiously. The buses were duly picketed, and riots broke out in various places throughout Cumbum Valley. Police were already heavily present, but their stations were attacked by both Thevars and Pallars in many of the sites of the conflict. In Theni, when police arrived in a jeep at the bus stand where many had gathered, they were immediately surrounded and attacked; 'the jeep had to beat a retreat and in the process two persons were run over and they died on the spot." Roads were blocked with boulders and tree-trunks, and traffic could not pass the only road from Madurai to Kerala. The riots continued for several days, spreading across the region but many villages and towns, such as Uthamapalaiyam and Kombai, were able to keep it out. People seemed to feel that this was because of the successful meetings of the influential leaders of the various communities in resolving to keep peace. In the end, 31 people were officially dead, 26 by bullets, and a further 91 injured, including 30 policemen; obviously, locals have much higher estimates, and bodies were not always returned by the police. Several state-owned transport corporation buses were burned.

The Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi (DMK) declared in the aftermath that it was "unfortunate" that people had been "misled" by an "individual with vested interests"; this is probably an apt description of Pandian, who was arrested some time later, although there remains the question of a murdered Pallar

woman. It is widely felt and probably true that the DMK is a pro-Thevar party, but he still insisted that "his sole object was to improve the lot of the poor." The leader of the A-DMK party (now [1991] in power but then very much not), Jayalalitha, whose constituency is Bodinayakkanuur but is not known to spend much time there, had called Rajiv Gandhi to ask for intervention from Delhi to stop the "communal war." The A-DMK party is generally more popular amongst the Harijan community in Tamil Nadu.

A group of Harijans including women walked to Madurai from Thevar-dominated Usilampatti to request government intervention to restore peace in their village, Ayankoilpatti, where they said their cattle had been stolen; the "younger generation" "even" threatened to embrace Islam if they were not listened to. They were trying to visit the Chief Minister at a 5-star hotel in Madurai, but police officials refused to let them enter the compound, let alone the building. During the aftermath, the newspaper reported that the only vehicles on the road were those of the police, the press, and a Kerala Tourism Development Corporation bus from a popular park at Thekkadi, just over the border from Cumbum Valley.

As for the rhetoric of representation of the newspapers - The Hindu - I'll cite two examples. The report of the clash at Thevaram, a small town where tension is particularly strong, suggested that it was a sequel to an incident in which "an *urchin* belonging to a nearby Harijan colony was assaulted by a mob of non-Harijans." The boy escaped, and the "colony people" - i.e., the Pallars - came and opened fire with country guns at the "non-Harijans", who retaliated. The five dead at Thevaram were all non-Harijan (2 Thevars), and so police supposed that only Harijans used guns, which is extremely unlikely. Another reporter wrote, during the immediate period of martial law after the riots: "As this reporter motored down to Bodi, he could see an eerie calm in many a hamlet criss-crossing the road." He publicized that some "non-Harijan Hindus" had complained to him that "some of their men" had been taken to the police station on the charge of setting fire to Harijan dwellings - they claimed that "Harijans, after removing all their belongings, had themselves set their homes ablaze before fleeing."

So much for the newspaper. The conflict can be both broken down and expanded. Sattur, about 100 km to the southwest of Cumbum Valley, is probably the most violent place of late; the conflict is the "same": Pallars vs. Thevars. The violence is extreme, as attested to by the Pallar woman who was killed and had her breasts cut off and an axe buried in her vagina. Vengeance prevails there, and people are afraid to talk to people on the street. "The circle of alienation gets wider and wider," I was told by a Pallar schoolteacher who personally had good friendships with Thevars, and taught in a school in a village in which they predominated. He was taking a medical leave of absence because, despite those friendships, he was afraid to go to work there. He spoke of the need for "numbers" to even the tally of deaths. As the presence of John Pandian itself attests, networks of community and information exist over wide territories to spread the same conflict throughout the area south and west of Madurai. Another case is that the Pallars and the Thevars are probably the two communities most involved in "illegal" arrack-production, a black market activity which is heavily dependent on police alliance and a willingness to use force to dominate the local arena. In Sattur, the Pallars are also increasingly involved in money-lending activities, usually as the enforcer-collectors for other people. The woman so brutally killed was seen as a major money-lender in the area.

On the other hand, there are some specificities; as noted, the Thevaram case was interpreted as having causes other than the speech at Bodi. In Thevaram, the Thevars have erercted a statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar, a Maravar politico who was a friend of S.C. Bose and pushed the Forward Bloc party in the Ramnad area; he was known as quite willing to terrorize the Harijan communities in the area with his henchmen (*cf.* Hardgrave 1969). These statues exist all over the place, including in Ammapatti. The Pallars tried to erect an Ambedkar statue, which was not deemed appropriate, exacerbating tension. It is felt that the tensions in Thevaram are due to the "rapid economic rise" of the Pallar community in the area, much resented by the Thevars, who may well be patronized by other higher caste people.

Chinnamanur is yet again different. This is a large town of almost 40,000, and is distinct in the Valley for the number of Brahmins living there. The Pallars are perhaps more subject to "traditional" ritual stigmas there than anywhere else. They also live in a colony which is in the middle of the town; it is resented and reviled that they must pass through the streets of "non-Harijan Hindus", but this they must do simply to go the fields to work. The conflict in Chinnamanur, another site of high violence, was

seen locally as due to these "traditional" symbols of subjection. The Pallar community there obviously know how well-liked they are, and provide workshops in Tamil stickfighting (*silambu*) for the defence of their people; women also are encouraged to learn. The Thevars of Chinnamanur are also more avid in this pursuit than elsewhere. The Pallar headman seemed to have a high amount of control over the "street"/neighbourhood of his community; he was superficially hospitable to me, but refused to say a word about anything, "cancelled" several arranged meetings by not showing up, and asked me not to return to his area, with which I could hardly argue.

It is not simply a matter of Pallars and Thevars. In K.G. Patti, for example, the Scheduled Castes are Chakkiliyar and Paraiyar; the latter once owned substantial amounts of land given in the 1920s by a colonial re-settlement project. They have now lost almost all of it, and a government housing project was built for them - but it is over 600m from the main village. Now they don't live there, having all moved into the crowded neighbourhood of their kin in the village. They are afraid to live in the government colony, which they feel is dangerously isolated. During the clash, "non-Harijan Hindus" attacked the government colony, damaging the houses. The Paraiyar feel it is only "because we are Harijans," and the rallying cry of the valley clash was that it had to do with the offensive behaviour of "Harijans", not specifically the Pallars. When I was there, I spent some time with a Kallar man and some Paraiyar together. They seemed to get along, and at one point the Kallar gave a little homily about how everyone was equal, winning him many points from the Paraiyar. They all expressed relief at their village having avoided the clash, and said that they didn't like the government housing because the roofs leaked. Later they told me in private that they had been attacked there, and that was why the roofs were so leaky.

There are no Pallars in Ammapatti, only Paraiyar and Chakkiliyar. The latter are more patronized, and seem a bit grovelling. Quite frankly I found their living conditions un-necessarily abysmal and unclean, despite plenty of water and access to live better. The Paraiyar, meanwhile, are immaculately neat, despite the fact that the government-paid Chakkiliyar cleaners never come to their streets as implied in their job description. They were very marginal in the employment structure, a high proportion of them working outside of the village. A number worked in Kerala, at tea estates, or even in quarries near Cochin. It is a conscious policy, as they hate working for local land-owners, who degrade and oppress them. They choose to work for land-owners of other villages, which is no more lucrative and costs them much time to commute; nonetheless, this is their strategy to escape local patronage structures. They had several ideological leaders of sorts, who supported this move of self-respect, a move whose poor economic returns are no worse, really, than if they work for their local dominators; some of them do work locally, anyway, at least part of the time.

One of their leaders was a man in his early 30s named Eshwaran, whom I never met. He and his family had managed to acquire about 8 acres of land, and he had a notoriously strong bull to help him with ploughing. He also was having an affair with a Chettiar woman, whose husband had died some years ago. He had moved to a house in the Chettiar part of the village, but was a big "uplift" person for his *jati*; he was their panchayat representative, and was highly regarded by all the Paraiyar who mentioned him. On the second day of the Bodi clash, Eshwaran was returning from the fields with his large bull. A Chettiar man visiting from another village made some derisory quip about how large the bull was, and how ill that fit a Paraiyar. Tempers flared and words were exchanged, and Eshwaran let the man know that there were other ways to continue the discussion, then went on home.

Information about the clash - in fact, the clash itself in a sense - spread through the valley on the local buses in the early days, before everything was closed down. In Ammapatti, there was a big meeting at the Thevar temple, for all the "non-Harijan Hindus" there, to discuss ways to ensure the keeping of the peace. During the meeting, people ran in and reported the argument between Eshwaran - who the higher castes loathe as a Paraiyar who is making it - and the visiting Chettiar; this was tantamount to a declaration that the temple discussion was already obsolete, as the clash had already come. People tried to maintain order, but a few people started to leave, including some of the notorious bullying thugs of the village. Soon everyone was around Eshwaran's house, where taunts were being hurled at him, and he had armed himself with an iron rod used to groom bunds in the field. A fight soon ensued, and Eshwaran tried to retreat into his house. He succeeded, but the thugs had arrived and set it on fire. It seems that this was somewhat the frenzy of the moment, but it also represented a congealed hatred of Eshwaran by all involved. The Paraiyar who had also gathered around realized that they were heavily outnumbered, that the unwanted clash had effectively begun, and fled the village to Uthamapalaiyam, about 6km away, where there was a police station. Eshwaran and two others were burned to death in

the fire. The thugs and hangers-on now realized that indeed "the clash" was fully on, and moved to the Paraiyar colony. The Chakkiliyar houses were left untouched. The Paraiyar had largely fled, and so their houses were looted, and it was said that the "non-Harijan Hindu" looters stole even food that was in the middle of being cooked.

When I was in Ammapatti 7 months afterwards, about 15 Paraiyar families still feared to return, and were staying in Uthamapalaiyam, including all the relatives of Eshwaran. Everybody expects compensation from the government, as is the norm in "atrocities against Harijans"; however, the event has been declared an un-related issue. It is true that one of the men who set fire to Eshwaran's house was the son of the Chettiar woman who was having an affair with Eshwaran. It is also true that Eshwaran's moderate success makes him the object of hatred, which I think was highly exacerbated by his caste. It is hard to maintain a strong position in the landed economy without being one of a group, often a kin-group, who together comprise a strong and co-operative presence; this Eshwaran did not have. The family has not lost their lands, but they are afraid to come and cultivate them. The villagers assure that they will not molest any such attempt.

When I left in September, 1990, tension was brewing strongly again in Thevaram, and some shots had been fired. The tension was centering on the Thevar's effort to have de-legitimated the Pallars' right to their Ambedkar statue, and their designs on installing another, bigger statue to Muthuramalinga Thevar. The Thevars seem to take great pride in this, and it is unambiguously an expression of their intent to dominate the life of the street - an activity for which they are respected and/or feared by all other communities. They certainly have a monopoly on the "valiance" ethos, which the Pallars are beginning to suggest is unwarranted. As Appaji Raja Kumar, of the ex-polegar lineage of Kombai, told me: "The Thevars' arrogant valiance cannot be contested, but the Pallars finally did. Now it is a battle for supremacy." In Thevaram, however, I was told that the Pallar and the Kallar *both* used to work in the *kaval* system, which was a sort of "protection racket" and wealth-guarding occupation. This suggests a close relation in the past, which was also the belief of the Pallar around Sattur, who felt they were practically kin.

How important is this statue? (One Gowder told me that he grew up thinking it was a statue of his grandfather.) In Ammapatti, it is in the middle of the main road of the village, through which the bus passes, and on which are the three tea shops. The Thevars take special delight in that it is placed on government *poromboke* land, and that nobody dares do anything about it. The Kallar *talaivar* (headman) told me, with great joy: "There are no other statues allowed in Ammapatti. What's more, the statue is on 22 *cents* of *poromboke* land. The government should get the proceeds from the chillies grown on it. But does the Government get any money? No, we, the caste, we get the money. We *saw* the land, we encroached on it, and now it's under our control." The Kallar community are now arranging to give as *danam* some land for the construction of a new building for the village panchayat building; it, too, is *poromboke* land.

Some of the Kallar also told me: "We move with Harijans equally, but Chettiars and Gowders, although economically strong, are guilty of countless wrongdoings." It is true that the latter two groups are the dominant landowners, and thus more likely to employ Harijan coolies in their patronage schemes; one Kallar bully told me that he would gladly hire even a Paraiyar to work in his arrack still, but they are all afraid. The same rhetoric of courage is used to defend the Kallars' willingnes to allow Harijans in the *sancta sanctorium* of the village temple: "That's the truth. We don't say anything. But they don't have the courage to come inside and pray." Only Thevars are valiant; others "are all soft." In a situation requiring valiance, "they will just be silent", whereas "We always straighten things out." Kallar recognize their caste-fellows, they told me, by their rough language, including that of their women. "If we have money, if we don't have money, we're still a Thevar. Money comes, money goes, but always we need people." The *talaivar* added: "Piramalai Kallar are like bullocks. If you treat it well, it will be tame. If not, it will gore you. That's us."

The Pallar are willing to contest this sort of attitude, which they seem largely to share. It is unclear "why" the Paraiyar do not seem to have this ethos; it may be because they do not feel demographically powerful enough in the region. The Chakkiliyar are in an even worse situation in this regard.