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The Country near the City: Social Space and Dominance in Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

The Country near the City: Social Space and Dominance in Tamil Nadu

Recent anthropological, geographical, and historical studies have exorcised the conceptualisation of space as an empty container. Yet the anthropology of space often limits itself to examining representations of space instead of comprehending the wider spectrum of relations and processes that produce social space itself. Within the field of South Asian ethnography, this has, combined with the rejection of the 'legacies' of village studies, cast a shadow over the village as an ontologically and epistemologically relevant category. In addition, scholarship of caste and gender only obliquely refers to the dialectic between the production of space and the reconstitution of social relations. This thesis redresses the problems emerging from these issues.

Combining fieldwork in Tamil Nadu's Madurai district with comparative research, the thesis explores the linkages between the production of social space and dominance. This research's broad ethnographic focus on a micro-region dominated by the Piramalai Kallar caste throws light on transformations of past agrarian territories and caste dominance. With its sharper focus on a village near Madurai city's administrative boundaries, and close to major national highways, the thesis also highlights the nature of new ruralities, which are shaped by transformations in transport infrastructures, widening markets of land, labour, and credit, global futures trading in agricultural commodities, developmental regimes, and the multi-scalar networks through which dominance and resistance are wrought. Grasping sites such as roads, irrigation tanks, land, and memorials as concrete abstractions, and attending to the turbulent and the normal – the event and the everyday – the thesis uncovers the co-constitutive characteristics of space and social relations, and the hybridity of social space in India. Simultaneously, it discloses the tension between

movement and stability, emphasising the relative permanence of social groups and the relative instability of objects and things that produce, and are produced by, this space.

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INTRODUCTION

‘So, why us?’ asked Arumugam, sitting on one of the plastic chairs that the local body officials of his south Indian village, Malaiur, had arranged for the occasion.¹ It was mid-January 2008, the beginning of the Tamil *Tai* month. The period of the Pongal celebrations, which mark major shifts in the region’s agrarian and ritual calendars. The occasion was the staging of a ‘typical’ rural Pongal in Malaiur for tourists and visitors.

In October 2007, I had moved to Tamil Nadu’s Madurai district (see Map 1) for my doctoral research. At the time, my idea was to explore the reconstitution of caste and gender relations through ethnographic and historical research. My specific interests were in patterns of dominance and social mobility, and in land, irrigation, and labour relations in a western Madurai micro-region. This micro-region is often termed, after the locally dominant Piramalai Kallar subcaste, as *Kaḷḷarnāṭu* (henceforth Kallarnatu).²

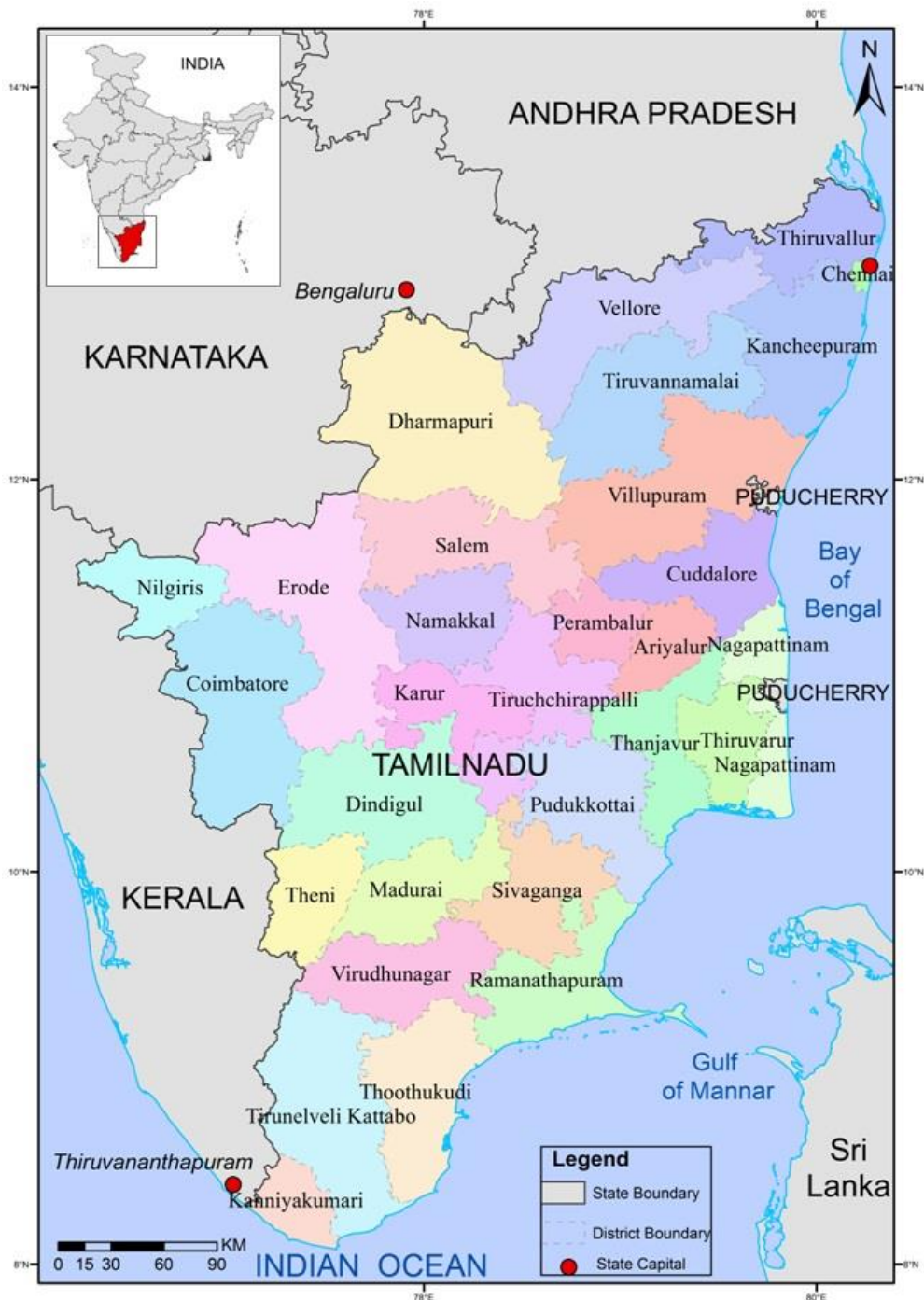
For centuries, many such micro-regions or *nāṭu* existed in the peninsular south. As agrarian territories, *nāṭu* were important socio-spatial categories. They partly framed production and reproduction relations. They were themselves transformed by shifting practices and ideologies related to kingship, farming, kinship, ethnicity, infrastructures, technologies, and trade.

These micro-regions were not homogenous. They differed in terms of demography and ethnic composition. Modes of resource allocation, extraction, and redistribution differed. Their links with kings and chieftains fluctuated. A once

¹ Names and, occasionally, biographical details of most individuals have been changed. The only place-names I have changed are of three Madurai villages. I refer to my primary field-site as Malaiur, and two of its neighbouring villages as Tenur, and Pechikudi.

² Tamil Nadu is home to many Kallar subcastes. Piramalai Kallar is one of the two main Kallar subcastes of Madurai district. Unless stated otherwise, Kallar is shorthand for Piramalai Kallar. I use English spellings for caste names (Kallar, not *Kaḷḷar*). I follow the regional usage of plurals as respectful address – ‘Kallar wo/man’ rather than ‘Kallan (m)/ Kallachi (f).’ I only use singulars while reporting conversations, and to convey any informality or disrespect their users intended.

prominent *nāṭu* could wane in significance. A *nāṭu* peripheral to one polity could become central to another.



Map 1 Tamil Nadu districts

Contemporary south India resonates with the pasts of these micro-regions. *Nāṭu* are no longer central elements of territoriality or generators of socio-spatial relations. Yet they announce their presence now and again, booming as temple festival disputes, and intimate caste-geographies. In modern cartographic representations of space, *nāṭu* lie buried under existing administrative markers. Yet they periodically resurface.

The problematic of space first appeared on my fieldwork horizon as a deceptively minor constellation. Its first star appeared alongside incantations of *nāṭu*, of Kallarnatu. For a territory unspecified in Madurai's modern maps, the incandescence with which Kallarnatu rose in my field encounters was remarkable.

I am not the first researcher to have sighted the *nāṭu*, to have noticed how such 'spectres of agrarian territories' (Ludden 2002) haunt life and space in contemporary south India. At the time, perhaps because of the themes and approaches dominating the anthropology of space, I only heard metaphors in those incantations of territory, treated space as a readable text, and experienced the affective geographies my interlocutors evoked whenever they mentioned Kallarnatu.

Later, I comprehended associations of real and representational, metaphor and matter, subjects and objects. The outcome is this thesis, an examination of social space and social relations, and an affirmation of their dialectics. I consider space neither as a container nor as an idiomatic expression of social relations, conceptualising it instead as a set of practices and representations that interact with, and is informed by, social relations.

Kallarnatu is more than subterranean territory in this thesis. The place where Arumugam interviewed me, Malaiur – one of Kallarnatu's many villages, or *ūr* – may be termed my primary field-site. Of the eleven months (October 2007–September 2008) that constituted my first round of fieldwork, nine months (January–September 2008) mainly consisted of research in – and *on* – Malaiur. In the first of my Madurai months, I was a day-job anthropologist, hoping to place my research and myself in one of Kallarnatu's villages. I had to contend with three and a half months of 'entry trouble.' That period officially ended with my interview by Arumugam.

The Kallar comprised the majority of Malaiur's population and held most of its land. As a social group, it is more powerful – economically, socially, and politically – than Malaiur's other caste groups. I take recourse to standard anthropological approaches (e.g. Srinivas 1959, 1994) and term the Piramalai Kallar a dominant caste. I also consider caste and dominance as concepts needing re-examination. This thesis treats castes as social groups, but attends to the qualities, emergence, stability, and fractures of castes *as* groups. It emphasises the fluctuating materialisation of dominance and subordination by scrutinising castes groups from within and without. It shall thus respond to recent trends in the anthropology of caste – for instance, the call to 'focus on relations between castes that simultaneously comprehends the dynamics within a caste' (Natrajan 2005: 230), and the invitation to understand caste as 'attachment, performance, or "composition" rather than as a sui generis entity... [and as] both a mode of domination and a means to challenge that domination' (Mosse 2012: 96-7). The thesis also examines things, not so much as mute elements in space as active constituents in the production and transformation of spatial and social relations. How do I carry out these tasks?

In this introduction's first section, I use the pretext of introducing my field to engage with the theoretical and analytical frameworks I have found most adequate to my tasks. Here, I also briefly address the question 'what is a field-site?' that frames my first two chapters, where Madurai, Malaiur, and Kallarnatu re-appear through greater attention to socio-spatial dialectics. I 'locate' Malaiur in terms of different conceptualisations of space. This combined treatment of field description and thematic outline serves as a trailer to my manner of representing processes and dialectics.

I then introduce the thesis's key concepts and frameworks. Conceptual snapshots only capture a work as it leans on one intellectual frame here, and on another there. It is best if intellectual debts appear as stimulants rather than as formulaic applications, and emerge through chapter design, arguments, exposition, and details. This section is an initial admission to my main theoretical leanings; my chapters reveal a dispersed treatment of theory. Here, I also scan over my methods of inquiry in connection with what I inquire into. Finally, I outline the plan of my

chapters, summarise the themes I address, and explain why I group the chapters in three parts.

Repositioning the Field

As location, Malaiur seemed to fit with my research interests. Yet my interest in the village puzzled many of my Madurai Kallar acquaintances. Thinking Malaiur to be incompatible with my life-cycle status, some advised that as a woman researcher who was single (such as I was reputed to be), I avoid notorious villages (such as Malaiur was reputed to be). Some also cited Malaiur's position within Kallarnatu as a reason for their scepticism.

Heterogeneity was characteristic across *nāṭu* and within *nāṭu*. Within each *nāṭu*, settlements had varying degrees of political, social, and territorial importance. They occupied different positions in the *nāṭu*'s constitutive networks of temples, trade routes, ties of patronage, tributary systems, and irrigation. Ecological differences – land fertility, soil type, its suitability to different kinds of crops and animals, and hydrology – played a role in these variations. Human competencies to develop and utilise new technologies, and to forge and sustain social and political networks were equally decisive. There was, thus, considerable difference in the ability of constituent settlements to become, or come closer to, *nāṭu* centres.

These positions and competencies were not static. Social groups had varying success in their ability to garner and redistribute resources such as agrarian produce, land, labour and water, gifts and patronage, and honour and other status indicators. Whenever possible, chieftains, families, lineages, and individuals contested their marginality. They sought greater centrality with respect to the *nāṭu* as well as the regional powers that knit different *nāṭu* into the fabric of segmentary polities. Kallarnatu was no different.

Disputes over centrality in Kallarnatu continued long after colonial rule transformed 'honour' into 'a particular form of "public" commodity' (Dirks 1987: 360). My fieldwork revealed long-standing, bitter disputes between Kallarnatu's eight internal *nāṭu*, its many *ūr* or villages, and between Kallar lineages. Criticisms over my interest in Malaiur echo these disputes. The Kallar individuals who had

emphasised Malaiur's marginality to critique my field-site choice were from other Kallarnatu villages.

How was Malaiur marginal? In terms of metric distance, Malaiur was closer to Madurai's centre than many of my sceptics' native villages. Clearly, physical distance from the city is an insufficient measure of village marginality. Malaiur's marginality arose when my critics located and repositioned it vis-à-vis Kallarnatu's historical geography. They were perplexed that I chose Malaiur rather than one of Kallarnatu's older power-centres.

This calls for locating Malaiur in a matrix of social space. By positioning my field-site in social space, I shall also demonstrate the dialectics of space and social relations. Rather than treating space as external medium and place as empty location, I display the connections between field-site and world.

Imagined as mere setting, 'the field' was yet to attract the reflexivity that anthropology's 'whats' and 'hows' systematically received in the last quarter of the twentieth-century (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 2). The field-site's imperviousness to theoretical attention soon disappeared. One response was to destabilise older ideas of the field by highlighting the inherent instability of places. Criticism of anthropological practices that coupled places and people coincided with the grant of overwhelming causal power to globalization. Anthropologists substantiated their case for revisiting 'the field' by turning globalization into a key witness.

As witnesses go, the concept of globalization responded only to queries it was posed. Academic and popular literature on globalization emphasised accelerating flows of capital, commodities, people, and ideas – flows taken to characterise the modern world since, at the least, the late-twentieth-century. Globalization thus became synonymous with 'deterritorialization' (Appadurai 1996, Clifford 2003: 29). So pervasive and powerful was this view that reterritorialization processes – equally characteristic of the contemporary world – were only minimally scrutinised. Consequently, much of this scholarship failed to grasp reterritorialization as an effect (and cause) of the same phenomena, the global space-time which emerged through capitalism.

How may we remedy this? Firstly, by avoiding presentism. Utilizing the concept of globalization to destabilize the earlier anthropological practice of incarcerating particular social groups in particular territories begs the question – did human mobility only become an important phenomenon in the late-twentieth-century? Historians have answered with an emphatic no, asking that we instead attend to the ‘back-and-forth, varied combination of territorializing and deterritorializing tendencies’ (Cooper 2001: 191).

Secondly, by understanding these tendencies as simultaneous effects and causes of processes characterising a given moment. Summarising the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century moment in the production of space, historian Manu Goswami says,

The making of a global space-time was a dialectical, contradictory, and doubled process. It was generated by and expressive of the simultaneous “deterritorialization” (the acceleration of... “space-time compression”) and “reterritorialization” (the production of relatively fixed sociospatial organizations from material infrastructures to state forms that enable the accelerated temporal circulation of capital) of multiple socioeconomic fields and cultural imaginaries (2004: 39).

To swing the discussion back to Malaiur, I reposition my field through geographer David Harvey’s discussion (2005: 94-8) of three main frames of space – space as absolute, as relative, and as relational.

Most ethnographers begin their monographs with a mention of the place(s) where they carried out field research.³ The research site(s) is also located within wider and wider scales of territories. Such information is usually token; it still carries the sense of field as the ground from which the ethnographic account is to take off. This is schoolbook geography serving as pre-condition for anthropology. It is related to the dominant conception of space in the manner of maps and plans. The mode is something of this sort,

³ I have in mind the kinds of field-sites (villages, neighbourhoods) we conceptualise and represent as spatially bounded locales. But multi-sited ethnography, and the turning of scientific research laboratories, bureaucracies, aid organisations, professional communities, financial institutions, and virtual networks into field-sites, have entailed new strategies of representing and examining location, scale, and space.

Malaiur is a village in Madurai, about 15 kilometres westwards from one of the main public transport bus terminus at the city centre. Madurai is located in southern Tamil Nadu and is the state's second largest city. Tamil Nadu is a state in south India.

This describes Malaiur as unique location while positioning it in relation to other places. It involves two frameworks – space as absolute, and space as relative. It starts by furnishing Malaiur's location within the frame of absolute space, the 'primary space of individuation' (Harvey 2005: 94). I could (although I do not) throw in Malaiur's longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates, and anchor it in Newtonian and Cartesian notions of space as an empty container *in* which things exist. What are the uses of this framework? It specifies Malaiur as an absolute location in space. Such a description helps readers imagine the absolute geographic locations of most of the individuals, and phenomena, appearing in this thesis.⁴ Yet stopping at this framework is inadequate to my thesis.

This representation inadvertently suggests that these individuals, and phenomena, are simply located *in* Malaiur, and that the village exists independent of them. Yet the above note also describes Malaiur in relation to other points in space. Even this staccato geography shifts from representing place as discrete location to representing it terms of distance and directions from other places. It thus orients the site *vis-à-vis* other kinds of territorial units, and administrative and juridical categories.

An anthropology of socio-spatial processes requires that we supplant the space-as-absolute approach with other approaches. Let us think of Malaiur resident Dharmar, a Kallar man in his early-forties, as he prepares to leave, early morning, for work. For this routine task, Dharmar boards the bus going to Periyar bus terminus at Madurai city. The only distance I noted while describing my field-site is that between this bus-route's endpoints (Malaiur and Periyar terminus). This gives us one frame

⁴ James Clifford notes that '*fieldwork* is... a special kind of ethnography, a spatial practice of intensive, interactive research organized around the serious fiction of a "field". This site is not so much a discrete, single place as a set of institutionalized practices, a professional habitus' (2003: 18). This is true of all places. Although true for ethnographers and residents alike, there are somewhat different sets of institutionalised practices and habitus which make their places, and by means of which each set produces these places.

with which to understand Malaiur's relation to Madurai. My use of the present tense begs the question, has the village *always* been about 15 kilometres from the city?

The question is far from being puerile; its sheer presence indicates that physical distance is a socio-historical attribute. We have so far only switched between the space-as-absolute and space-as-relative frames. Yet Malaiur's distance from Madurai city already comes across as dynamic. Distance alters due to changes in transport infrastructure, public transport services, and privately owned motor vehicles. To emphasise this dynamicity is also to suggest that rural-urban relations are not absolute; they change over time.

In fact, my thesis title gestures towards Raymond Williams' *The Country and City* (1975). In this well-known book, Williams correlates English literary traditions of opposing the country to the city with social history. The region examined in this thesis has other problems and sources – poetic, historical, anthropological, administrative, and development and planning literatures. Here we have different trajectories to rural-urban relations, and other imaginaries juxtaposing city and village. What I must stress is that the country has been very close to the city for centuries, and that the two are more closely connected than we take them to be.

I could encapsulate this in the space-as-relational framework by acknowledging that the country and the city are co-constitutive. They do not only exist as points or territories relative to each other. What a city *is* already consists of the country. The country likewise consists of the city. I could well have chosen another thesis title – *The Country in the City; The City in the Country* – to convey relationality rather than mere proximity. A relational exposition would destabilise the imagination of Indian villages as self-sufficient and static units (Dewey 1972) – an imagination that became pervasive and potent through British colonial rule, administrative knowledges, and theories, and was carried through to post-independence sociological and governmental frames of knowing, planning, and doing.

The representation of distance in metric terms is itself linked to particular ways of seeing and colonising space. This representation is a social practice and a result of historical processes. However, representations and practices themselves

change. Transport networks and motor vehicles, for instance, not only change how (and with what speed) people and things move between country and city but also provide an infrastructure for linking the rural and urban.

Supposing we consider Kasi, another Malaiur resident who does not need to traverse the entire bus route? He disembarks the bus after 3 kilometres of travel on the Malaiur approach road. The stop is located on the intersection of this road and National Highway NH49. At the junction, the bus turns eastwards towards the city centre. Kasi, however, takes a bus travelling westwards, and gets off at a stop about 15 kilometres on the opposite direction, further down the highway into Kallarnatu.

The city might not immediately figure in Kasi's daily journeys between his workplace and his home. Yet it mediates Kasi's route, routine, and rhythm as he goes between home and his place of (contractual) work – a 'ration shop' or centre of the Public Distribution System that passes for India's food security measure. Let us now look at Kasi as he travels on another task. This one takes him towards the city centre. He takes the village bus to Periyar, and then takes another bus, which drops him off at the Madurai bench of the Madras High Court. These trips are related to a land dispute between him and some villagers of neighbouring Tenur.

Picturing all these tasks, the city comes through as a node connecting different places. We are yet to see the city as a place made by all these connections. Likewise, metric distance of village from city does not give us an idea of all the practices that produce space. Distance does not encapsulate all the routes followed, affirmed, or modified by daily practices. Nor does it say anything about other kinds of proximities and distances between Malaiur and Madurai city, other villages, or other cities.

The conception of space undergirding this representational practice (measurement of distance in metric units) does not simply exist in the minds of planners. It undergirds circulatory practices, the patterned flow of people and things across places, the movement of labour and commodities. That is, the conception enacts and relates to a set of practices. Distance influences the already constrained decisions individuals take on where to work, where to live, which cinema to watch a film in, where to buy brinjals, how to send brinjals to markets, where to invest in real

property, and which school to send their children to. We shall see circulatory infrastructures not only as material objects but also as elements in affective space.

For now, I need only state that a relational account would move beyond grasping Malaiur's existence relative to other places in space. It would reveal the networks, pathways, and social relations that constitute place and space, and confirm them as product, process, and internalisation of these relations. As another geographer, Doreen Massey, reminds us, space is not a thing that takes 'the form of some abstract dimension,' it is 'the *simultaneous coexistence* of social interrelations at all geographical scales, from the intimacy of the household to the wide space of transglobal connections' (1994: 168, emphasis added).

Massey intimates another aspect to repositioning the field, prompting us to conceptualise places as 'formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location' (ibid). Thus, Malaiur is the amalgam of social relations that lend it its singularity; it is both incorporator and generator of social relations that are wider than its own area (ibid: 168-9). This is another way of saying that villages, cities, nation-states, regions, and the global emerge and transform through social and spatial processes operationalised at multiple scales. Every site, and place, develops through its location in a series of historical spaces. Places come to be stretched, dispersed, and shrunk. Moreover, as was the case for a settlement abutting Malaiur, places are also settled, abandoned, and recolonised through combinations of processes and actors specific to each historical moment.

Malaiur is not just a container or backdrop. Malaiur consists of much more than its resident individuals, families, lineages, and castes, its panchayat office, bus stops, temples, homes, and fields, post office and telephones, television sets, newspapers, weeklies, school textbooks, loudspeakers, irrigation tanks, wells, roads, and statues. It consists of more than it contains. It also contains more than what it consists of.

Now for the question posed by my non-Malaiur Kallar interlocutors. I could restate it as follows – whatever Malaiur is, contains, and consists of, how do these characteristics motivate my study? And how is all this related to Arumugam's question, 'Why us?'

There were many reasons as to why Malaiur. Like other anthropologists, I chose my primary field-site in circumstances not of my own making, due to factors I was yet to comprehend let alone explain at the time. But the impact of all that scepticism was such that when Arumugam asked 'Why us?' I presumed he too was asking 'Why Malaiur?' Arumugam clarified. No, he wished to know why my interest in his caste. I provided a synoptic account of my research proposal. I made light of my interest in dominance and subordination and overpitched the apparently innocuous research aim of a revisit. I told Arumugam that I was revisiting the area studied by 'French researcher' Dumont.

Based on research in the late-1940s, Louis Dumont, a key figure in the history of South Asian ethnography had authored a monograph on the PIRAMALAI KALLAR. Some Kallar I met in Madurai had read parts of the English translation published years later (Dumont 1986). Anthropologist and monograph regularly featured in my conversations with school and college teachers, university students, political and caste association leaders, and administrators. Some of them thought Dumont had failed as an anthropologist of their caste.

Dumont did not figure only in my discussions with middle-class Kallar, those able to afford higher education and sustained English language training. There has been some talk of translating the monograph into Tamil, but nothing has come of it so far. Even Kallar men (and occasionally, women) who were not proficient in English knew of the book. Opinions regarding Dumont overflowed any simplified matrix of Kallar class differentiation. (In a sense, what English proficiency – to the extent required to read the monograph – signifies in contemporary India is social mobility). Men like Arumugam could not read the monograph, their formal education ending at secondary school (with Tamil as the medium of instruction), but had had discussions with others who *had* read it. Arumugam had an opinion on Dumont's ethnographic capabilities and on what the monograph's central 'failing' was.

Not that I knew Arumugam's opinion when I first met him in January 2008. I only knew that there was no escaping the spectre of Dumont in the field – not least because those who introduced me to Arumugam had pitched my research as though it aimed at producing a true account of the PIRAMALAI KALLAR. As my preterrain

references went through and I applied for the post of Malaiur's (temporary) resident anthropologist that morning, I was so sure of Dumont's imminent appearance that I mentioned him myself. I also held the misplaced idea that revisiting Dumont made for a safe research genealogy. This is what I told Arumugam – I was revisiting the region from which Dumont first drew up his doctrines for an anthropology of India.

I was prodded. What did I think of Dumont and his work? I resumed hesitantly. Another man intervened, only to be silenced. '*Iru,*' Arumugam told the second man, somewhat irritably. 'Wait.' Signalling that I ought to speak, Arumugam went on to speak instead. '[Dumont] did not do [research] properly. [He] just sat, kept sitting and writing about temples and clans, marriage and marriage rules.'

The ticking off was a reminder that anthropological revisits could be as controversial a genealogy as any other to parade. Arumugam proceeded to say that Dumont did not know a thing about PIRAMALAI KALLAR. His principal objection was that, despite its length and attention to detail, the monograph hardly referred to the *Criminal Tribes Act, 1911* and its impact on his caste.

In 1918, the government of Madras Presidency (a provincial unit of British colonial administration which encompassed large parts of peninsular south India), imposed this Act on the entire PIRAMALAI KALLAR caste. Its notification as a 'criminal tribe' emerged out of colonial modes of rule and representation conjoining over decades to stereotype PIRAMALAI KALLAR as a caste of thieves, predators, highway robbers, and extortionists. Arumugam's questions regarding Dumont echoed those posed by other KALLAR. How could Dumont not have written anything about this Act? Why did Dumont not mention the agitations for its repeal? Dumont was sure to have seen or heard of these agitations; does this not turn the misdemeanour of omission into a more serious crime?

'Now, what about researchers like you? Those who come after reading Dumont?' 'Will you correct those errors? Or repeat them?' 'Will there be a proper account of the PIRAMALAI KALLAR, our history, of the Act?' These were the questions posed to me.

Recent scholarship (e.g. A. Pandian 2009) relating to Arumugam's caste has focused on that legislation. Arumugam has also met researchers whose areas of interests overlap with some of Dumont's, even though the analytical frameworks they bring to the study of kinship, marriage, and marriage preferences are far removed from his.

This is additional to the local interest in the Criminal Tribes Act (henceforth CTA). The CTA is now the subject of many media reports, memorials, student papers, pamphlets, and books. Reporters interview Arumugam, seeking his statements for their write-ups on CTA-related commemoration. Individuals and associations have authored popular and academic writing (e.g. Jeyaraj and Maheswari 2003, Cuntaravantiyattēvaṅ 2011) and directed attention to the Act and its relation to Kallar history and identity through diverse media.

A few words, then, on how I respond to the exhortations to correct Dumont's 'failures.' Given the thesis's focus, I investigate the history, effects, and memories of this Act primarily in connection with contemporary intra- and inter-caste conflicts. I explore memorialisation practices and imaginaries enlisting the Act as evidence of territorial sovereignty and caste valour. I cannot help but wonder what Arumugam shall think about this work, geared as it is towards issues and themes that neither Arumugam nor I could have predicted in January 2008. So, what are these themes, and how do I approach them?

Product and Process: Theoretical Handles to Social Space and Social Relations

This section combines discussions of the thesis's main theoretical handles with reflections on my research trajectories and methods. This approach nods to the processual nature of anthropological (or all) knowledge. Reflecting on the writing techniques deployed throughout the thesis, I also show that these strategies mirror the dialectical and processual nature of space and social relations. That is, I utilise discussions on methods as heft to my thesis claims. Since methods are inseparable from contexts and texts, I think the approach well advised.

An Entry tale

To grasp the methods of research in conjunction with the subject of research is to attend to the networks of places, people, things, and infrastructures that produce that study. It is to consider the convergence of multiple spatialities and temporalities in each study. Of concern to such a task would be the space-time and rhythms of fieldwork, field, and academe, and the positions and temporalities through which the triad of researcher, researched, and research emerge.

In September 2008, I went to Tamil Nadu's capital, Chennai. Firstly, the brief visit aimed to build the bureaucratic scaffolding of research. I embarked on the somewhat complicated process of gaining library and archive access. Secondly, I aimed to meet scholars, activists, administrators, and others who could put me in touch with people in Madurai. Days later, this assemblage of papers and people, and documents and digital data cohered to produce a less sketchy preterrain.

As a child, I had often visited Madurai during vacations. However, any thoughts I harboured of familiarity were soon put to rest. My parents' villages were located in different reaches of Madurai district but neither was located in Kallarnatu. I also wished to avoid my kin during research and reorient myself to Madurai. My caste was negligibly present in Kallarnatu but villages where it was a dominant caste abutted this micro-region. Of course, castes have for long overflowed micro-regional orientations. It was this very overflow, this shared social and spatial history of castes and caste relations, and the dominance of my caste, that motivated me avoid my kin circle. Strangely, my fieldwork plan combined an awareness of my caste positionality with a brutal negligence of gender. The combination was to shape my research considerably.

When I shifted to Madurai in early-October 2007, I had to fall back on my kin circle. I moved into the home of an uncle and aunt, promising to relocate myself soon. The promises were sincere but rash. The retreating monsoons that overhung my arrival disappeared long before my relocation. My uncle and aunt lived in a newly established residential colony just outside the southern borders of Madurai municipality. Basing myself in their home, I tried remapping my (still hazy) preterrain onto the lived space of Madurai.

Madurai highlighted Tamil Nadu's reputation of being a well-connected region. Its streets buzzed with two-wheelers, shared auto-rickshaws, mini-buses, pushcarts, and lorries. The district had many public and private buses plying between villages, administrative headquarters or taluks, and city bus terminals; yet other buses connected Madurai to other districts and to neighbouring states.

I set off each morning, taking whatever permutation of vehicles the day's task demanded. I travelled to college canteens, university rooms, offices, homes, and temples across the city. My journeys soon began to include streets, fields, squares, temples, and government offices in some of Madurai's southwestern and western villages. Each evening, I traversed a complex infrastructure network – in vehicles moving on national and state highways, district and panchayat roads, and city streets – with a growing sense of disquiet. I feared that I could never move out of my uncle and aunt's home.

Entry trouble was all very well as trope-supplier; what was I to make of its broker-like disposition and lingering presence? My time as fieldworker was on a budget but entry turned usurer, overshooting what ethnographers most credit it for – providing the moment of initial, productive dislocation. I activated my preterrain. Days rolled by. I sought 'appropriate' location(s). Weeks piled up. Time, in all its dimensions, came out of joint. Schedules came unhinged as field proposal contended with field. Duration slid towards deficit when field research's 'real participants... the "locals" whose decision it really is as to what kind of access, participation, and experience' (Van Maanen 2011: 176) anthropologists gain began to overhaul my templates. Daily rhythms became exhausting, with travel to field-sites consuming as much of my day as research there did. Ultimately, all these dimensions of time played a role in my 'finding out where to go' (Dalsgaard and Nielsen 2013: 4).

All the while, I hoped and strove for the point when I could move to a Kallarnatu village and begin to understand something of dominance, social mobility, and the reconstitution of caste and gender relations in this micro-region. All the while, I discounted the experiences I gathered from this initial footloose anthropology. Only in retrospect could I understand those months of entry trouble as the gears that shifted my interests. That daily hypermobility – which had, for

ethnographic research, seemed constricting – led me to experience Kallarnatu, the relations between its villages, the relations between villages and city, and the relations between circulation and fixity, long before these territories and relations emerged as thesis matter. In a sense, this thesis extends that initial, experiential knowledge of the field as a real multiplicity of locations – each location coming to matter not as singular event in a spatial kaleidoscope but in relation to others. Those experiences were a tip-off on how to comprehend social space.

I also learnt that places were more than mere setting for research. Different places and kinds of locations appear in this thesis – fields and homes; houses doubling up as workshops; streets, tea-stalls, and ‘squares’ where village and city residents ‘passed time;’ temples; administrative offices; and buses, bus stops and auto-rickshaw stands. This thesis accords locations the status of subject matter, not theatre. In an inversion of Clifford Geertz’s famous declaration (1973: 22), Malaiur was not simply the village *in* which I studied; it is part of what I studied. This links with recent anthropological efforts (Mines and Yazgi 2010) to investigate “village matters,” to analyse territories instead of merely analysing *in* them. This effort is crucial to understanding space as produced and dynamic rather than static and given.

Productions and Relations

To investigate social space is to investigate the *production* of social space. I found my starting point in the work of Henri Lefebvre, whose signal contribution to the scholarship on space can be summarised in one pithy sentence – (social) space is (socially) produced (Lefebvre 1991). Yet nothing could be more difficult to grasp, for social space is not produced in the manner in which computers, buses, or pasta are produced. Space is no *a priori* condition for social relations. To comprehend space as a static tableau in which social groups act is faulty scholarship.

The Lefebvrian approach to space appears to be social constructionist. It is far from being one. To start with, Lefebvre favours the concept of production over that of construction, because the former ‘emphasised the integration of... spatial processes with more general processes of social production and reproduction’ (Ahuja 2009: 26). Space is produced; conversely, it makes its way into production and other social relations. Lefebvre (1991: 85) signals social space’s peculiar link to production

by identifying how it 'infiltrates, even invades, the concept of production, becoming part... of its content.'

Lefebvre also understood space as a social relation. This social relation is 'one which is inherent to property relationships (especially the ownership of the earth, of land) and also closely bound up with the forces of production (which impose a form on that earth or land)' (ibid). Nowhere is Lefebvre like the social scientists criticised recently by some scholars (e.g. Latour 2005: 1) for their adjectival approach to the social. Lefebvre does not think of *social* space as akin to *hardy* tables, *rainy* photographs, or *al dente* pasta. Nor does he oppose *social* space to *natural* space, *biological* space, *economic* space, or *poetic* space. He presages many of the themes picked up in the associative sociology and actor network theories that has found favour amongst scholars more recently.

There are important differences, however, with Lefebvre providing a keener attention to sequence and history, to the overlapping temporalities and spatialities in each moment and location, to everyday rhythms, and to the conflicts and contradictions that produce a space in motion. Lefebvre was just as interested in the emergence of perspectivism in art as he was in political, social, and economic relations of the time. He sought out the connections between the two. He was as interested in city plans and maps, and grids and routes as in architectural trends, and links between places and practices of work, residence, and leisure.

His approach conjoined all these practices and representations to analyse the urban form and its reach. He was just as interested in the local as he was in the global. This theoretical framework led to a series of illuminating insights on the analytical category of spatial scale. He favoured not 'flat ontology' but attention to intercalations of the global and the local. This choice stemmed from acknowledging the different capacities of human actors, institutions, things, and ideas to act on space, and of the modes by which space acts on people and things. He was just as interested in products and works as he was in process and relations. It would be rather unfortunate, were an anthropology of space to make clipped references to a scholar whose reach included so many elements in their interconnections.

For most of us, an acquaintance with Lefebvre's main treatise on social space (1991) is likely to have emerged through countless citations of the conceptual triad he introduces in that work. Some clarifications over Lefebvre's method to conceptual abstraction are of necessity. The triad's conceptual elements provide an analytical handle to social space. Lefebvre starts with a working definition of these elements but continues to hone and modify them throughout his investigation of space. Aspects of each element and their interconnections appear in one light here, and in quite another there. The triad first appears as follows.

Lefebvre sets out to theorise social space through the triad of 'representations of space' or conceived space, 'representational spaces' or lived space, and 'spatial practices' or perceived space (ibid: 33, 38-9). None of these – the spaces of planners and state institutions, the spaces of affect, emotion, and feeling, and the spaces of everyday practices, or the rhythms shaped by people's (and things') actions as these oscillate between work and leisure, and production, consumption, and reproduction – are independent of the others. My chapters differ in the attention they pay to each element. Some focus more on spatial imaginaries and affective spaces while others are more interested in plan documents and spatial practices. Yet they aim to evoke as well as make visible the interconnections between these elements.

The Looping of Methods and Field

What modes are adequate to the comprehension of space as both precondition and result of social relations, and as both product and process? The reach of such an investigation would depend on how it treats anthropological and historical methods of inquiry. For a while, I tried interspersing my stay in Madurai with visits to Chennai. These trips aimed at archival research in the Tamil Nadu State Archives. There, I exhibited an anthropologist's proclivity to turn the archives into field. And, as novice historian, I suffered from the penchant for surface readings. I imagined the archive as a monotonous retreat, a welcome contrast to the unpredictable ethnographic field. The fantasy did not last. Paper and ink were just as exciting and volatile as people are—even though I approached these like a reader of detective fiction rather

than the detective herself, obtaining clues twice removed, plodding through files referenced in existing scholarship.

Outside of my own inadequacies, two rhythms framed my jumps between Madurai and Chennai, between ethnographic and historical fields. I shared the first with all researchers. This was the rhythm imposed by institutional rules and timelines. Research's time has its own temporalities, with its schedules and duration running on budgets. This rhythm conjoins with all the other rhythms producing field, fieldwork, and biographical time. What with the prolonged untranslatability of my move to Madurai into my move to a Kallarnatu village, my time to research was so scarce as to disallow the prolonged embeddedness necessary for productive archival research.

The second rhythm was also from without but connected to bureaucratic and political fields that had little to do with the institutionalised rhythms of doctoral research. My requests to access archival documents did not always come to fruition; staff could not locate all the files I requisitioned. The central government had recently constituted a National Commission for De-Notified, Nomadic, and Semi-Nomadic Tribes.⁵ The commission's task was to make policy recommendations on improving these communities' access to education, health, and livelihood opportunities. My field duration tallied with the final stages of the commission's report preparation.

Did the rhythms of this political field converge with my research time and result in my limited access to archival material? Other researchers in Madurai thought so, guessing that the commission had requisitioned some of the documents I wanted to consult. To take that possibility seriously was to hear echoes of my field – the many meetings and CTA-related commemorations, Kallar caste associations' petitions to increase affirmative actions for DNTs – ricocheted into the archive.

These two rhythms conjoined to set limits to my archival research. The upshot is an inadequacy to my approaching space and caste relations as product or process via historical research. This is not to say that my archival research has had no impact

⁵ De-notified Tribes or DNTs refers to communities earlier notified as 'criminal tribes' under the Criminal Tribes Act, and subsequently 'de-notified' after the Act was repealed.

on this thesis. I also conducted research in the local archives at Madurai and, briefly, in the Jesuit mission archives at Kodaikanal district, Tamil Nadu. Archival research was not so negligible that I could ignore it completely. It was just too piece-meal to arrive at a sequential history of the region.

I confronted a difficult choice in this regard. Ought I to make do with what I did access, perhaps dressing up my efforts as a valorisation of the fragment? Or, given sequential history's importance to understanding processes, ignore my patchy archival research? The choice is a question of historical methods. Declarations about understanding space and social relations as product and process need backing by adequate evidence and commensurate methods.

The nature of my historical research prevented me from achieving this. At any rate, I needed to signal the impact of archival research on this thesis. By allowing certain archival documents to appear in this thesis, I struck upon one solution to my predicament. These were the documents already circulating in the field, and through their circulation actively remaking the field. To ignore this double movement between field and archive proved impossible. Local newspaper articles, pamphlets, political speeches, conversations, and memorial structures pulled the archive back into the field, and into the collective memory through which contemporary Kallar identity is forged. My strategic use of archival documents may not give an adequate sense of space as process but it provides a sense of the social life of archival documents. It reveals the different rhythms or space-times producing constellations of locations and relations – the traffic between documents and monuments, the associations of objects and subjects, and the conjoining of representations and material practices.

Similar associations between archive and field, documents and context, and people and paper were visible in all the places and practices that have gone into this research. Staff and other researchers at archives shared their insights on my research themes. Here are some instances. Selvam, a staff at Kodaikanal's Jesuit missionary archives threw light on a well-known event of the time. A Dalit from Uthapuram, Selvam reflected on the years of conflict between members of the Dalit Pallar caste and the dominant Pillaimar caste of this Madurai village. He went through the history

of the much-publicised ‘wall of untouchability,’ built nearly twenty years earlier, and recently electrified, to segregate Dalits, and the temple-related disputes which had resulted in that wall.⁶ Weeks before we met, a portion of the wall had been demolished. As Uthapuram’s Pillaimar residents temporarily abandoned their homes to stay at a temple as a ‘protest’ against the demolition, ensuing tensions also received media attention.

Selvam re-positioned these developments. He linked the developments to a new road that would affect a local temple. By arguing that Pillaimar caste action was just as connected to this road construction and its effects on this temple as it was to conflicts between social groups, he offered an associative sociology or anthropology. At Kodaikanal, my access to the mission archives was limited – texts were being digitised, and I was there only for a week. Yet the short stay influenced me, if only because Selvam’s modes of narrating conflict provided cues on how and where to base my own associative anthropology. For instance, in part II, my examination of roads and highways connect these concrete sites to human efforts as well as other objects and sites such as irrigation tanks. I may not delve into instances when new transport networks have led to new conflicts and to new practices and architectural styles for India’s ‘roadside temples,’ but part II offers an approach useful to reassemble types of sites, to represent associations that already exist between temples and roads.

This thesis also draws from government and other institutions’ reports to pursue the connections between space and social relations. Some of these reports are available online, via new communication networks and virtual infrastructures that depend on and refashion existing socio-spatial processes. I also tracked many reports through physical visits to government offices and record rooms. My lengthy waiting periods turned these offices and rooms into field-sites. Conversations and observations in these offices also served as brief portals to interconnections of space, caste, class, and gender. Let me provide some vignettes of those waiting rooms, where my thesis aims were, unbeknownst to me, undergoing transformation.

⁶ ‘Electrified wall divides people on caste lines,’ *The Hindu* 17.04.2008; Viswanathan 2008.

Some visitors removed their footwear before entering the offices of upper-level bureaucrats, according *mariyātai* or respect to district collectors (and other officials). The practice appears jarring in collectorates and modern institutional settings but it throws light on regional social relations. Individuals routinely remove footwear before they enter temples, according *mariyātai* to deities and preserving the sanctity of sacral spaces. The multiplicity of this practice across sites highlights sacrality's link to power and social space's hybridity – underlying themes to this thesis.

Others visiting the Madurai Collectorate appended photographs of Ambedkar or local 'caste icons,' or the visiting cards of local politicians and activists to their paperwork. These Dalit petitioners cued that the most local of conflicts could potentially turn into state- or national issues. Their scale-jumping acts revealed dimensions of spatiality that this thesis addresses.

As I waited to access Malaiur's land records, I occasionally witnessed administrative staff dissuading people from selling or buying land. The moment these discouraged individuals left, staff would telephone and inform local big-men or land brokers about the 'party' that had just left, and the plot in question. Overhearing one end of these conversations, I realised that officials and brokers guessed how amenable those individuals would be to suggestions (from these officials) on whom to sell/ buy from, and at what price.

My time at the Madurai district land records office again highlighted the routineness of such practices. There, one conscientious official, who taught me how to read land records, spoke of 'missing land.' He noted the frequency with which 'government land' or wasteland could exist on paper while disappearing from the ground once any scheme requiring land was announced. By investigating road infrastructure, part II pursues the links between government policies, land acquisition, and the flights of land in speculative markets.

All this is to say that my efforts to erect the scaffolding of this thesis's many methods was forever bringing me back to the themes of this research. I could reaffirm what I have noted about archival research about all the methods I have deployed. Put another way, I have asked whether the limits and conditions of each

research practice reveals something of the field itself. Elaborating on these conjunctions shows that the field is what the fieldworker *does* and makes of it.

Geographies of Caste and Gender

To being with the statement, capital has played an important role in the reconstitution of caste, class, and gender relations, is to follow up with concrete lines of inquiry. How do accelerating turnover time, space-time compression, and time and space mediate these relations? How do different dimensions of temporality – ‘rhythms, durations, episodes, and temporal ruptures’ (Dalsgaard and Nielsen 2013: 3) – and different dimensions of spatiality – territoriality, location, place, distance, scales and networks (Brenner 2001: 597) – produce contemporary geographies of caste and gender?

I have already alluded to my entry troubles. In itself, the experience is unsurprising. Regarding his fieldwork in a Moroccan village, anthropologist Paul Rabinow submitted that ‘there really was no reason to allow [him] into the village’ (1977: 78). Anthropological knowledge necessarily comes to play in a turf of objections, suspicions, expectations, and rules supplied by the individuals, groups, and institutions involved.

If it is business as usual, does entry trouble require a mention, let alone honour a discussion? Can the ‘conditions of fieldwork’ be articulated as ‘part of what is to be accounted for in fieldwork’ rather than as ‘impediment to the task of doing fieldwork’ (Pratt 1986: 41). To further instantiate this an approach, I now return to the start of my field research, when social space had not yet become the lodestar in my explorations. In that period, my interests in the reconstitution of caste and gender relations were hitched onto a research proposal that had marked-down considerations of my own gender. My disregard of the co-constitution of my gender, age, and life-cycle status and my research is inexcusable. I am aware of this disclosure’s absurdity.

Until I began to live in Madurai, I was primarily thinking of the ethical, political, and social dilemmas of anthropologists researching communities they are not part of. In all the Kallarnatu villages I visited during those initial months, I faced

little hostility over my 'outsider' status – outsider, that is, vis-à-vis this micro-region's main caste groups. Most people I met appeared welcoming of, or indifferent to, my presence and research. I am attentive to the provisional nature of my reception. Given another caste position, I would have met with a different set of fieldwork conditions. I earlier provided one explanation for the responses to my project, namely the dominant position of my own caste.

It is just as likely that the absence of direct confrontation over my (caste) outsider status elucidates the operations of caste relations at micro-regional and local-levels. The combine of my caste's dominant position and its absence from Kallarnatu probably underwrote my research experience. This probably rendered my position as one of second-order, rather than immediate, relevance to caste as *jati* (Tamil *cāti*) as strictly local social relations.

Subsequent ethnographic investigations sometimes brought to bear the 'unimportance of interactional rank in... everyday life' (Mosse 2012: 127). This too is a strange admission, coming as it does from Dumont's fieldwork region yet belying his tenet that caste is best encapsulated in the South Asian civilizational obsession with purity and pollution, and with ritual hierarchies.

Here is a case in point. Months after our first meeting, I joined Arumugam's family for a meal of mutton curry and rice. Arumugam's son, Ajith, posed a question that stirred the Sunday post-lunch stupor. Posed to no one in particular – Ajith had wanted to know whether Gounder [another Tamil caste] were above or below Kallar – we were all invited to respond. The first response flowed from an equally young male cousin. Ticked by Ajith's attempt to rank Gounder and Kallar in relation to each other, the second teenager simply replied – 'Aey, they live in an altogether different place.'

The cousin saw the importance of geographical proximity, location, and territorial organisation to caste rankings. Ajith's mother, Jyothi, provided a radically different response. With her hands, she deftly assembled a stepladder in the air, and said 'look here.' She then matched her gestures with the terse statement that Kallar 'are one *step*, just so, above Chakkiliyar.' Jyothi placed her own caste in relation to Chakkiliyar (also known as Arundhatiyar), one of Malaiur's Dalit or ex-untouchable

castes. Jyothi recounted a common tally of caste rankings in ritual terms. This meter of hierarchy fails to read everyday relations of Kallar dominance and Chakkiliyar subordination, which only partially derive from idioms of purity and pollution.

Later that day, other cousins teased Ajith. 'Why did you want to know?' 'Are you romancing some Gounder girl?' 'Who above? Who below? Are you going to marry that girl?' Ajith protested. 'Simply asked.' 'Nothing of the sort.' 'Need there be a reason behind each question?' This cackling conclave tutored itself in caste and kinship, possibilities and prohibitions. Synthesising street and village compositions with caste geographies of schools, private coaching classes, and public transport, these adolescents rehearsed distinction and difference, and teased their way through realms of marriages, kinship, endogamy, and other co-ingredients of caste relations.

What may we take away from such twinning of fieldwork conditions and research interests? One, caste as local rank order does not exhaust relations of caste domination and subordination. One does not encompass the other. Land and labour relations, different capacities for mobility and livelihood, different strategies of networking and performing caste (Mosse 2012), are not readily translatable into rank orders. That the importance of ranking is also subject to change was evident each time I 'returned' to Malaiur.

I returned to Madurai for shorter periods of research – a few weeks in December 2008–January 2009, in April–May 2010, and in January 2015. I understand that return visits are not the anthropologist's equivalent of RSS feeds. The purpose of these brief visits were many – to seek clarifications over something that had interested me when I first lived there, to re-orient myself with the field after the many intervening months full of deskwork, and to refresh the relationships I had forged during my first fieldwork period. What the visits most reaffirmed was temporality, the processual nature of what constitutes places, people, social groups, objects, and associations of all these. Since ethnographers never return to the same field, my visits inevitably propelled additional interests, events, and themes. Each visit, especially the last, revealed that caste relations are not static and that local rank

orders could become more important where they were less so (or less visible where they were more so).

Two, highly localised rank orders may be superseded by other nodes and networks through which caste emerges as a social group (in the associative sense). The well-known distinction between caste as *jati* and caste as *varna* (the four, or five, categories under which castes are classified), and accounts of the intermingling of *jati* and *varna* indicate this. Three, although South Asian ethnography has often engaged with caste as though it were the primary axis of identity, power, and belonging, caste is (and was) only one of many interlocking – even contending – measures of power, status, distinction, and resource control and redistribution.

There is enough historical scholarship (e.g. Ludden 1999, 2003; Stein 1977, 1980) to remedy any tracing of regions and social groups as just so many images of premodern immobility and intransience. My research – its conditions and themes, its process and product – examines these very aspects of socio-spatial dialectics. Perhaps the uneven importance of interactional caste ranking signals not so much the realisation of modernity's promised deliverance from caste ascriptions as older regional variations to caste domination and subordination.

Four, mobility and group formations have for long characterised integrative frameworks of social relations and spatiality. Subcastes, castes, and supracastes, as well as lineage, kin, and marriage circles exhibit a mix of fixity and fluidity. This tension and repose partially emerges from their dialectical relation to space. The very elements that enable these associations prevent them from gaining permanence. Yet mobility has not dismantled caste and kinship's constitutive links with space.

Aspects of spatiality transform while social space continues to be dialectically tacked to social relations. And precisely due to this dialectic, contemporary social groups and relations take on and provision a set of human (or inter-subjective) agency to the 'different geographical properties' of different 'dimensions of capitalist spatiality' (Brenner 2001: 597). Individuals, social groups, relations, locations, and associations exhibit and generate the geographical properties of 'extension, embeddedness, situatedness, immobility, enclosure, dispersion, [and] connectivity' (ibid).

Let me return to the field and fieldwork conditions and go over the stream system that braids these spatial and social relations. Another anthropologist – say, someone from a northern Indian Dalit caste – is bound to encounter Madurai, Kallarnatu, and Malaiur as radically altered fields. Her emplacement in and by these fields are bound to be different. How may we understand different emplacements? What enables the emplacement of strangers in local caste registers? Is it mainly assisted by the operationalisation of caste as varna, a classificatory model that avowedly holds the entire subcontinent in a tight embrace, and is as archaic as is fixed? What about other modes through which caste relations operate at local- and supralocal-levels? Do they also fashion this sensibility?

Localised caste relations obtain macro purchase not just as geographical extension of varna knowledge but also as extension of caste practices. Some intra-caste solidarities falter while others gain ground. Political projects seek to merge or create new castes. Assimilations work in some contexts and fail in others. Inter-caste conflicts come to bear on intra-caste differentiations. The embeddedness of caste relations works through their extension. This is to affirm that caste relations – like all social identities, practices, and ideas – are witness to reconstitution and reterritorialization. With their reproduction and reconstitution by scale enlargement, extension, circulatory networks, and borders, caste groups also reorient their attachments and relations to other castes.

Delving in the conditions of my fieldwork and other modes of investigation has served as concretisations of my research focus. The very social and spatial relations I seek to illuminate have assembled and instantiated the research practices that have gone into this thesis.

Spatialities and Ruralities

Philosophers, geographers, anthropologists, and others have expended an extraordinary amount of theoretical labour to study social space, often conjugated these undertakings with the ‘urban question.’ My task is to provide just such a critical valence to the examination of contemporary ruralities, agrarian territories, and villages.

The regular association of the rural with time rather than space makes this task trickier. Linked chiefly to agrarian production, rural spaces are more readily associated with cyclical time and seasonal rhythms than with social space. This is not to suggest space's absence from rural ethnographies. I only emphasise the inadequacies of additive approaches to space and the 'reading' of space as though it replicates a static rural social order.

What about contemporary ruralities, dynamism, and conflict; how may we examine them? Firstly, we must avoid using the 'mutations' of villages as proof that each village is only another city (or suburb) in waiting. Secondly, we cannot allow the urbanisation question to subsume the examination of rural space. While we may be accustomed to thinking of the country and the city as distinct, even conflicting, types of human settlements, social space itself is changing at a planetary scale. Yet even as the urban form exceeds city-space, the transformation of land use is not the only 'spatial' aspect of new ruralities. Nor is occupational diversification from agriculture the only other reason why anthropologists of the rural ought to consider space.

Social space and social time have for long inflected agriculture. Seeds, fertilisers, cropping patterns, irrigation systems, electricity, circulatory infrastructures such as roads and highways, and markets of credit, labour, land, and agrarian produce – none of these things and relations are mute expressions of static space and society. They contribute to, and render dynamic, socio-spatial relations. They also generate new rhythms of cultivation. Infrastructures of irrigation, energy, transport, and storage; new seeds, pesticides, and fertilisers; and new markets – these have decreased cultivation's dependence on seasonal and diurnal rhythms. They reconfigure the associations of humans and non-humans in any village. Ruralities are fully enmeshed with the question of space.

Geographers, anthropologists, and philosophers of space and place have provided us with enough tools to go about our current task. While keeping in mind the urban-centric nature of space-scholarship, we also need to address the comparative imperative of social sciences. How amenable to our task is the Lefebvrian account of transitions in social space? Lefebvre argued that the transition

to capitalism in Europe accompanied and was enabled by the transition to an abstract space.

This abstract space slowly overlaid existing social space, that is, absolute space and historical space. These older social spaces characterised space as it was annexed by, organised by, and expressive of, social relations that bound groups through idioms and practices of kinship, blood, and sacrality. But abstract space is Newtonian space, the space of cadastral surveys of land, city planning, and the global rise of urbanisation.

Abstract space realised its height and reach in and through the steady annihilation of space through time. This 'space-time compression' enables capital to stay in motion, to congeal, and to shift between fixity and motion, and reduces its turnover time (Harvey 2006). It has also affected biographies, ideas, art forms, structures of feeling, work practices, weddings and marriages, and schooling and residence. Does the 'global' reach of this compression turn the entire world into the image of capital? What measure of the abstract, to utilise Lefebvre again, is a striving for homogeneity? What measures of it are potential and tendency? To what extent is it a goal?

To determine the validity of these processes for regions whose histories are shaped by colonialism, we must pose a different set of questions. An underlying motive of this thesis is to examine the processes that have produced, in one such region, what may be termed a hybrid space.

The hybridity of this space is commensurate with the continued presence of caste relations in India. Thus, it is fallacious – although common – to imagine caste relations as feudal remnants or vestiges of precolonial social orders. Social space's hybridity in this region stems from the interlocking of colonialism and capitalism. Here, characteristics of absolute space are present as much more than traces. This hybrid space not only sustains caste relations and local patterns of dominance but also internalises these to capitalism. Caste relations and patterns of dominance and subordination sustain capitalism and are integral to its embedding in this region.

So, how do the following chapters forward my aims, and what of the representational techniques through which this thesis realises its intentions?

Plan of the Thesis

The challenges of grasping and presenting the space–society dialectic have mandated a specific logic of presentation. I meet these challenges by deploying different tactics. This thesis consists of six chapters, grouped into three parts. Most chapters focus on specific sites. To an extent, this conscious focus on sites disallows the thesis from slipping into a human-centric approach, and from relegating space to the background. Rather than using readily available frames – political economy, field-site, historical background, economy, kinship, and religion – I arrange the chapters as expositions of different kinds of sites. The attempt is to allow for a processual and relational account of space and social relations by treating these sites as concrete abstractions.

Conceptualising and examining each site as a concrete abstraction has the potential to unravel and re-present complexity, and query existing representational practices. Part I addresses these challenges through an exposition of particular places – villages, cities, micro-regions, and settlements – and their interlinkages. What exactly does comprehending a field or site as concrete abstraction entail? A village conceptualised in concrete rather than abstract terms is comprehended not only as what it contains but also as what it consists of. The method recognises that individuals, social groups, and objects co-produce the village as more than a locality. Individuals, families, lineage and caste groups, kinship and friendship circles, roads, government offices, fields, pathways, vehicles, water taps and tanks, bunds, electricity and its infrastructure, gas stoves and mud hearths, firewood and fodder, and animals, rocks, shrines, and hills are seen as partial producers, retainers, and channels of relations that exceed the village.

Spatial practices network territories, locales, and places. Structures of feeling, geographies of emotions, and spatial imaginaries also connect places, territories, and locales. Part I focuses on affective space and on imaginaries linking caste, village, territory, city, and self. It helps us to comprehend that every narration of the village pushes outwards and pulls inwards, and reveals the historical patterns and

determinants of the sign-vehicles in stories, songs, and memories. It is also groundwork for my analysis of affective space in later chapters.

Part II shifts the focus to roads. The road as a site first appears, in chapter 3, as an abstraction. It, however, 'attain[s] "real" existence' (Lefebvre 1991: 86) in chapter 4, as this site is queried through government documents, land relations, tanks, kinship, and property and credit markets, the road. A similar attention to 'networks and pathways...[and] bunches or clusters of relationships' (ibid) allows us to perceive the embeddedness of other sites – tanks, temples, commemorative structures – that frame this thesis.

I seek a logic of presentation that simulates the analytical logic. In part II, I examine roads and their association with land, water, property, caste, and kinship relations. These sites, entities, actors, and relations are the result of social and spatial processes operationalised at different scales. We shall also see that scalar operationalisation is anything but the superimposition of the global on the local. Roads and highway construction are not simply global impositions on the local. Local social groups and individuals may mobilise for or against road projects. Objects and the products of human labour bring another set of relations and 'individuated' characteristics to an event. In part II, I move across locations and places. This movement is determined not so much by ethnography's favoured 'participation observation' techniques as by spatial connections already present in legal documents, news reports, and secondary literature. Part II mirrors this network of places, documents, people, and ideas.

Part III takes up another set of 'things,' examining memorials as they come alive through human action, and as agents in their own right. Here, we see memorials not only as expressing social relations – caste dominance and subordination – but also as things acting back on the social.

Parts II and III also disclose the tension between movement and stability. Throughout the thesis, I emphasise the relative permanence of social groups and the relative instability of things that produce, and are produced by, social space. Since many voices emanate from and meet at any given place, anthropological accounts must move through a maze of scales and places, fields and factories, worksites,

homes, housing projects, colonies and other sites of dwelling, places of consumption, government offices, educational institutions, health centres, and transportation networks. Anthropology, in addition, must recall and trace the networks and constellations that congeal into visceral subjects and objects, and graspable manifestations of institutions. My representational logic mimics this analytical logic.

Since I aim to comprehend things, relations, people, social groups, and space in movement, my argument proceeds through an additional logic. The grouping of chapters – into three parts, each comprising two chapters – captures a specific dialectic. Each set of chapters highlights a tension or expounds a familiar opposition. The separation of representation from reality, the symbolic from the real, or a plan from its execution is negated as we proceed through a thicket of ethnographic investigation, policies and reports, secondary literature, and interpretations.

Take chapters in part III. Chapter 5 focuses on memorials as they become visible through and act via commemorations, while chapter 6 focuses on memorials as they become visible through and act via desecration. Part II is organised around the basic opposition of a policy and its implementation. Both chapters (3 and 4) concentrate on road building and infrastructure. Together, they address part II's aim, which is to understand what a road is. They do so by taking into account plans, policy decisions, conflicts, and implementation.

Part I works through an additional tension emerging from different expectations from anthropological knowledge. The academe and the discipline of anthropology makes one set of demands related to the knowing or representing of a field (chapter 1). Those who live in and produce the fieldworker's field 'know' this space through their bodies, and feel and experience it through spatial imaginaries (chapter 2).

PART I WHAT IS A FIELD-SITE?

Most ethnographies emerge from transformations of research intentions and research proposals, and continuous traffic between the desk and the field. Perfectly sensible research proposals fall apart in the field as they ‘lose their motivating force’ and are replaced by ‘the preoccupations of the people on the spot’ (Strathern 1999: 1-2). The traffic between anthropology’s desks and fields is not one-way. Its circuits leave anthropologists correlating emergent and original interests, and might leave them routing for representational modes that meet the demands of a diverse audience.

I have already summarised the shift in my research interests, using these reflections to examine person, position, field, temporalities, and spatialities. But how do the pre-field desk (of the research proposal), the field, and the post-field desk (of the ‘writing-up’ period) come together in the production of ethnographies? What do these processes reveal of space known corporeally, of knowledge produced by bodies oriented in space? What do they signal about actors and the acted upon?

Firstly, the pre-field always already constitutes the field. We arrive at the field not with a blank slate but as bearers of theoretical orientations and research goals, and as consumers and producers of academic resources. The pre-field desk is not excess luggage that we can put away during field research. We carry it to the field. Along with our experiences, habits, emotional predispositions, and rhythms, the pre-field desk drags itself through the ground of thoughts, choices, actions, and improvisations in the field. The desk’s actualisation is routine. It cohabits the field we conceptualise, experience, and seek to comprehend. Secondly, there are just as many moves in the opposite direction. Although field research is seldom so alchemical as to transform every theoretical field it draws from, the field’s effects and relations lead us to reinterpret the pre-field. These two moves reveal the pre-field and the field in a dialectical bind.

A third process runs through the production of ethnographies. Comprising the modes by which the 'desk collapses into the field,' it highlights the 'relational nature of anthropological knowledge' (Mosse 2006: 937). Such a collapse may be more marked in some projects than in others. One set of interlocutors may be more vocal and possess more resources than others (or the anthropologist herself). Some interlocutors have a more powerful presence than others do when they 'surround the anthropologist at her or his desk' (ibid).

'Writing-up' involves more than what the term suggests, for 'ethnographic writing creates [its] second field' (Strathern 1999: 2). Writing does not simply seat the desk and field in proximity. It reassembles them relationally. Since the network of relations comprising ethnography cuts across (Mosse 2006) and binds pre-field, field, and post-field, it is unsurprising that the product of ethnography runs through different sources and audiences. This is another way to indicate relationality of knowing and writing, description and analysis, and academic expectations and field expectations.

Chapters 1 and 2 signpost the knottiness of knowledge production, and unravel the threads tying what we comprehend and how we communicate that comprehension. They also address ethnography's diverse audiences. What is everyday experience for one is analytical matter for another. What is requisite material for one is all too obvious for another. Ethnographic knowledge proceeds by addressing these different concerns.

A few words on part I's matters of exposition. Chapter 1 provides a relational examination of different places and spatial categories. It discusses three Tamil spatial categories (*ūr*, *kirāmam*, and *nāṭu*), and unravels the relations between three different places and territories – the village of Malaiur, the city of Madurai, and the micro-region of Kallarnatu. Chapter 2's subject matter is the imaginaries of place and caste. It starts by examining how mobility, or circulatory practices, can lead to a paradoxical fixing and collapsing of people and places. Understanding regional practices, wherein 'geographical placement [becomes] the interrogatory means to identify a person's (caste) identity' (Mosse 2012: 99), makes way for an analysis of narratives of caste, place, self, and the past in Malaiur.

CHAPTER 1 VILLAGE, MICRO-REGION, CITY

I have already introduced the major theoretical tools utilised in this thesis. This chapter extends that discussion. I begin by reflecting on two spatial terms – *ūr* and *kirāmam* – with which Tamil speakers refer to village. The second section reveals connections between Malaiur village and Madurai city. It notes that new ruralities, networks of places, and territorial reorganisation complicate the traditional opposition of country and city. The third section elaborates on another Tamil spatial category, the *nāṭu*. It intersperses reflections on territoriality with references to Kallarnatu's history.

I finally provide an overview of Malaiur's land and labour relations, and its settlement and housing patterns. To describe a place and its social relations as though they were distinct from each other would be at cross-purposes to this thesis. To meet one of the thesis goals – demonstrating the dialectics between space and social relations – I avoid representing space or place and social relations as discrete concerns or realms while juggling demands of diverse readership and discipline-specific representational templates.

Ūr and Kirāmam: Two Tamil Concepts of Village

When Arumugam asked 'Why us?' I presumed he wanted to know why I was interested in his village, Malaiur. My misinterpretation likely stemmed from my interactions with non-Malaiur Kallar who had expressed scepticism over my field choice. My initial response to Arumugam was to clarify my interest in his village rather than in his caste.

The misinterpretation touches upon the contiguous associations between person, caste, and village in this region – indeed, in significant portions of South Asia. Anthropologists (e.g. Daniel 1984, Mines 2005) suggest that Tamils refer to the village in distinct ways when they speak of it as *ūr* and *kirāmam*. They also note the

significance of the ‘polysemic, multireferential’ *ūr* (Daniel 2010: 318) to Tamil notions of personhood, caste, and emplacement.

That January morning in 2008, my misinterpretation had more to do with my being a Tamil speaker than my familiarity with this literature. For often, the very first question Tamils ask each other involves the *ūr*. And since *ūr* is frequently conflated with other signs such as caste and person, the ‘us’ in Arumugam’s query could well have meant his village, his *ūr*, rather than his caste. To match up to the importance of village, the next chapter looks at narratives of caste and place, especially from and about Malaiur. For now, we can make do with a brief outline of *ūr* and *kirāmam*.

Dictionary meanings of *ūr* include village, town, city, and place. Ethnographic investigations however, differentiate between the ‘person-centric’ spatial category *ūr* and the village as administrative spatial category *kirāmam*. Here is how Valentine Daniel condenses the distinction:

[K]*irāmam* and *ūr* have different cultural meanings despite the fact that they can both refer to the same territorial unit, the village. *Kirāmams* are legally defined spatial units with boundary lines of an exact and clearly demarcated nature. The *ūr*, as a village, is a spatial unit with the focus on the centre of the village and with a vulnerable “frontier”...or a periphery through which foreign substances from beyond the village enter (1984: 77).¹

In a sense, *ūr*’s polysemic nature and territorial multi-referentiality (to village, city, even country) parallels geographical categories in other languages – *home* in English (Daniel 1984: 67) or *heimat* in German. *Kirāmam* has an imprint of governmentality. It evokes official maps, bounded places, administrative boundaries, land records, panchayat offices, rural policies and schemes, contracts and funds dispensation, and taxation. Daniel suggests that seeing the village as *ūr* helps us understand it, while seeing it as *kirāmam* only explains it (2010: 327-28). For him, *ūr* is an ontic category, while *kirāmam* is an epistemic one.

¹ An earlier, considerably different, account of *kirāmam*, *Ūr* and *ūr* is provided by Brenda Beck (1972) in her study of the Kongu region, contemporary Coimbatore and portions of some surrounding districts. Beck translates these terms as village, hamlet, and settlement. Unlike Daniel, she writes of both *kirāmam*, revenue village, and *Ūr*, hamlet, as spatial units characterised by annual ritual celebrations.

What would social space in rural Tamil Nadu look like, when approached through this interpretive path? The village as *ūr* would appear central in most festivals and ritual contexts and everyday life, whereas the village as *kirāmam* would seem important in administrative and juridical contexts. Daniel's insights help us comprehend diverse aspects of social space – the ontological and epistemological, the material and the symbolic, the mundane and the extraordinary. It is now standard practice for anthropological or geographical accounts of, or set in, the Tamil region to treat *ūr* and *kirāmam* as distinct notions of space. To limit ourselves to this framework, however, is to be oblivious to the routine traffic between village as *ūr* and village as *kirāmam*.

Firstly, this approach ignores instances where contemporary Tamil speakers discard the distinction. Were I motivated by faithfulness to existing conceptual distinctions rather than experiences and events, I would say that my own (admittedly bogus) arrival scene was set in Malaiur as it celebrated (or staged) Pongal as *kirāmam* rather than *ūr*. Actually, fidelity to my pre-desk affected my experience of the field. I failed to notice immediately that Malaiur speakers used both concepts while addressing visitors and tourists that day. More importantly, I did not realise that the concepts cannot be placed across an insurmountable chasm.

Secondly, we may fail to examine why Tamil speakers use these terms interchangeably. The governmental echo to *kirāmam* allows Tamils to use it instead of *ūr*. Such interchangeable usage is especially marked in contexts where speakers wish to avoid using *ūr*, as its polysemic characteristic inadvertently opens up certain associations they do not want to explicitly state. Wanting their listeners to infer these very associations, they use *kirāmam* instead. This was the case in political meetings (chapter 5) where public speakers used *kirāmam* instead of *ūr*, and terms such as *āḷka!* (people) and *camūkam* (society) instead of *cāti* (caste), and *iṇam* (ethnic category, caste).

Thirdly, when panchayat officials participate in and organise *ūr* or *nāṭu* temple festivals, they often do so as *kirāmam* representatives. Likewise, some *kirāmam* officials (representatives or descendants of hereditary office holders, who had once served as conduits between village and wider polities) are honoured during

key moments in these temple festivals. These phenomena highlight social space's hybridity.

Let me elaborate at the micro-regional scale. Dumont's monograph is not the only frame through which Piramalai Kallar and Kallarnatu are 'known' or represented in the academia, the media, and activist circles. In the mid-1990s, Pappapatti, Keeripatti, and Nattarmangalam – three villages of this micro-region – gained regional, national, and even international notoriety (Sumathi and Sudersan 2005).

In these Madurai villages, Kallar groups stalled elections to the posts of panchayat presidents for nearly ten years from 1996, when the state government notified that the posts would be reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC) candidates. (SC is an administrative category of ex-touchable castes, also known as Dalits). These notifications, and corresponding changes to state-level rules for local body elections, were in line with national constitutional amendments.² The ten-year period highlighted Kallar dominance in the form of economic boycotts, threats, and violence against Dalits. Kallar groups also threatened political parties, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and administrators who supported village Dalits or sought to broker peace. The effort is to reaffirm dominance by hedging in the spatial scales in which local Dalit castes could regroup, rescale, and represent their interests.³

Kallar representatives justified their objections to Dalit political representation (Sumathi and Sudersan 2005) through many kinds of arguments. One contention of *ūr makka!* – 'village people,' but specifically, Kallar villagers – was that as *kirāmam* representative, Dalit panchayat presidents could receive *mariyātai* (honour, respect, distinction) during *ūr* and *nāṭu* temple festivals.

One of the three villages, Nattarmangalam, had a Dalit president during 1996–2001, winner in a contest between three 'dummy' Dalit candidates fielded by

² In 1996, Tamil Nadu held the first ordinary elections to rural and urban local bodies in accordance with the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Indian Constitution and the new Panchayati Raj Institutions introduced through state-specific legislations and rules.

³ When elections for the reserved posts were finally held in 2006, peace and administrative (or political) success was celebrated. The achievement was a brokered one. Success was achieved *after* the district administration agreed to demands voiced by Kallar representatives, and held simultaneous elections for other panchayat offices, thereby allowing Kallar individuals to contest for the vice-president's post.

three Kallar factions of the *ūr*. It was only in the next term that Nattarmangalam joined Pappapatti and Keeripatti villages in stalling elections altogether. Why the initial difference in Nattarmangalam?

Some of the district administrators, Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M) activists, NGO workers, and Kallar individuals I met in Madurai provided one explanation. They correlated Nattarmangalam's initial 'acceptance' of participatory democracy to this *ūr*'s 'inferior' or ordinary status within Kallarnatu. Nattarmangalam is an *upakirāmam*, one of the two main types of territorial units within Kallarnatu. It is one of Kallarnatu's 24 *upakirāmam* or 'secondary-villages' (Dumont 1986: 164). *Upakirāmam* is a category of territorial unit normally considered inferior to Kallarnatu's other main category of territorial unit, also known as *nāṭu*. We shall return to these distinctions later; what is relevant here is the general view that Nattarmangalam (like Malaiur) was in a peripheral position within Kallarnatu. This was not the case with Pappapatti and Keeripatti villages. They are part of 'Pappapatti *nāṭu*,' one of Kallarnatu's eight *nāṭu*. Kallar representatives of these two *ūr* received *mariyātai* during festivals at *nāṭu* temples such as the Ochandamman temple, dedicated to Ochandamman, a deified female ancestor.

The patterns to power's dispersal within Kallarnatu and the continued importance of temples appear to have factored in the initially different approaches Kallar groups in these three villages took vis-à-vis the elections. Those who referred to Nattarmangalam's ordinary status also thought that Pappapatti and Keeripatti Kallar had been 'adamant' from the start precisely because their *ūr* were closer to old centres of power and sacrality.

That *ūr* and *nāṭu* are not outside of the functioning or even the definition of the *kirāmam* was apparent on a number of occasions. Consider one day in November 2007, when I met seventy-seven-year-old Paga Thevar in a public transport bus. I had boarded this bus at Usilampatti, an urban centre in Madurai district and an important place within contemporary Kallarnatu. Paga Thevar was returning to his *ūr*. I was on my way to a *kirāmam* that had recently gained disrepute. The *ūr* that Paga Thevar was going back to and the *kirāmam* that I was visiting were the same – Pappapatti village.

And the territory that was narrated and enacted during our subsequent conversation was Pappapatti as both *ūr* and *kirāmam*. At a tea-stall that Paga Thevar took me to, I was introduced, firstly, to the *ūr*. Paga Thevar, the tea-stall owner, and four other Kallar male villagers described Pappapatti *nāṭu*'s origin, its lineages and villages, and its main temples and festivals. They also delineated the *mariyātai* recipients during temple festivals. This led us to broach Pappapatti as *kirāmam*.

By this time, participatory democracy was 'successfully' introduced in these villages, after protracted negotiations between Kallar groups, district officials, and some political parties. Two of the residents stressed on this, adding that the *ūr* had accepted this just as it had accepted inter-caste couples 'living right here, living well, and jolly.' Paga Thevar continued to object, stating that the new Dalit president would portend doom for *ūr* and *nāṭu*. 'If we accept his leadership, what will happen? Will the [Ochandamman] temple gods not become angry? What will happen to the *ūr* if [a Dalit panchayat president] is given *mariyātai*?' Others said panchayat presidents are not honoured unless they also held hereditary offices or appeared as *ūr* representatives.

This discussion highlighted the possibility of an *ūr* representative doubling up as *kirāmam* representative. An allied phenomenon is the determination of panchayat presidents by *ūr makka!* deliberations rather than the *kirāmam* electorate's votes. As I later learnt, Malaiur's panchayat president was regularly nominated through *ūr* decision and declared as elected unopposed. In Malaiur, the president's post was rotated between representatives of *ūr* Kallar lineages, and Kallar residents projected this process as proof of democracy.

In Kallarnatu, there have also been successful or attempted auctions of panchayat president posts and, in at least two panchayats where the president's office was reserved for Dalits, of vice-president posts. Bidding for the posts occurred in Kallar dominated assemblies at the village square or temple. Auction was justified on the count that the money thus obtained would return to the village through

temple renovation. Moreover, temple renovation was termed as village development.⁴

Thus, the *ūr*, its temples, and *mariyātai* distinctions between families, individuals, lineages, and castes are co-constitutive of the *kirāmam*. This complicates not only the neat conceptual distinction between *ūr* and *kirāmam* but also the Lefebvrian thesis on the withering away of absolute space and its domination by abstract space. I have tried to retain the specific Tamil term used by my interlocutors when they refer to village. But delineating *ūr* and *kirāmam* as distinct concepts may belie a processual account of social space or, indeed, of social relations. Chapter 2 provides a processual account of legislations and government policies producing Malaiur as *ūr*, not just as *kirāmam*.

All this is not to dismiss but to qualify existing insights on these two concepts. Of course, I was unaware of the need for such qualifications when I met Arumugam in January 2008. I was also unaware of the extent to which *ūr* and *kirāmam* are interlinked to the city.

The Country, the City, and New Ruralities

When Arumugam posed that question to me, *ūr* Pongal celebrations were yet to commence. Now, *that* would have been a perfect backdrop for setting an arrival scene. I could have begun by describing Malaiur's caste groups as they went about observing Pongal, gone on to report the festival as it is celebrated at the level of each caste's lineages, and then provided an account of the rituals and any attendant contestations. A description of arriving at the village as *ūr*.

Except, I had been to Malaiur a week earlier to meet Arumugam, one of the most well-known gatekeepers of the *ūr* (as far as researchers, novelists, and journalists are concerned). I could not meet him. He and other villagers were on a pilgrimage to the famous Murugan temple in Palani. I went to the then panchayat president's house. Already, in my first attempt to interact with Malaiur residents, I unconsciously replicated the folding in of *ūr* and *kirāmam*.

⁴ 'Dalit woman panchayat president auctioned for 2.16 lakh in TN village,' *The Indian Express*, 19.11.2006; and 'Bid to auction panchayat post foiled, 6 held,' *The New Indian Express* 26.09.2011.

On the day that Arumugam inverted the standard ethnographic interviewer-interviewed roles, I thought I was going to see the village as *kirāmam*. That was when Madurai’s district administration and Malaiur’s local administrative body, its *kirāma panchayat*, had come together to frame the village for the gaze of tourists. Local papers had reported that Malaiur was to be the location at which visitors would be treated to a ‘typical village style’ Pongal.

It was for the second year in a row that Malaiur served as a venue for this tourists’ Pongal. The festival was organised under the banner of *Sangam*, a literary forum launched in Madurai the previous year. The forum aimed to promote, among other things, an ‘exposure’ to *sangam* compositions – the corpus of early Tamil literature, traced to academies patronised by regional Pantiya kings. Through its very name, *Sangam* echoed an idea of oldness, tradition, and culture. Indeed, in 2007, the five-day festival held under its banner was termed *Tamiḷar Paṇpāṭṭu Tiruviḷā*, Tamils’ cultural festival. The district administration had organised buses to Malaiur for visitors to witness and consume this event.

In 2008, the spectacle was re-enacted in Malaiur under the sign of tradition. This time, I too was party to its consumption. We reached Malaiur’s bus stand, in buses, bullock carts (rented, to provide tourists a ‘feel’ of rural India), and other vehicles. Before reaching the main village, we halted near the *ūr* temple. As is common practice in this region, it was known as the Karuppu temple, after Karuppu, a fierce, guardian deity. During the tourist Pongal, Malaiur’s Karuppu temple turned into an indicator of Tamil rurality.

This temple is at the foot of the ‘Jain Hill.’ Our stopover included a short climb to visit Jain rock-cuts and reliefs on this hill. Speeches and sights informed us tourists that we were visiting a very old settlement. An organiser greeted us with these words:

Good morning. I invite all of you, the foreign delegates, and all other local tourists. The Pongal festival is being celebrated in our district in great manner. Madurai is a very famous... one of the ancient cities in India. This city is called as the Athens of south India. Madurai, the name of the city itself explain... the land of paddy fields... It has the unbroken history of 2500 years... This place [Malaiur] is one of the very ancient Jain centres. The hill we are seeing is called as the Jain Hill. So, the hill itself explains the association of Jainism. Jainism is deep rooted

in south India, particularly the Madurai region, 300 B.C. itself. More than 15 centres in and around Madurai were Jain centres. This Malai... is a south Indian old monument. We are going to see the monument.

By 'south Indian old monument,' the speaker meant the sculptures and the hill itself. Yet the success of rural tourism typically rests on reframing villages as relics. Tourism turns markers of rurality into commodities. It also leads to the manufacturing of 'ancient' village traditions. Recall that the organisers had rented a bullock cart to lend authenticity to the event. They had also dressed the welcoming party of children in costumes of recognisable pan-Hindu deities. This was not so much a direct outcome of sanskritisation, the adoption of high-caste practices and symbols for upward mobility, as an effect of tourism – non-local visitors were unlikely to recognise local deities. (Also, local deities, being fiercer and given to possessing human beings, are not amenable to such laidback mimicry).

Innovations have emerged in ritual cooking itself. A highpoint of Pongal festivities is the cooking of 'pongal,' a dish prepared by boiling recently harvested rice until it foams and spills over. This spilling over signifies prosperity. The question is how to convey this to non-Tamils or in virtual media.

In summer 2010, my visit to Malaiur coincided with the visit of a Tamil tele-series' production unit. To depict a typical village scene, the crew roped in some Malaiur women as background characters and directed them to cook pongal. The women had to boil detergent powder, instead of rice, in water. This is standard cinematic technique, since the 'detergent-pongal' was foamier and 'looks better on camera.'

Rural tourism and the production of rurality effects conceal some kinds of rural-urban relations and co-constitution. Scholarship on rural India can also be selective in its focus. Until January 2008, I seldom visited Kallarnatu villages unaccompanied, instead travelling with individuals I had contacted via academics in distant places or my Madurai-based relatives. Accompanying me during my first Malaiur visit, some days prior to the tourists' Pongal, was a young Pirmalai Kallar man, whose close kin lived in Malaiur. I had contacted this Madurai-based scholar through a US-based anthropologist.

A vast network – of roads, buses, auto rickshaws, telephones and e-mails – came through to enable my visit to Malaiur. The country and the city may have once served as an important spatial dichotomy. This is no longer the case. In fact, the rise of concepts such as suburbanisation, periurbanisation, and new ruralities signals the invalidity of this distinction.

The Pongal event in Malaiur was as much about the ‘newness of old things’ (Bate 2011: xv) as it was about oldness and antiquity. Indeed, the term *panpāṭu*, with which organisers marked it as a cultural event, is a neologism (A. Pandian 2007). By 2006, Madurai’s district administration was in a frenzy to step up infrastructure conducive to tourism development. The district collector was asked to prepare a ‘tourism master plan.’ The Confederation of Indian Industries had already formed a committee to promote medical tourism here. Madurai had only recently beaten most of its competitor cities in south India, emerging as a favoured destination for medical tourists.⁵ Promoting rural tourism was part of this effort, and organising the event in Malaiur was a foray in that direction.⁶

This accorded with recent institutional efforts towards urban development in India’s smaller cities, referred to as tier-II and tier-III cities. Key to Madurai’s USP in tourism-related efforts was its temples. Its ‘focal point’ was the renowned Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple, which provides one kind of orientation to the city, its ‘unbroken history,’ and its villages. This temple, envisioned as Madurai’s centre by some of its kings and resident groups, has to compete with other centres of power. Yet many continue to consider it as Madurai’s centre.

For long, Madurai’s orientation was that of a ‘ceremonial city’ (Lewandowski 1977). Its built form, the axes to its orientation, and its plan illustrated how places, buildings, kings, deities, persons, bodies, and sacred space partook of and contributed to cosmologies, geographies, and categories of thought. This ‘Hindu holism’ echoes premodern holistic ontologies in other regions (Gurevich 1985).

Colonialism significantly altered Madurai’s built form (Viguiet 2011). In specific moments, administrators attacked Madurai’s nerve centres. However,

⁵ ‘Integrated plan for Madurai tourism,’ *The Hindu*, 14.08.2006.

⁶ ‘Rural tourism all set to get an impetus,’ *The Hindu*, 14.12.2007.

colonial rule was also accommodative of existing spatial and social relations. Contestations and collaborations characterised the interactions between local groups and administrators.⁷ These historical developments shaped the city I came to know during fieldwork.

Many of its residents bemoan that Madurai is nothing but a city of villages. Scholarship can also depict Madurai as a non-city. 'Despite its size,' writes one analyst, 'Madurai is more like a sprawling premodern town than a modern industrial city... best thought of as an urban centre that is halfway between a village and a metropolitan city' (Kohli 1990: 154). Even as textile mills, granite industries, new production chains, four-lane highways, bypass roads, and Special Economic Zones transform villages and rural-urban relations in the district, a good number of the people I met in Madurai during 2007–08, held that it is a city of villages.

As per the 2011 census, a little over 60 per cent of Madurai's population lived in territories classified as urban. Less than seven per cent of the district's total workers were cultivators, while 27.5 per cent were agricultural labourers. Statistics on agricultural labourers suggest remarkable gender differentiation – 42 per cent of Madurai's total female workers, but only 20 per cent of total male workers, were agricultural labourers. My ethnographic investigations revealed a similar feminisation of agrarian labour in Malaiur. This is linked to changes in cropping patterns, Malaiur's steady shift towards vegetable cultivation. Over 60 per cent of Madurai's working population engaged in neither agricultural activity nor household industry. These figures do little justice to Madurai's agriculture-driven growth patterns.

Views that posit Madurai as a hick town probably stem from expectations over what cities and villages ought to be like. Additionally, the actual extent of rural and urban spaces is debatable. The government seems to be in a rush to proclaim that India's villages are dead or dying. According to the 2011 census, India's urban population had grown marginally over the preceding decade. What *had* dramatically

⁷ Other colonies have experienced an accommodation-and-reconstruction combine – e.g., in the 1910s, key French administrators sought to re-engineer Morocco by birthing an urban form commensurate to a modern, dual hierarchy (Rabinow 1989: 285-8).

increased was the number of villages now grouped into and classified as ‘census towns,’ promoting analysts to read this as ‘census activism’ (Kundu 2011).

One explanation attributes the surge in census towns to transparency and modernisation of enumeration; the 2011 census thus revealed not extraordinary urbanisation but the more modest success of updating already urbanised villages to the category of census towns. In this view, reclassification was long due – but for village groups preferring to be administered (and administer themselves) as rural rather than urban citizens, urbanisation’s extent would have shown up in earlier censuses.

Yet there is enormous pressure to demonstrate rapid urbanisation – and not only because urbanisation signifies development. Reclassifying a village as part of a census town, while rendering its residents ineligible for government schemes specific to rural populations, is enabling in other realms. Reclassification equips administrations and the real estate sector with simplified templates for modifying land use. Malaiur is one of many villages now falling under the Madurai Composite Local Planning Authority. In 2014, nearby villages were added to those already under the Madurai Palkalai [University] Nagar New Town Development area. These reclassifications eased juridical and administrative procedures for realtors to gather and assemble land. When I returned to Malaiur in January 2015, the effect was visible in the form of new housing colonies.

In Malaiur’s vicinity, I counted at least one marriage hall, some small industries and showrooms catering to the construction sector, and many more fenced properties containing little but earth, weeds, and hope. This hope rests on a speculation bubble created by the recent upgradation of a national highway, NH7, passing along Malaiur. Property owners and dealers hoped the bubble would swell, and for ribbon development along NH7 to further boost land prices. As construction of the new university branch commenced after the 2014 notification, the bubble only grew bigger.

In 2008, only a tiny housing colony existed in Pechikudi, a neighbouring village. By 2015, there were many more houses. Substantial numbers of Malaiur families now live in Pechikudi, while other families have moved to already established

colonies nearby. They relocated to neighbourhoods near new roads bringing the city closer.

These colonies and townships were established through the efforts of housing societies, land developers, revenue officials and other administrators, and local politicians and big-men. Some landless families I met in Malaiur and neighbouring villages in 2015 stated that local big-men had lobbied for their villages' incorporation in the new or amended administrative areas. Thus, rapid urbanisation emerges from census activism as well as actions of the real estate sector, bureaucrats, and villagers. This reveals the real and the representational, and representations of space and spatial practices, converging in the transformation of Malaiur and its vicinity. Transformations are also visible in representational space. Urban aspirations are signalled by the Nagar (town) suffix to names of new colonies – Pasumpon Nagar, Maxworth Nagar, Malaiyan Nagar. These transformations draw from links between the locality's dominant social groups, administrators, and real estate developers. Malaiur villagers and Madurai-based property dealers act in tandem with seemingly fortuitous events such as the NH7 upgradation (part II).

Thus, Arumugam's *ūr* now correlates with a *kirāmam* rather different from the one I knew through fieldwork. Although *ūr*'s open-endedness avowedly contrasts with *kirāmam*'s stability (Daniel 1984), *kirāmam* boundaries, the population administered in its territory, and its relation to other administrative and juridical territories are liable to change.

As per the 2001 census, Malaiur's population was about 3000. According to the 2011 census, its population fell to about 2650. It was not as though in those ten years, many had migrated out of Malaiur, or that many had died. Residents had not stopped marrying either. Marriages added new individuals – mostly women, given patrilocal arrangements – to existing population. Villagers had not stopped having children. That is, these statistics represent neither mass migration nor tectonic shifts in decennial birth and death rates. Malaiur *kirāmam* now simply consisted of fewer families in its jurisdiction. As I mentioned earlier, some village residents had shifted to Pechikudi or nearby residential colonies. In the same decade, Pechikudi's population rose from just over one hundred to nearly one thousand.

Other kinds of rural-urban linkages need outlining. Unlike *ūr*, *kirāmam* only refers to rural territories; this probably correlates with the history of modern land tenure and revenue arrangements, and with colonial and postcolonial administrative differentiation between country and city. Yet space and social relations do not fully obey conceptual and administrative differentiation. This was obvious even in the modes by which state representatives conflated village history with a partial history of the *ūr* during the 2008 tourist Pongal.

The January 2008 event complicates distinctions between ceremonial and commercial, and rural and urban. It also complicates the oeuvre and product distinction, a point Lefebvre (1991) makes in connection to the space and history of Venice. Cities like Madurai (and Venice) are both oeuvre and product. Modern tourism depends on Madurai-as-oeuvre but hastens the city's annexation as product. Administrative pandering to the tourist impulse is part of the 'art of rent' (Harvey 2002). Unsurprisingly, many Malaiur residents took pride in the event, which they referred to as the government festival or government Pongal, *aracu viḷā* or *aracu poṅkal*.

The district administration and the panchayat, epitomisers of the *kirāmam*, had been well behaved towards the *ūr*, having gone as far as to organise the event one day before the 'real' Pongal began. Tourists were thought of as possible impediments to the *ūr* Pongal. There was a fear of tourism complicating the ritual reproduction of village as *ūr*. Moreover, since tourists are likely to be repelled by the conflicts that routinely attend *ūr* festivals, the *ūr* Pongal was seen as possible impediment to rural tourism. (Even during the staged pongal, organisers repeatedly reminded us that the *ūr* was hosting *foreigners*, and pleaded that we refrain from fighting, occupying the best seats, and so on).

Why had the district administration chosen Malaiur? The then Collector of Madurai had stated that Malaiur was chosen as venue because of its history. The events he summarised as history – counting that Malaiur was the first village to have a girls' school and the first to get a metalled road, nearly hundred years ago – are precisely those Kallar villagers recount to prove that Malaiur was first among equals, home to Kallarnatu's bravest Kallar. They turned being first in a sequence – their

village was the first to see schools, roads, and so on – into a matter of pride and distinction. Being home to, or experiencing, something first, *mutal*, became a measure of firstness, *mutalmal*, a concept detailed later.

The school, the road, and this version of history only constitute a partial history of Malaiur. All references by the event organisers were to twentieth-century history as perceived and represented by Malaiur's dominant caste. It was also partial in the sense that twentieth-century history was collapsed to a single event.

This was the notification of the Piramalai Kallar, under the CTA 1911, as a 'criminal tribe.' This partial history mirrors contemporary Kallar memory. The most prevalent theme in Kallar collective memory, in narratives I heard in Malaiur and elsewhere in Madurai, related to this Act's implementation. It was a brutal act, normalizing a state of exception, and severely restricted the mobility of all adult male Kallar.

The CTA was repealed soon after independence. In the Tamil region, associations and political leaders from the social group now known as the Mukkulathor played an important role in agitating against the CTA. Mukkulathor is a modern supracaste, comprising of the Kallar, Maravar, and Agamudaiyar castes of southern Tamil Nadu. Mukkulathor castes now commemorate these efforts in a number of ways – by organising public meetings and the occasional university seminars, and erecting memorials of key figures in the anti-CTA agitations.

Commemorative structures such as the statues of Muthuramalinga Thevar, an important Mukkulathor icon, have been key to contestations in southern Tamil Nadu, particularly between Dalit and Mukkulathor groups. A statue installed to commemorate Kallar subalternity vis-à-vis the late colonial state also expresses Kallar dominance vis-à-vis other social groups. Subordinate groups, in turn, act on the same statue to challenge Mukkulathor violence and dominance.

By January 2015, a bronze statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar had emerged on the bund of Malaiur's largest tank, although it had a shadowy presence as far as the local administration was concerned. Adjacent to it is a memorial commemorating Malaiur Kallar's notification under CTA. Exactly how commemorative events and

monuments *alter* space rather than simply *express* social relations are taken up in part III. Its chapters elaborate on the constant circulation between administrative space and spaces of affect, between representations of space, representational spaces, and spatial practices. So far, I have illustrated this traffic by confining myself to village and city. It is now time to turn to *nāṭu*, a Tamil spatial concept I have already been using, and to provide a brief history of Kallarnatu.

Nāṭu and Kallarnatu

Scholars such as Mines and Yazgi (2010) argue that villages have become ‘lost objects’ in South Asian ethnography, especially as it is practiced in European and U.S. academia. If villages are in need of urgent resuscitation as frame, place, concept, and ‘matter,’ other territories could likewise do with a rematerialisation. In the mid-twentieth century, Dumont devoted as much (if not more) attention to another kind of territory, as he did to the village. I refer to Kallarnatu, the *nāṭu* where Piramalai Kallar have lived at least for four centuries. Regional histories of the peninsular south (contemporary south India) abound with such *nāṭu* – another of those polysemic, multireferential concepts for territories.

For many centuries, *nāṭu* formations were an axis to agrarian territoriality in the Tamil region, especially in its fertile riverine belts (Stein 1977, 1980, Ludden 1986, 1986). *Nāṭu* existed in centres and peripheries of competing, overlapping, and segmentary polities (e.g. Stein 1980) across the peninsular region, with each historical moment inflecting older territorial formations with new content and meaning (Ludden 2002: 246-48). For about three hundred years from the mid-fourteenth century, the Vijayanagara Empire served as an umbrella regional polity, paradoxically provisioning more power to a number and variety of chieftains. Both overlords and lesser lordships – such as the Madurai Nayakas – adopted similar political, military, and entrepreneurial strategies to hold sway over domains.

Agrarian expansionism heightened in dry lowland forests. New *nāṭu* emerged in the dry regions of contemporary southern Tamil Nadu. These expansionist drives involved the incorporation of ethnic communities such as Maravar and Kallar then living in these regions, and the settling of new migrant communities (Ludden 1986). One way of incorporating communities within the folds of segmentary polities was

through the provisioning of *pāḷaiyakkārar* (poligars in colonial-sprache) titles. This linked chiefs of smaller territories and overlords. *Pāḷaiyakkārar* provided tributes to overlords in the form of military services, while overlords often legitimised *pāḷaiyakkārar* territorial control via temples and irrigation network, by settling land, granting rights over land, crop, and other produce.

The *kāvalkārar* institution was another means to stabilise rule. Recruited from different ethnicities, *kāvalkārar* provided *kāval*, protection to settlements, places of worship, fields, and trade and pilgrim routes. In the Madurai region, many *kāvalkārar* came from the Pīramalai Kallar subcaste. Malaiur Kallar families provided *kāval* at a number of the city's streets and localities until the late colonial period, and at the countryside for longer still.

With the English East India Company becoming a significant regional presence, *pāḷaiyakkārar* and *kāvalkārar* were recast as predatory chiefs heading institutionalised extortion rackets. British colonial rule involved diverse tactics over modes and institutions for revenue extraction and for policing populations. Exigencies of rule led to alternating or co-existing tactics that upturned, transformed, or destroyed existing institutional networks and social relations. Colonial knowledge misapprehended the logic of sovereignty and patronage (Dirks 1987, 1989) in a region marked by, and recognising, historical contiguities between kingship and banditry (Shulman 1980a). But colonial administrators, ethnographers, travellers, and missionaries also collaborated with elite native groups to discover tradition. New frameworks for understanding subcontinental and regional history reconceived spatial and social relations.

This was the context wherein new ideas of crime and criminology were annexed to older Tamil spatial and social distinctions, and many Mukkulathor subcastes were designated as criminal groups. In account after account, travellers, missionaries, administrators, and ethnographers conveniently glossed the Tamil word *kaḷḷan* (plural *kaḷḷar*), meaning thief, as evidence that Kallar subcastes were a 'traditional' community of thieves or robbers (A. Pandian 2009: 4). Etymology excused itself as history. Generic words morphed into proof of castes' 'traditional occupations.' By end-nineteenth-century, the colonial framing of Kallar *kāvalkārar* as

predators rather than protectors of the countryside had stabilised (A. Pandian 2009: 79-80).

Kallar groups argue that British colonial rulers designated them as criminal groups and repressed them only because they had ruled the region, especially their own *nāṭu*, as 'independently' and resisted colonial rule. Collective memory now recalls the early-twentieth-century CTA as but one episode in a long-drawn struggle over sovereignty. Piramalai Kallar claim to have resisted not only British colonialism but also the fourteenth century 'Islamic invasion' of Madurai by the Delhi Sultanate, and later Nayaka 'intrusions.'

Despite claims of Kallar intractability and resistance to external polities, there is enough evidence to suggest intricate connections between non-Kallar rulers and Kallar groups. One kind of evidence is the built structures in this micro-region's landscape, the temples, tanks, canals, and pilgrim and trade routes. Landscape itself hints at the historical networks between the Kallar community and regional polities.

Evidence also exists in the form of land and labour relations in the region. Substantial numbers of Kallarnatu villages including Malaiur were *inām* lands, tax-free lands gifted to priests and other service providers of the Madurai Meenakshi temple. Other dwellers (and not just Kallar) were granted land in return for services to the nearby Tirupparankunram Murugan temple. Tributary and redistributive arrangements, irrigation infrastructures, temples, and hereditary chieftainships reveal social relations and interconnections of a kind that would have to be erased from Kallar self-representations of uninterrupted sovereignty.

Links between Madurai Nayakas and Kallarnatu is represented vividly in a copperplate inscription dating to the early-seventeenth-century reign of Tirumalai Nayaka (Dumont 1986). Metal whispers a historical secret that the contemporary project of Kallar memory would rather not hear, as caste members maintain that they have always fiercely guarded their territory and ruled it independently.

In segmentary polities, it is difficult to gauge the exact nature and extent of relations between overlords and local lineages, families, and chieftains. Elsewhere, 'marginal' communities played an important role, aiding overlords through military

services and by organising raids and cattle thefts during war (Ludden 1986, Mosse 2003, Skaria 1999). Malaiur Kallar men admit as much, but say that it is their village that most harangued king and colonial ruler alike. They rest their claim by evoking Malaiur's physical distance from Madurai city – utilising an element of abstract space for a battle over honour within Kallarnatu.

Arumugam harboured little doubt that any anthropologist interested in Kallarnatu would be interested in his village. Malaiur may have been peripheral within Kallarnatu at the time of Dumont's research. Non-Malaiur Kallar stressed its marginality through two counts. One, they highlighted that Malaiur does not have its own temple. Given the importance of temples to agrarian territoriality, this served as crucial evidence of Malaiur's marginality. Two, they stated that Malaiur representatives did not receive *mutalmāi* in Kallarnatu's main temples.

The word *mutalmāi* – from *mutal* (first, best) – translates to primacy, superiority, or 'firstness.' In the Tamil region, *mutalmāi* is an important mode through which an individual or group is distinguished or given *mariyātai*. The order in which persons are accorded *mutalmāi* during temple festivals and rituals is an important measure of their social position. Malaiur representatives' non-receipt of *mutalmāi* in *nāṭu* festivals was thus proof of village marginality.

The village as *ūr* was not internal to any of Kallarnatu's eight *nāṭu*. It was not even one of Kallarnatu's 24 *upakirāmam*. While Kallarnatu included other kinds of territorial units, the *nāṭu* and *upakirāmam* were its main territorial categories. The eight *nāṭu*, themselves ranked, were more central to Kallarnatu than its other territorial units were. According to Dumont, *upakirāmam* peripherality derives not so much from reduced population or area as from the 'inferior status of their founders, the "younger" sons of headmen' (1986: 164). Despite the inclination to subsume territoriality under kinship, he offers another tentative explanation – that Kallarnatu's *upakirāmam* were 'more recent settlement[s] separating out of the [eight *nāṭu*]' that comprise the micro-region's main type of territorial unit (ibid).

Lately, some Madurai-based researchers have reinterpreted this territorial hierarchy. For example, Cuntaravantiyattēvan (2011) dismisses the idea that territorial classification and ranking derived from miscegenation or from the ranking

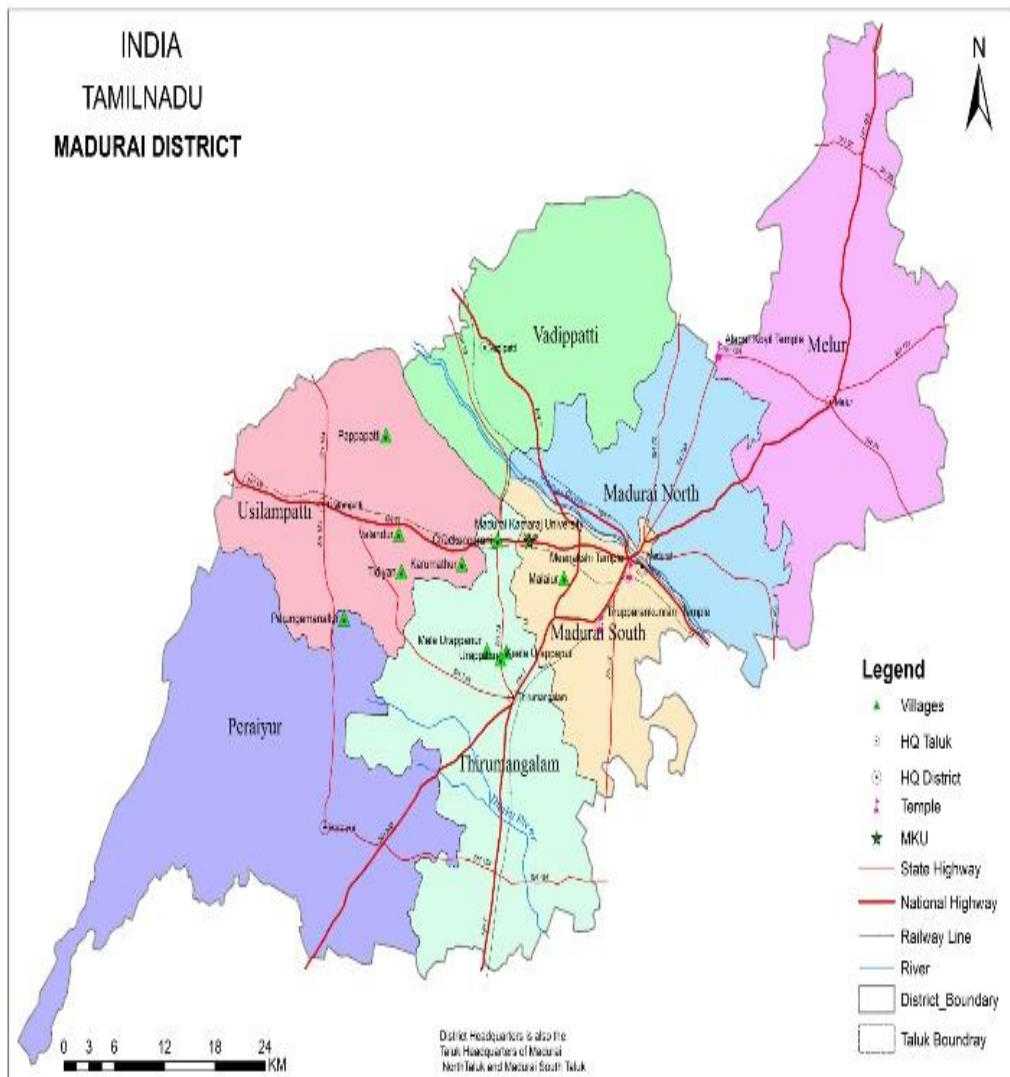
of founders as senior or junior sons, suggesting instead that *upakirāmam* were gathered into the folds of Kallarnatu at later historical moments. The reinterpretation attempts to reduce such *mutalmāi* fixations from affecting contemporary intra-Kallar relations.

Such attempts are few and ineffective. Kallar individuals and associations continued to describe Kallarnatu as a territory of eight *nāṭu* and 24 *upakirāmam*. Disputes over *mutalmāi* also spilled over from the time-space of their formal reckoning (at temple festivals, say) and re-emerged during *mariyātai*-focussed ordinary conversations. Malaiur Kallar routinely encountered taunts and gentle banter over their peripherality.

Yet Malaiur's contemporary importance overshoots its 'traditional' place in Kallarnatu. Its transformed status largely stems from residents' employment in Madurai's textile mills. Other recent spatial practices – the city's sprawl in Malaiur's direction, greater transport infrastructure, the rise of real property markets in the vicinity – have only boosted the economic mobility of Malaiur's dominant families, and energised Malaiur's claims to centrality in contemporary Kallarnatu.

There are legends regarding the means by which Malaiur villagers challenged their previous peripherality. Routine clashes at temple festivals – as in the Moonusami temples at Kallarnatu's Karumathur *nāṭu* – and the occasional murder are inevitable plot elements in most accounts of Malaiur Kallar propelling themselves to Kallarnatu's centre and forcing others to acknowledge their *ūr*'s importance. Where changing the order of *mutalmāi* at a ritual or festival proved difficult, Malaiur Kallar articulated their upward mobility through other methods such as sponsoring nightlong Special Drama performances during *nāṭu* temple festivals.

Colonial and postcolonial history demonstrates a partial separation of religion and rule. Temples are no longer significant nodes in the redistribution of resources such as land, water, and labour but contemporary battles over temple honour prove that *nāṭu* continue to be of significance. Following historian David Ludden (2002), I can term Kallarnatu as a 'spectre of an agrarian territory.'



Map 2 Madurai district

Kallarnatu does not appear in Madurai's official maps. In any case, since *nāṭu* are characterised by frontiers rather than boundaries, they are less amenable to modern cartographic conventions. Contemporary official maps outline national, state, district, and taluk borders, and evoke other elements of capitalist spatiality. These representations and territorialities are very different from precolonial space, polities, and spatial scales of *periyānāṭu*, *nāṭu*, and *ūr* (Stein 1977). Nevertheless, for the sake of readers accustomed to modern cartographic representations, I could say that Kallarnatu can be juxtaposed on portions of Usilampatti, Thirumangalam, and

Tirupparankunram or Madurai South (administrative and revenue blocks) in a contemporary map of Madurai (Map 2).

Barring urban centres and new residential neighbourhoods, Kallarnatu continues to be a 'single-caste' settlement. Piramalai Kallar is still the locally dominant and largest caste. Inevitably, conflict in Kallarnatu is not only between Kallar and Dalit castes but also within the dominant Kallar caste. These internal conflicts and the range of individuals and families making a pitch for dominance are exemplified by the increase in caste associations. In agrarian production, and labour and land relations, we see as many (or more) contestations among Kallar as between Kallar and Dalits. This is as true of Kallarnatu as it is of Malaiur.

Malaiur and its Residents

Malaiur is today not the *ūr* that was gifted as an *inām* village to one of the priest families of the Madurai Meenakshi temple. For decades, land has been a commodity, agrarian labour has been remunerated mainly through money wages, and residents have diversified from agriculture. Yet commoditisation of land did not automatically result in the sale and purchase of Malaiur's agricultural fields to non-villagers. In 2008, some Malaiur residents could still comprehend the 'original' land distribution pattern along Kallar lineages. Changes to land ownership have been more noticeable since my first fieldwork period.

Outsiders (people from outside the *ūr*) have purchased significant portions of Malaiur and neighbouring villages' land. Realty, not agriculture, motivated these transfers. By January 2015, uncultivated tracts abutted new residential neighbourhoods, showrooms, and the occasional small- or medium-sized factories. With greater dispersal of the village's families, there was further disjuncture between Malaiur as *ūr* and Malaiur as *kirāmam*.

Yet *ūr* dispersal predates this round of urbanisation. Long-term employment-related migration is more pronounced among, although not restricted to, the Kallar. Migrant families periodically reappeared at Malaiur. They participated in temple festivals and fulfilled personal vows made to household, lineage, or *ūr* deities. They invested in Malaiur land and contributed to temple- and house-(re)constructions.

During visits, they settled disputes and organised life-crisis rituals. Some visits to the *conta ūr*, native village, had no specific purpose. Migrants and residents mobilised and refreshed kinship ties during these visits. Migration signalled a connection between *ūr* dispersal and the pursuit of non-farm work outside Malaiur.

Older dispersal of settlements emerged from agriculture. Malaiur consisted of a thickly populated main *ūr*, and a number of *ottai vīṭu* or 'single house' in its vicinity. To use a contemporary analogy, *ottai vīṭu* are like satellites of *ūr*. Villagers dated them to a distant past when farmland was parcelled out to certain Kallar sub-lineages or families. The *ottai vīṭu* were established when such groups took to residing near their farms.

Street and House Geography

Where and how did Malaiur's different social groups live in 2008? Firstly, as in other Tamil villages (Mosse 2012: 101-6), there was a 'caste geography' to Malaiur's streets and settlement pattern. Kallar residents represent the *ūr* as a lineage geography, saying the main *ūr* still exhibits a division of village space according to Kallar lineages. They usually refer to their five lineages not by the names of ancestors but by the names of the village's main streets. Four of these streets are named, after the four main directions, as the east, west, north, and south streets, while the fifth is known as the middle street. This was Malaiur as a Kallar-generated *representational space*. Kallar lineages suffuse the *ūr* and its streets, and permeate spatial orientations and directions. Kallar narratives of Malaiur's origin also forward this representational space.

The lineages are traced back to five brothers. Kallar individuals say that no one knows where exactly these brothers were born or when they existed. They were simply born 'somewhere [else],' and lived many years ago. Here is a gist of their story, which doubles up as Malaiur's origin story:

The brothers part ways while still young and head out in different directions to search for food and work. By chance, all five meet some years later in Tenur, a village in Malaiur's vicinity. In Tenur, a Pillaimar woman adopts the five brothers. She was already sheltering the middle brother, as though he was her own son. The brothers settle in Tenur. They marry and have children. Their children have children.

Over time, there are so many descendants that Tenur can no longer contain them. This is a time when Malaiur does not even exist. It only comes into being after the five brothers' descendants move out of Tenur and resettle in a neighbouring area. This place becomes the *ūr* known as Malaiur.

These five Kallar lineages now form Malaiur's largest group. Yet Malaiur's Kallar population, although synonymous with these five lineages, includes some affinal Kallar households. These affines are said to be recent settlers who moved to Malaiur in search of livelihood.

Dominant social groups often serve as metonyms of their village. As *spatial practice*, however, Malaiur's residential pattern was more complex than Kallar *representational space* posited it to be. Malaiur also consisted of many other castes. There was a sizable number of Konar ('shepherd') families, some Agamudaiyar (another Mukkulathor caste, here known by their honorific title 'Servai') families, fewer families of Asari subcastes (blacksmiths, carpenters), one Vannan (washerman) family, and a good number of Pallar and Chakkiliyar (Dalit castes) families.

The larger castes subdivided into lineages existing within Malaiur, each lineage having its own shrines, festivals, and 'head' families. Some of Malaiur's smaller castes likewise divided into intra-village lineages. Vannan, Asari, and some other castes were so small that their lineages exhibited an inter-village rather than intra-village orientation.

Malaiur's most subordinate caste group is the Chakkiliyar (or Arundhatiyar). We can follow existing analysis (Dirks 1987: 269) to say that Malaiur Chakkiliyar internal structure 'replicated' that of Malaiur Kallar. Chakkiliyar are divided into exactly the same number of lineages as Kallar. Malaiur Chakkiliyar usually refer to their lineages as the first, second, middle, fourth, and last. They too retrace themselves to Tenur. Malaiur Kallar termed Tenur their 'mother village.' Malaiur Chakkiliyar termed Tenur Chakkiliyar their elder brother. Kallar residents were proud of having wrenched *mutalmāi* from Tenur. But Chakkiliyar residents observed their own goddess festivals only after Tenur Chakkiliyar announced and celebrated theirs. The deferral of festivals was in deference to Tenur Chakkiliyar.

Secondly, closer attention revealed a somewhat multi-caste composition to Malaiur's central, most accessible, streets. These were the streets near the village bus stop, main tank, panchayat and other government buildings, and important *ūr* temples. Kallar, Pallar, Agamudaiyar, and Asari houses abutted one other. Atypically, some Malaiur Pallar families lived in central locations. One Pallar house in fact doubled up as the village post office. Some Pallar houses neighbored Kallar houses on by-lanes emanating from the embankment of Malaiur's main tank. Here, ancestral and household shrines of both castes were likewise dispersed.

Surprised, I enquired about these streets' multi-caste composition. Some Kallar residents believed that these Pallar families had only recently shifted to their current locations, and that it was a deviation from the original parcelling out of Malaiur to Kallar lineages. However, I once heard, while sitting on the porch of her house, thirty-eight-year-old Pallar woman Muniamma's reverse explanation. Pointing to the 'amman' or goddess shrine located within the compound, Muniamma first referred to its importance in *ūr* rituals. She also stated that it was one of the *ūr*'s oldest shrines. Only then, once she had outlined our surroundings as sacred geography, did Muniamma assert that Malaiur's original inhabitants were Pallar, and not Kallar.

Sacred and human geographies repeatedly intertwine (chapter 2). We must note at least two points in this regard. One, a village could have as many origin stories as social groups (castes, lineages, and households). Two, similar origin narratives could be utilised for dissimilar assertions. Kallar origin stories fixed Malaiur as though their ancestors' movement determined its settlement. On rare occasions, some Kallar individuals echoed Pallar versions of Malaiur's past. Weeks after I heard Muniamma's assertion, I asked Arumugam about caste-housing patterns. Surprisingly, he said that Pallar houses perhaps existed in Malaiur long before Kallar moved in from Tenur. Arumugam also thought that Kallar ancestors had only wrested control over an existing settlement and turned it into the *ūr* as it now exist. Thus, origin narratives gloss either primordially (in Muniamma's assertion that Pallar were Malaiur's original inhabitants) or variability (in Arumugam's rare concession) in village settlement.

Let me return to Malaiur's streets and castes. Konar families were similarly dispersed. In the main streets, Konar houses neighboured Kallar and Agamudaiyar houses. Significant numbers of Konar lived outside the main *ūr*, near an *ottai vīṭu*. The largest bunching up of Konar houses was in one main *ūr* street. Here, in a Kallar dominated street, about twenty Konar families lived within a compound, which also housed their ancestral shrine. This street also included Agamudaiyar houses, some likewise bunched up within compounds.

There was a marked spatial segregation with respect to one Malaiur caste. This is the third aspect of Malaiur's street and house geography. It reveals Malaiur's street geography to be only partially 'mixed-caste.' Chakkiliyar lived near Malaiur's bus stop, temples, and government buildings. But they were more or less segregated. In 2008, most Chakkiliyar lived in a newly established 'colony.' The street immediately west of this colony still housed some Chakkiliyar families, deities, and public spaces. The new colony consisted of houses constructed through a state housing scheme that avowed to improve the rural poor's living conditions, only to 'creat[e] anew the spatial segregation of the "untouchable (dalit) colony" that is stereotypic of Tamil villages' (Mosse 2012: 105).

Agricultural Land and Labour

Kallar residents held most of Malaiur's land until recently. Some Kallar families and a handful of Pallar families also owned irrigated or 'nanjai' land in Tenur, where they cultivated paddy and cash crops such as bananas. It was difficult for me to trace actual household land holdings as these were scattered across Malaiur and surrounding villages.

The original settlement register of Malaiur revenue village recorded 120 holdings, inclusive of government land. The updated register from 1987 reveals further divisions of these holdings. When I succeeded in accessing the register, there were 1312 jointly- or individually-owned holdings. Most holdings ranged from 0.08 to 0.14 hectare. Only two or three Kallar families owned about three acres (1.21 hectares). Their total holdings included non-agricultural land in Malaiur and Tenur, and plots in nearby urban(ising) localities.

The fragmentation of landholdings is one factor to villagers taking up non-agrarian work. One early-twentieth-century document illustrates villagers and colonial administrators mentioning agriculture's inability to sustain Malaiur's population. The colonial sociology of 'Kallar criminality' briefly (and partially) appeared in this document as an agrarian question. It suggested that these individuals and groups might be taking to crime because agriculture could not support them. The framing of Piramalai Kallar criminality as an agrarian question was to recede after Malaiur's notification under the CTA.

This document dates back to the 1910s, and is a note on the Malaiur Kallar, signed by Madurai's District Superintendent of Police. The note was prepared before, and in preparation for, Malaiur's notification. It referred to a recent survey of Malaiur.⁸ According to the survey, there were about 210 families in Malaiur. (Most were likely to be Kallar families). Out of a total adult male population of 321, only five were landless. The rest held about 265 acres of wet land and about 185 acres of dry land.

This document suggests that, already in the 1910s, Malaiur could not solely depend on agriculture. A hundred years since, dependence on agriculture has further reduced. By 2008, there were over 725 households of different castes in Malaiur. Many individuals have shifted away from cultivation or agrarian labour.

Malaiur's landless agricultural labourers were mostly Kallar, Konar, and Arundhatiyar. Landless agricultural workers classified themselves as coolie (*kūli*) or daily wage (*arraikūli*) workers, and contrasted themselves to cultivators whose were classified as *camucāri* (farmer, householder, married person).

Most male non-Kallar labourers were Arundhatiyar, while female labourers were from all of Malaiur's castes. A single-crop paddy grown in some fields depended mostly on Arundhatiyar labour. Paddy cultivators organised labour cultivation by paying an Arundhatiyar headman, who brought along about ten or fifteen Arundhatiyar to the fields when labour requirement was high.

⁸ Note on the "Malaiur" Kallas by Mr H.G. Clinch, District Superintendent of Police, Madura, 14.03.1914.

For horticulture, labourers were recruited and paid daily. In 2008, women's wages were Rs 50 for a full day's work and Rs 30 for half a day's work. This was only half of men's daily wages. Since farming involved gender-segregated tasks, both women and men participated in the day-to-day labour negotiations between landholding families and landless labourers. Farming involved gender-segregated tasks. Women of land-owning or tenant families recruited women labourers for the next day in the field, or later in the evening by going in person or sending word through their children to the homes of potential workers. Men of cultivating families did likewise for male tasks. Cultivating families referred to this daily recruitment of waged labour through the typical statement that 'anyone can work for anyone.' Usury and indebtedness, however, complicates this picture of free labour.

Occupational Diversification

Most families across castes recall a not so distant past, when everyone was involved in agrarian production. Agrarian festivals, and modes of representing caste relations through this realm, continue to be important. In 2008, I could see significant occupational differentiation in Malaiur. In the 1970s, a number of Kallar men had found employment in textile mills either located at Madurai city or peppering the countryside closer to Malaiur.

With the closure or downsizing of mills, most of these men had lost their jobs by 2008. More recently, jobbers recruited young, unmarried women across castes and sent them to out-of-town textile mills and garment production sweatshops. These women worked there for months and accumulated a small fund of wages, which was released only at the termination of their 'contract.'

In August 2008, when it was almost time for me to leave, the much-awaited Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS, henceforth NREGS) finally materialised in Malaiur (chapter 4). The NREGS was a state generated 'guarantee' of rural employment. It was a workfare scheme rather than the welfare scheme it was touted to be. Initially, NREGS provided some of Malaiur's poor a patchy source of income and entitlements. Its first set of workers consisted of women across caste and age groups, and mostly elderly Chakkiliyar men. During later visits, I saw that the NREGS was more woven into the fabric of village life and rhythm.

Initially, the *ūr* handled this sudden outflow of labour from agriculture through arrangements with *kirāmam* officials and others appointed to supervise the scheme. One evening in early-January 2009, I met a group of women from landless Kallar, Pallar and Konar families by a public drinking-water supply tap. These women informed me that cultivator families had met and decided a few weeks earlier to stop NREGS work since they needed labour for the paddy harvest.

By January 2015, even women from small landholding families had entered the muster rolls and were spending hours at NREGS worksites. This was a result of diminishing real farm income for small farmers – or income depletion, in the words of Vaidehi, a young Kallar woman from a family that held and cultivated 0.09 ha. But this was modifying cultivation’s diurnal rhythm in Malaiur. In that short visit, I saw women scurrying between stoves, wholesale vegetable markets, NREGS worksites, farms, and water supply taps, desperately manoeuvring time, space, and rhythms to meet routine tasks.

In 2008, a national-level construction boom provisioned Malaiur’s single-largest non-agrarian employment opportunity. Unlike in neighbouring villages, only men from Malaiur worked in the construction sector. They were recruited from different castes by Malaiur contractors-cum-workers. Male construction workers denoted themselves and their contractor with a single term, *kottaṇār*. Contractors worked alongside, instead of merely supervising, their village- or caste-brethren. These contractors temporarily held in place the village, caste, and kin networks to recruit construction workers. But significant numbers of Malaiur’s construction workers preferred to find work through daily labour markets.

Other villagers went to other ‘unskilled’ labour markets, searching for work as loaders, carters, and so on. Some simply purchased commodities from wholesale markets each morning and hawked these wares in urban neighbourhoods. A few Malaiur residents had also obtained coveted public sector jobs, and served as teachers, policemen, or panchayat officials. Some families derived additional incomes through public works contracts, fixing-and-dealing, and usury. Dominant families recently entered the real estate sector. Individuals from other families now serve at the sector’s lower end.

I have described a village not altogether agrarian even though agriculture continues to be an important source of livelihood. Agriculture also frames the pool of symbols, idioms, and representations. This is characteristic of a region where farming has existed 'in a land of emotion' (Ludden 1999: 60). Millwork, usury, and real estate likewise exist in a land of emotion. The processes, institutions, people, and places constituting these sectors also partake in representations and practices involving 'gods, poetry, ritual, architecture, outsiders, frontiers, myths, borderlands, landmarks, and families' (ibid). It was Malaiur's mill workers who spearheaded the demand that Kallarnatu recognises their village's changing status. Until early-2010s, Malaiur workers' associations of different mills had sponsored Special Drama performances during important *ūr* and *nāṭu* temple festivals. The sponsorship had continued for some years after mill workers lost their jobs.

Modes of 'Knowing' Space and Social Relations

Another kind of task has cropped up in Malaiur. It concerns the traffic between desks and fields, people and paper, and realities and representations. As more and more journalists, novelists, and academics become interested in village and region, some residents gain importance as Malaiur's 'learned folk.' Were I literally to consider Malaiur as a 'little republic,' how would I designate these learned men? For nomadic researchers, they would no doubt be Malaiur's Public Relations Officer, Under Secretary of Narratives, Memories and Myths, and Liaison Officer.

Many of these men held cultivable land. Arumugam, along with his wife Jyothi and waged labourers, farmed vegetables out of his share of land inherited from his father. (He had three brothers). He occasionally performed (informal) panchayat duties, settling marital, moneylending, and property disputes.

Why note the obvious, that individuals engage in multiple tasks? It cautions us, when aggregating and characterising social groups, against turning somewhat fluid processes into permanent truths. In rural anthropology, a typical aggregation is generated through household surveys.

Absent Tables, Attendant Relations

Between June and September 2008, I thrice undertook a survey of Malaiur households. My questionnaire covered everything from household composition, property, occupation, and incomes, to caste and lineage affiliations. My survey also attempted to identify marriage circles. Despite the time spent on surveying, I cannot confidently represent my survey results in a manner that can serve as numerical shorthand for Malaiur and its residents.

Perhaps my failure to generate a village-level ‘avalanche of numbers’ stems from the astuteness of individuals who knew that surveys could ‘make them up’ (Hacking 2002: 100). Responses to my surveys contained villagers’ experiences of numerous other surveys and censuses. Censuses and surveys are well recognised as practices that create, rather than simply report the existence of, social groups. They *create* new classifications while tabulating present ones. I shall illustrate the twinning of realities and representations through religious identities in Malaiur.

When I ‘arrived’ in Malaiur, this twinning was visible in some residents’ characterisation of village population. Only hours prior to Arumugam’s ‘why us,’ I had met Sachin, a young Kallar man originally from Malaiur. A new recruit in the police force, Sachin resided elsewhere and was visiting his *ūr* for the tourist Pongal. Sachin welcomed me with the manner of someone expecting researchers to land up in his *ūr*. He said, ‘Oh, yes. Malaiur is an *important ūr*... These British [wanted] to somehow reform us, this *ūr* Thevamar.’ (Thevar is an honorific title of Piramalai Kallar and some other Mukkulathor subcastes. Thevamar denotes the Thevar people).

I probably mimicked other anthropologists (e.g. Mines 2005) when I promptly asked Sachin who else stayed in Malaiur. In turn, Sachin’s response reverberated with responses other anthropologists have received to this query. Sachin replied, ‘Ahm... *Majority* Kallar... Then, Konars... And SCs.’ He added, ‘But one thing. You will not find a single Christian or Muslim. If anyone else tries to enter our *ūr*, we drive him away. There is no place for anyone else.’

Sachin signalled the recent rise of Hindutva forces and the inroads made by belligerent Hindu nationalist groups in this region. Fluid religious identities are

thought to have characterised south India until recent decades (Mosse 2012). Historians (e.g. Bayly 1989) have outlined narratives, practices, and cults suggestive of long-drawn processes wherein many marginal communities gained upward mobility through Christianity and Islam.

Religious identities may be broached via their links with caste identities. This approach provides additional proof and purchase of the worn-out yet valid lens of intersectionality, while instantiating connections between governmental and social practices, and the representational and the material. Official enumerations of India's Christian population are underestimations. This underestimation, scholars of Christianity remark, stems from 'the fact that the declaration of Christian identity bars certain categories of converts from state welfare and protections as Scheduled Castes' (Mosse 2012: 285). Malaiur's Christian Dalits probably passed themselves as 'Hindus' during my surveys because state policies streamline their responses. This does not fully explain why Malaiur Christians conceal their religious identities and practices.

Before exploring this, I shall elaborate another process at work in surveys. My interlocutors treated my surveys as opportunities to refashion themselves. They said one thing but asked me to note down something else. Part of my survey tabulated what I already knew, say, the extant of households. Yet respondents strictly regulated my entries over what was public knowledge. They asked me to count individuals or entire sub-units permanently residing outside Malaiur. Deceased family members occasionally haunted my schedules. Elderly residents inflated their age, hoping this would help them access some welfare scheme. Some respondents refused to count spouses because of domestic disputes, or name 'native village' if they had failed to secure livelihood there. Others attributed to themselves occupations starkly different from current ones.

Their intention was not always to fool me. They probably hoped these surveyor-surveyed collusions would forge a realisation of needs and desires. The very objects of paper and pen rendered my survey an official activity. Even residents who had interacted with me for months began to see me anew. Field's repositioning of fieldworker had less to do with the degree of familiarity between ethnographer and

interlocutor and more to do with people's familiarity with survey, its hints of state and non-state practices.

An additional complication was the NH7 upgradation and resultant land-related activities in and near Malaiur. Speculation, land transfer, and related tactics of persuasions and evasions (see part II) co-produced my methods. NH7 built itself into my research process, directing the routes along which my survey exercises could proceed. The absence of tables precisely representing my survey results is, then, not simply emblematic of my limitations. It testifies to relations and processes in my field. I had to contend with the heightened caginess of people who had enough reasons to evade land-related queries.

I nonetheless refer to these household surveys, because the 'excess' of these exercises cues my research themes. Absent tables reappear, in the following pages, as ethnographic incidents. What this thesis loses in terms of group aggregates and numerical expressions of individuals' and social units' characteristics, it earns back – by a meta- or para- ethnographic approach – as insights into the 'systems of relationship' (Leach 1967: 77) that are visible during all surveys.

Malaiur residents took my surveys to be a complete waste of time. They suggested I engineer numbers, if numbers were crucial to my passing myself as a researcher. One Kallar teenager, however, wanted to borrow my survey results and pass them to her teacher. Swetha attended the government-run school in Malaiur. A teacher had ordered Swetha to fix a length of statistics about Malaiur. For days, Swetha nagged me to produce and share a statistical table. Had I the requisite confidence in my surveys, I would have supplied both Swetha and this thesis with these statistics.

Swetha had only nagged me because her teacher had harangued her. The teacher had badgered Swetha because data collection further burdened her. Such requests for data were routinely and openly made. Villagers sympathised with schoolteachers and their double duties. In any case, they argued, if a journalist or ethnographer could request narratives, why could a data collector not request some numbers?

In Malaiur, numbers had not acquired absolute purchase. Statistical data was only one element of truth regimes. It was not uncommon for key villagers to collaborate with surveyors, and fabricate, summarise, or render anecdotal, statistics. My survey respondents wondered why I was not adopting these modes. I could not outsource the work of surveying even though my fieldwork time was limited. Perhaps I was too much of an anthropologist to be efficient as a surveyor, while not lacking in the ambition to be both.

To gather the threads of this discussion – relationality of places, importance of history and process, and ways of knowing and representing – let me return to religious identities in Malaiur. In my initial weeks in Malaiur, as also later, significant numbers of Kallar residents echoed Sachin's views – that Malaiur was a decidedly Hindu space. How valid were these claims?

Some Kallar residents attributed Malaiur's fierceness and essence (*ūr kuṇam*) to the avowed absence of Christians. Here is a summary of their claims. 'Because we were fearless and fierce, we could not be bound (*kaṭṭuppāṭu*) by the white man. Since the white man could not defeat us, no missionaries could enter our *ūr*.' Their narratives emplotted an undifferentiated 'white man's time,' interchanged colonial rulers and Christian missionaries, and expressed caste, place, and religion in terms of *kuṇam* or essence. Kallar *kuṇam* was characterised as 'independent' spirit and valour. It emerged in a register that accounted for all historical events and processes as just so many revelations of Kallar refusal to pay taxes or accept the authority of overlords. Their fashioning of a 'Christian *kuṇam*' then allowed for the effacing of historical processes hindering these imaginaries.

This might be a local enunciation of the widespread view that Christianity in India had its roots in colonial history. Malaiur villagers were perhaps forwarding this view when they recast Christianity, mission work, and colonialism's relations through their talk of a Christian 'collaborationist' *kuṇam*. Malaiur Kallar utilise this view to contest certain claims about Kallar in Perungamanallur, another Kallarnatu village (chapter 5).

As Malaiur and Perungamanallur Kallar, and different political formations, compete over whom to denote as the truest representatives of Kallar essence, and

whom to identify as the most valiant rebels against the colonial state, religious identities and their imaginings returned in a peculiar manner to caste identities. Malaiur Kallar contested Perungamanallur's claim of epitomising Kallar *kuṇam*. One evidence of Malaiur being the place of true Kallar essence was the absence of Christians in this village, contrasting this to the 'intrusion' of Christians and missionaries in Perungamanallur. In a circular fashion, the absence both signifies Malaiur's fierceness, and ensures an unbroken dissemination of this quality.

The claim that Malaiur is devoid of non-Hindus was questionable. I realised that this regularly stated opinion made it difficult for the few Christian residents to express their faith publicly. Inside homes, the hesitancy lessened somewhat. I was still unable to enumerate religious groups in Malaiur. In any case, religion is also expressed as orientations rather than fixed identities. A Kallar woman at Malaiur's southern limits said some of her children 'liked' Christianity. A Pallar woman living near the village centre said one of her four sons and all three daughters were a 'set' now. She spoke of their 'liking' for Jesus (*Yēcu cāmi*), not the adoption of another religious identity.

But late one afternoon in mid-2008, Muthupillai's otherwise silent house was enlivened by the presence of many visitors. Born in Malaiur, Muthu, a Pallar woman, had married a man from a village almost 25 kilometres away. In 2002, she returned to Malaiur with her husband. They had had to sell her parents' land to meet health bills and began working in other villagers' fields. Muthu now lived alone. She was often ill and unable to work. That day, the streets and houses surrounding Muthu's house reverberated with songs broadcast over powerful speakers.

Cinema, folk, and devotional songs defined the aural landscapes of Tamil villages (and cities). What was unusual was that the speakers installed in Muthu's house were broadcasting Christian devotional songs. I was in the vicinity and caught the discussion in nearby streets. Much of the discussion took place in the thirty centimetre voices women used while gossiping. These were voices outside of my hearing range on normal days let alone on days swinging by a set of loudspeakers. I could catch the refrain – 'Look, look, what she is up to now,' or a 'How [she] does all this.'

For an hour, I visited houses in the vicinity. I did not want to seem too eager. I thought the subterfuge necessary. Some villagers regularly asked me whether I were Christian (which, in their opinion, was a very bad thing). I finally stopped by at Muthu's house. There were rows of chairs in the front room. There were over fifteen, very energetic people. I asked Muthu whether they were her relatives. No, they were guests, she said. Muthu probably wanted to avoid mentioning that they were fellow members of a church she had recently started visiting. (While the loudspeakers announced a new assertion, Muthu seemed diffident).

Muthu's church was relatively new but there were other churches in urban localities near the highway. When one of these churches installed a cross brightly lit in red, I noticed the disquiet in my fellow bus travellers. Ravi, who was going to a clinic on the highway, even stood up to see it. This 'wickedness' (*akkiraram*) was noted by some of the men that night and was conversational topic for a few days. Churches were frequently termed as new practices in the neighbourhood, although Christianity predates these new churches by years.⁹

When Malaiur was recreated as Hindu space, the emphasis fell on Christianity rather than Islam. Other political projects – geopolitical and Hindu nationalist – targeting Muslims had also converged in Malaiur. Dumont could write of Kallar accounts that linked caste with Islam and Muslims. I could not. On my first visit, one of my companions was a college student whose family had moved out Malaiur. He stopped to point out the letterings on a grilled archway to a tiny street clustering the houses of one Kallar sub-lineage. The lettering spelled out on this archway to a lineage shrine was 'Mammuthu Thevar.' Lest its significance went unnoticed, I was told that Mammuthu is the Tamil rendering of 'Mohammed.' Actually, the one who was most shocked was a young Kallar boy who lived in that street. This boy immediately asked, 'Mammuthu...is a *Muslim* name?'

⁹ Catholic presence at a nearby village is traceable to the seventeenth century. See <http://maduraiarchdiocese.weebly.com/nagamalai-pudukottai.html> for a description of this village as 'an ancient Christian center frequented by Jesuit Missionary Robert de Nobili.'

I waited some weeks before broaching the subject. Some villagers said all they knew was that Mammuthu was an ancestor. One individual responded differently.

Arumugam (brusque, wary): Why do you all ask this question?

Dhivya (almost sure whom he had in mind): Who is all?

Arumugam: *Amerikākāri* [American woman].

This was a US-based anthropologist Arumugam had recently met. She figured in our conversations occasionally. Arumugam named a string of researchers who had asked him about Mammuthu Thevar, wanted to know why an *ottai vīṭu* of a nearby Kallarnatu village was called the Allah *ottai vīṭu*, and asked why practices such as the circumcision of Kallar boys had become infrequent. (I did say he was a Liaison Officer between Malaiur and its researchers).

Dhivya (undeterred): The name Mammuttu?

Arumugam: It is not Mammuttu. The chap who made the grill misspelt the name. It is actually Mā Im Muthu Thevar.

It was an ingenious response. He had had time to think of it, what with the pesky *āyvālar* (researchers) and their predictable queries.

Conclusion

This chapter took us through Tamil spatial categories *ūr*, *kirāmam*, and *nāṭu*. It elaborated the history of Kallarnatu and the broader region in which it exists. It introduced Malaiur's castes, settlement patterns, land and labour relations, and residents' main occupations. It positioned Malaiur village, Kallarnatu micro-region, and Madurai city in a relational geography. By the end of the next chapter, part I shall have fulfilled its remit – explaining what a field-site is, and doing so in a manner faithful to ethnography's double location.

While ethnographers 'yield to the flow of events and ideas which present themselves' in the field (Strathern 1999: 2), the field yields to the presence of ethnographers, surveyors, and reporters. Trends towards 'objectification and self-reflection' are present in both field and academia, and conjoin in the anthropological project (Rabinow 1977: 119). As Rabinow argues, 'the data we [as anthropologists]

collect is doubly mediated, first by our own presence and then by the second-order self-reflection we demand from our informants' (ibid).

The reach, nature, and frequency of field research and representation, censuses and surveys, and interviews and conversations are such as to affect both ethnographers and interlocutors. The narratives interlocutors provide ethnographers are partially fashioned out of their brush with government, media, and academic techniques of knowing, reporting, and reflecting. Thus, the second-order self-reflection that anthropologists access in the field emerges from their interlocutors' interactions with other institutions, practices, and actors.

This chapter scanned the networks cutting across desks and fields. By linking ethnographic surveys with other enumerative practices, it captured researchers and residents lugging around the weight of desks as they produce living texts. Elements of such collaborative knowing link up in a manner similar to associations of lived, conceived, and perceived space. Knowledge production and the production of space – both involve objects and humans. The next chapter twists the analytical lens onto another aspect of their co-production in Malaiur, and takes in place-self relations, landscapes, and imaginaries.

CHAPTER 2 'IT IS THAT SORT OF AN ŪR:' NARRATIVES OF CASTE AND PLACE

Tamil speakers are likely to ask strangers, 'What is your *ūr*?' Does this indicate a peculiarly Tamil drive to orient everyone in place? Alternatively, does this signal 'the nature of the human subject who is oriented and situated in place,' and disclose that these Tamils simply illustrate the 'geographical selves' existing across cultures (Casey 2001: 683)? To meet these inquiries, we must acknowledge that while emplacement may be universal, the way we orient ourselves to place differ.

South Asian scholarship highlights regional trajectories to orientations of body and self to space. This calls for refreshing our previous discussion of Tamil spatial categories. Valentine Daniel understands the person-centric definition of space – encapsulated in the spatial categories *ūr* and *nāṭu* – as flowing from 'the person-centric orientation of Hindu culture' (1984: 70).¹ Other anthropologists of south India have pointed to the 'geographical placement' through which a 'person's (caste) identity' is known (Mosse 2012: 99).

I begin by stressing the closeness of caste and place. The first section examines the collapse of place- and caste- identities. For the strategy of emplacement to be effective, places themselves need to have meaning. Places are partly constructed or imagined through local knowledges, which take 'dwelling' to be 'not just living in place but also encompass[ing] ways of fusing setting to situation, locality to life-world' (Feld and Basso 1996: 8). The meanings or senses of place shape that place's singularity.

¹ He writes that this 'person-specific view of reality is... in keeping with the Hindu's underlying understanding of substance and the rules for its proper mixing' (1984: 71). He reads the *ūr*-person relation as a search for compatibility, a search mediated by such variables as soil type, strategies persons and castes employ in their transactions with *ūr*, and the dispositions and qualities of both *ūr* and persons/castes (ibid: 85, 89-90).

Some scholars understand singularities as accretions over time. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan writes, 'places, like human beings, acquire unique signatures in the course of time' (1979: 409). In my fieldwork region, this signature becomes legible through the lens of *kuṇam* (Sanskrit *guṇ*). The Tamil Lexicon translates *kuṇam* as attribute, property, quality, character, or fundamental quality. I take up *kuṇam*'s link with history in the second section. This section focuses on Malaiur but examines it as a place where processes operationalised across spatial scales merge. I then assess the operations of history or process in the making of caste *kuṇam*.

Both places and people possess *kuṇam*. Tamil speakers regularly evoke *kuṇam* through and alongside caste. To put this differently, they express caste relations through many paradigms and idioms, one of which is *kuṇam*. The concept of *kuṇam* has been analysed within an ethnosociological framework (Daniel 1984, Marriott 1990, Osella and Osella 2000). Fencing scholarship around emic theories of biology, chemistry, physics, and cosmology, this approach has ploughed interpretations with the favoured concepts of substance, code, transactions, and exchange. There is another way to ask how people and places come to possess their *kuṇam*. Malaiur residents provided the clearest, impromptu enunciations of *kuṇam* when narrating histories of place and caste.

McKim Marriott and Ronald Inden (1977), pioneers of the ethnosociological view of India, had a particular kind of flow in their mind, when they spoke of the 'dividual' person in Hindu society. Rejecting the universality of Western conceptualisations of the individual, Marriott stressed 'the "dividuality" of the person in the flow of social relationships' (1976: 190). The ideas these writers identify – much like the substance they write about – flow rather seamlessly from the fountainhead of Vedic monism, mix in various contexts (ritual and everyday) and emerge in various proportions as thought-pools within contemporary Hindu heads and beliefs.

While ethnosociology sought to correct Dumontian structuralism by emphasising caste's processual and fluid nature, both approaches stood united in

assuming civilizational unity and making short shrift of historical processes.² Yet ethnosociologists (Marriott 1990) considered this meta-level holism, which collapses actor and action, moral and material, and person and environment (or place), an important corrective to many assumptions of modern Western thought.

South Asian scholarship is not the only field to have stressed on holism. There are other attempts to correct modern Western thought's methodological individualism. Many historical and anthropological studies have shown the conception of space and time as homogenous to be non-universal. David Harvey (1996) illustrates how historian Aaron Gurevich (1985) and anthropologist Nancy Munn (1986) unravel space, time, and self as dialectical and relational. Harvey, however, notes that scholarship is impaired when processes and relations are conceptualised in essentialist terms. Munn's well-known ethnographic account of value, symbols, and fame in a Papua New Guinea island implies a region where residents 'live in a self-contained process of constructing intersubjective space times... entirely free from colonial influences' (Harvey 1996: 222).

How do the flows and processes emphasised in ethnosociology relate to that other kind of 'flow talk' – of global processes and histories – that animates contemporary social theory? Do Tamils or, broadly speaking, South Asians construct personhood and places only with the tools of substance and transactions? Are there other axes along which places and selves come into being? Do process and history figure in this talk of *kuṇam*? One anthropologist suggests that the Tamil 'concept of habit and repeated practice is... consistent with some historical approaches to human activity' (Mines 2005: 112). This chapter situates the accruing of *kuṇam* to places and people in historical processes, and attends to history as expressed in local narrative forms such as *varalāru* (history) and *katai* (story), and in memories and ordinary conversations.

² Ronald Inden later distanced himself from the ethnosociological project. He critiqued essentialising caste, treating it as 'the unchanging (substantialized) agent of the civilization, from the rise of the Indus Valley culture and the arrival of the Aryans down to the present day of regionalism and caste in electoral politics' (1990: 83). Inden's work on medieval Bengal, which rehabilitated 'kingship or a polity' as a central and 'constitutive institution of Indian civilization' (ibid: 82), played a role in this decision.

From *Ūr* to *Ā/ka!*, or How to get from Place to Caste in a short span of time

Examining conversations during which the question about place is posed reveals that it serves as a prelude to (or used instead of) the direct quizzing of individuals' caste identity. Someone who is not fully immersed in 'being a person the Tamil way' (Daniel 1984) may mistake the questioner's interest to be purely geographical. Someone who fully comprehends the question's implications could stall the proceedings by giving geographical responses from which their caste identity cannot be easily second-guessed. For individuals from subordinate castes, cities and towns (or municipalities) provide some barrier to an immediate mapping of caste and place.

In Madurai, I often had to go through a series of questions and answers in my initial encounters with individuals. These sessions typically went as follows:

Question: What is your *ūr*?

My reply: Madurai.

Q: Where in Madurai?

A: Thirumangalam [a municipality in Madurai district].

Q: Thirumangalam or *near* Thirumangalam?

A: Near Thirumangalam.

At this point, I would name my father's village. If I did not, I would be asked to. Here the obstinate respondent is taking the interrogator through a series of geographical territories. The Chinese boxes or concentric circles which have served as framing devices in some ethnographies (Beck 1972, Daniel 1984) nod towards such responses, which run through the names of region, city, taluk, and village, and perhaps, lineage and family. These opening gambits seem like hurdle races.

The litany of places may be bypassed by directly asking the person's *conta ūr*, native village. Occasionally, individuals bypass all references to place and simply ask, 'What *ā/ka!* are you?' If my interrogator did not know my father's village, s/he would ask 'What *ā/ka!* are you?'

This Tamil word means people; it is also widely recognised as a referent of caste identity. It is tempting to think that *ā/ka/* is a euphemism for *cāti* (jati) but I would seriously doubt such an interpretation. Instead, such utterances reveal caste as an important constituent of personhood. There have been debates over the nature of the caste 'system,' the varna and jati distinction, and the processes that have shaped contemporary experiences and conceptions of caste (Dumont 1980, Gupta 1980, Srinivas 1991, Dirks 2001).

Yet the classification of people or *ā/ka/* into *cāti* is hardly a moot point. Some anthropologists even argue that it is not only human beings but also 'animals, plants, and even inorganic material' to whom jati is applied (Daniel 1984: 2).³ To then say one has no *cāti*, as anthropologist Diane Mines found out in a Tamil village, 'mean[s] something like "I don't exist as a kind of anything – living or dead – in this universe"' (Mines 2005: 12).

The conversation I noted earlier reveals the importance of place and caste identity in how an individual (the anthropologist) becomes known (to her interlocutors). Now, it is possible for this conversation – which begins from a spatial category and disembarks at the question of caste identity – to be interpreted as simple cross-examinations. Would people not want to know the place and caste of an anthropologist displaying an interest in them, their locality, or in local caste relations? Yes, they would. It is doubtful, however, to take these conversations as specific to interactions between an anthropologist and her informers.

Firstly, my own Tamil identity renders this interpretation doubtful. In Bangalore and later in Delhi – prior to any affiliations with anthropology, that is – I had faced the same questions from Tamil speakers. Ethnographic research only highlighted aspects of conversations I had already participated in but not really grasped. Secondly, there are many such conversations between other kinds of participants. Conversations in buses and trains, public gatherings, educational institutions, and government offices revealed a persistent curiosity about where a

³ Daniel prefers to translate *ā/ka/* as genus (not caste) since this better alludes to jati as a classificatory principle applied to an array of beings and things.

person is from and who s/he is. They also revealed people's ability to correlate places and castes. Below are a few instances of how people do so.

Many of the non-Kallar I knew in Madurai referred to Piramalai Kallar as 'Usilampatti Thevamar.' Usilampatti is a small town in Madurai, returning a population of over 30,000 in the 2001 census. It is located at one end of Kallarnatu. Kallar men could identify themselves as Usilampatti *kāraṇ*, Usilampatti Thevan, or Usilampatti Kallan in mixed-caste gatherings, especially those taking place in urban settings.⁴

One afternoon in April 2008, as I was walking down a street in Malaiur's southern limits, I heard someone hail me. It was middle-aged Andi Thevar. I went over to the porch where he and other Kallar men sat resting. Andi Thevar had been to the city that morning. He was talking about how he had threatened a street vendor there. The vendor had sought to over-charge Andi and had refused to bargain. A crowd gathered to watch them argue. The argument was going nowhere. Until Andi Thevar yelled, 'Who did you think I am? I am an *Usilampattikāraṇ*.' The vendor apparently yielded within seconds. I asked, 'Why? Is Usilampatti such a scary place?' Andi Thevar replied, 'Yes. What else? To say "Aey, I am a *Usilampattikāraṇ da*" is enough. [They] will understand who [we] are. Why, did [the vendor] not understand that I am a Kallan? [Do you think] he reduced the price without understanding?'

'But many people stay in Usilampatti,' I persisted. 'How will [they] know who you are?' Another man intervened. 'Why, Dhivya, you have stayed in Madurai for days but don't even know this? To other *āḷkaḷ*, to town *āḷkaḷ*, 'Usilampatti' can only mean Piramalai Kallar. Would they know the names of all the Kallarnatu *ūr*? They may know. They may not know. But they would certainly know Usilampatti. And who are Usilampatti's *famous āḷkaḷ*? Kallar.'

Referring to Usilampatti also helped Kallar individuals identify one another. Soon after I arrived in Madurai, I met Senthil, a Piramalai Kallar man who had lived in

⁴ Thevar is the honorific title used by Piramalai Kallar and some other (Mukkulathor) subcastes. Non-Kallar use Thevar or *Tēvamār āḷkaḷ* to refer to the entire Mukkulathor supracaste. The noun terminator *kāraṇ* (feminine *kāri*) signals a person doing or possessing something – *Usilampattikāraṇ* signifies a man from Usilampatti, while *Madraskāri* refers to a woman from Madras (Chennai).

Chennai for a few years. By 2007, he had moved with his family to a house near Usilampatti bus terminus. Senthil recalled the joys of accidentally running into a Piramalai Kallar in Chennai. He admitted that identifying a person's caste is no big deal, although some people hesitate to ask directly. 'If I say "I am from Usilampatti," they will ask, "Usilampatti or near Usilampatti?" That is because in Usilampatti itself, so many *cāti* stay. There are Kallar, Nadar [a Tamil caste], SCs. Anyone can live in the town. But if I say I am from a village near Usilampatti, they will ask "Which *ūr*?" and from that identify me as a Kallan.'

True enough, a few weeks later, when Senthil and I visited a Kallarnatu village near Usilampatti, one of the village big-men quizzed us about our *ūr*. Once I went through the Q&A noted above, the big-man turned to Senthil. Senthil had already said 'I am from Usilampatti.' ('*Nā Usilampatti*'). So the big-man asked Senthil, as though to confirm, 'Are you from Usilampatti?' (*Nīnka!* Usilampattiya?) Senthil affirmed, and proceeded to name his *conta ūr*.

These interactions suggest that individuals can effortlessly collapse place and caste identities. They tempt us to conclude that territories have static caste compositions, and that castes are fixed in distinct territories. However, recent studies have shown mobility rather than fixity as characterising the South Asian region. Given 'modernity's consignment [of] human mobility to the dusty dark corners of archives that document the hegemonic space of national territorialism' (Ludden 2003: 1062), and a popular 'presentist periodisation' (Cooper 2001: 193) which treats pre-twentieth-century human actors as immobile beings, it becomes all the more important to examine the links between human mobility, place-making, and caste-place relations.

We need to recognise mobility's integral role in the production of space. The Tamil region's existence as a cognitive space has been visible for long, resonating in Sangam poetry. Yet the region as we know it today – as an intermeshing of smaller regions, and with connections to larger territorial canvases – is an outcome of circulatory regimes (Stein 1977) in different periods.

Just as circulatory regimes change over time and remake social space, so too have people's ways of 'placing' and knowing self and other. Although human mobility

complicates these queries, there are many ways to know a person's caste. Tamils are able to guess caste through place because of their knowledge of the region's historical geographies, agrarian territories, micro-regions, and historical patterns of migration. New processes, such as the postcolonial articulation of caste identities through regional political mobilisation (Palshikar 2006), add to ways of knowing caste territories.

Across India, castes are equated with regions, micro-regions, and villages, even as different caste members continuously move between territories. This twinned embeddedness and dispersal has ensured spatial imaginaries that continue to connect caste and place. Circular migrants (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003) bring back to rural spaces their knowledge of other spaces and other people. Thus, circulation, as much as fixity, fashions a geographical imagination wherein emplacement allows for a knowledge of caste identities (Mosse 2012: 99).

My initial wonder at people's ability to make that jump from place to caste gave way as I immersed myself in the habitus that is the fieldworker's location. Like residents, I too moved between villages and urban neighbourhoods. I read newspapers, watched television, and listened to the incessant analysis and discussion of media reports in local tea-stalls, fields, and homes. I peered out from bus windows to see hoardings that announced life-crisis rituals, and political meetings. I read (or glanced at) wall posters announcing temple renovations and festivals. I saw various caste associations holding meetings or organising roadblocks. I moved through urban, semi-urban, and rural landscapes, and built environments where wall-colours signified political parties (some of which were caste-specific formations). Each of these actions generated certain kinds of cognitive connections between places and people. Individuals also make these connections through marriages and alliances, through fellow workers and students, each practice and person bringing their own knowledge of places, castes, and place-caste relations.

The short journey from *ūr* to *ā/ka!* involves many travel mates. Help is provided by the non-discursive elements of every social encounter. An individual's dress, bodily comportment, speech, dialect, language, education, and occupation provide clues to her caste. The Madurai street vendor may have guessed Andi

Thevar's caste through the reference to Usilampatti as well as Andi's gestures, speech, and comportment. As Andi explained, 'From the way we say "we are Usilampatti *āḷka!*," with so much emphasis and stress, [they] will know that we are Kallar. Who else from Usilampatti can be so rough, so fierce, so threatening?'

Another aid is the web of relatives a person spins and makes known during interactions. After naming their *conta ūr*, individuals (particularly those from dominant castes) could name a big-man or a well-known political leader from their village or region and then add, 'I am his relative (*contakāraṅ*).' Once Senthil named his *conta ūr*, he mentioned his family members to that village big-man. The kin Senthil named were successful and well-known individuals – a grandfather who had been a '*kirāma* munsip, nattanmaikarar,' and an uncle who was a top-ranking police officer.

Senthil might have wanted to establish his own lineages and access to power while interacting with the big-man. Yet this was a common conversational frame. This approach allows people to disclose their caste identity *and* provide a measure of their own kin circle. If all else fails, there is always the direct question 'What *āḷka!* are you?' to take recourse to.

Kuṇam, Varalāru, and an Ūr's Notoriety

Places have reputations. This is true of London boroughs. Peckham Rye and St John's Woods have different 'characters.' This is true of entire cities. Detroit and New York, and Newcastle and London have different 'characters.' This is just as true of regions. In England, a vibrant South East is opposed to a dying North. Many anthropologists (Gordillo 2004, Munn 1986, Feld 1996, Basso 1996) and cultural and social geographers have revealed place to be a 'locus of imaginaries' (Harvey 1996: 294).

In parts of the northern Indian plains and western India (Pocock 1972), village-ranking accompanies village exogamy as considerations in the search for alliances. Likewise, in the Tamil region, village reputation influences marriage circles of castes and lineages. During their search for alliances, my own relatives avoid entire villages – some because they are full of drunks; others because my caste members are divided along religious identities; while yet others are simply dismissed for being

rotten places. But marriages are not the only realm in which village reputation plays a role. A place's reputation influences work, residence, and travel decisions.

Many of Madurai's non-Kallar and Kallar residents take entire Kallarnatu to be a place of lawlessness and disorder. Within Kallarnatu, some villages were thought to be more 'notorious' than others were. Many individuals, including Kallar men and women, warned me about Kallarnatu's 'interior' villages. I was advised against travelling alone to villages far from highways or other busy roads.

Proximity to urban centres and road networks were thought to redeem places from affinity to violence. Yet this view was regularly contradicted. We have seen that Usilampatti was itself suspect. It is seen as prone to violence, ready to stage public enactments of machismo and caste dominance. Likewise, Kallar dominated neighbourhoods – such as Karimedu and Sellur – in Madurai city were considered fearsome places. Taking crime reports as his source, Dumont had concluded that, barring 'villages close to Madurai,' the most dangerous Kallar lived in Madurai city; these were 'people who have left their villages to come and work in the spinning mills' (1986: 31). Neighbourhoods such as Karimedu and Sellur are firmly positioned in this geography of fear because of their Kallar residents. Dumont interpreted such areas' crime statistics as symptomatic of emergent class relations and city life. He writes, 'Here the criminal cases reveal that the phenomenon goes beyond caste, for it applies to a sort of nascent industrial proletariat for whom the traditional rules of the caste are yielding to the promiscuity of living conditions and work' (ibid). These geographies of feeling reveal that absolute and relative locations do not subsume representational spaces.

Kallar dominated villages such as Malaiur did not lose their notoriety simply because they were closer to the city, the centre of civilization, refinement, culture. Non-Malaiur Kallar alleged that Malaiur was a terrifying village (*payaṅkaramāna ūr*). Thus, in addition to being criticised for choosing a field-site peripheral to Kallarnatu, I was also thought to be too audacious in basing myself in Malaiur. Take middle-aged Indiran, one of the first to suggest I rethink my choice on the second basis. Indiran's life history encapsulated the colonial state's diverse reform efforts targeting the Piramalai Kallar community. His father's family had moved from their Kallarnatu

village to present-day Theni district. Their relocation was entangled with colonial history; many Kallar families migrated due to severe famine in the nineteenth-century, while others were placed in an agrarian settlement set up in the early-twentieth-century to deter 'criminal tendencies' (A. Pandian 2009).

Indiran had grown up in Theni and attended a Kallar school there. There were over 250 such schools in Madurai, Dindigul, and Theni districts. These schools are a legacy of the CTA and attendant efforts to 'reform' the community. When we met in 2007, Indiran was teaching at a Kallar school near Usilampatti. That day, Indiran said he had retraced his grandparents' movement when his employment brought him back to Kallarnatu. Our discussions touched upon Kallar migration out of Kallarnatu; migrant families' religious, economic, and kinship ties with their *nāṭu* and *ūr*; Kallar social mobility; and the policies that most Kallar individuals identified as having transformed their region, place, caste, and *kuṇam*.

When I informed Indiran that I had decided to work on Malaiur, he responded by saying that I had thrust my hand into a tiger's mouth. Since I had already heard others denote Malaiur (and its neighbouring villages) as Kallarnatu's gateway, I thought Indiran was positioning the *ūr* in relation to *nāṭu*. But his response was idiomatic. He advised me to be vigilant throughout my interaction with Malaiur since it was a thieving village (*kaḷavāṇi ūr*), where everyone was a thief until recently. True, its residents had reformed (*tiruttu*), he said, but a transformation of *ūr kuṇam* would take *time*, a lot of *time*. Indiran also stated that some Kallarnatu *ūr* had changed considerably, while others had not. He was not alone in suggesting that caste *kuṇam* varied across Kallarnatu *ūr*.

From his field-site, the 'relatively orderly and peaceful' village of Tengalapatti further away from Madurai city, Dumont observed that 'there is an uneven distribution of the surviving traditional lifestyle, which is particularly concentrated in a few places' (1986: 30). Here, Dumont takes the Kallar 'traditional lifestyle' of delinquency to be unevenly distributed and links this variance with mid-twentieth-century urbanisation patterns. Indiran, however, justified the common perception of Malaiur's *kuṇam* by evoking the order in which the CTA was imposed on Kallar –

Malaiur being one of the first Kallarnatu villages to be notified under the CTA (A. Pandian 2009: 263).

The entire caste was notified in 1918 but Malaiur's adult male Kallar were notified some years earlier. Conceived of as the 'headquarters of the Kallans,' colonial officials held that the notification of villages such as Malaiur would help controlling crime (cattle-lifting, highway robbery, grain looting) in the region. Malaiur's current residents submit that a large part of their village's notoriety derived from its proximity to the city. In their view, the Act's sole aim was the repression of their fathers and grandfathers, many of whom had provided *kāval* or watching services in Madurai's streets.

Many state that Malaiur was the first village in Madras Presidency to be notified under the Act.⁵ The colonial archive provides one kind of representation of Malaiur and other Kallar villages – as places requiring special surveillance because of their existing notoriety. The field, however, discloses another representation wherein Malaiur's current notoriety is partly an outcome of the notification. Collective memory represents the CTA as having criminalised not only the Piramalai Kallar, adding to the construction of caste *kuṇam*, but also entire villages.

Drawing from colonial reports and Tengalapatti residents' perceptions, Dumont concluded that Kallar *kuṇam* was concentrated in certain villages. We here notice colonial conceptions entwining with Tengalapatti Kallar's perception of these villages. Sixty years since Dumont's research, Malaiur continued to be perceived as an *ūr* thick with Kallar *kuṇam*. In the village itself, the gloss on *kuṇam* often shifted from crime to valour. Within that library of annotations, *ūr* Kallar cited themselves as the truest representatives and heirs of Kallar *kuṇam* and *varalāru* or history.

What we have seen so far is that history is seldom an outside to essence. Instead, the two constantly circulate and collapse into each other. It is partly through such a traffic in *kuṇam* and *varalāru* that the *ūr* emerges as a lived space. I was to hear many narratives of this traffic. For instance, history and essence were

⁵ Many of Madras Presidency's itinerant social groups were notified under the Act (Radhakrishna 2001). Nonetheless, many Kallar believe that their caste was the Act's primary target.

transmuted into space through local expositions of toponyms and place-names. One evening in May 2008, Malaiur resident Rasangam attributed meanings to place-names of neighbouring villages. This elderly Kallar man spoke of a time not long gone when

Travellers passed through Kallarnatu with thudding hearts. As they drew away from Madurai city, fear would come on its own, descend on them, even before they entered the domain of thieves. This place, where they were seized (*parru*) by dread (*acham*), is the village called Achampathu. What can they do? They had to somehow overcome the fear, and rush through Kallarnatu. How to do this? They would urge and whip and drive (*virattu*) the bulls pulling their carts. This place comes after Achampattu. This place, where they would begin to drive their bulls ruthlessly, is the village known as Virattipathu.

I was eager to hear Rasangam's explanation of other villages' names. But he bypassed many villages on this route, and arrived at Malaiur. In response to my 'What happens next?' he resorted to a 'What else, do you think we will let them go? A truly thieving village (*kaḷavāṇi ūr*).' Rasangam stressed that Achampattu and Virattipathu were not even Kallarnatu villages. They had derived their names simply by virtue of their location near his own *ūr*.

Rasangam located his *ūr* in a network of places, 'named places [which] are not only the environment of experience... [but] also objectifications of previous experience and process' (Myers 2002: 105). But while history may be appended to caste and place *kuṇam* in representational space, caste dispositions and place characteristics were also perceived as resistant to change.

Rasangam and other Malaiur Kallar forwarded metonymic relation between person and place by stating, 'Our *kuṇam* is our *ūr kuṇam*.' They thus represented themselves at Malaiur's centre. Dominant castes were more prone than lower-castes to equate caste and place *kuṇam*. The same *ūr* could be the locus of different imaginaries for different individuals and social groups. So what kind of imaginaries is Malaiur a locus of? How do Malaiur residents remember their *ūr*'s past? What kind of reputations has the *ūr* garnered?

One morning in January 2008, when I was on my way to Malaiur, I ran into Selvi, a Kallar woman in her late-forties, whom I had earlier met at a life-crisis ritual.

Sharing a seat during our bus journey, Selvi regaled me with stories of Malaiur. I was already familiar with Malaiur's reputation, but found Selvi's account of this *ūr* remarkable in many ways. For one, she was pleased with my choice of field-site. This was different from the criticisms I usually met with. Secondly, Selvi asserted that I could ask her anything I wished to know about her *ūr*. Although it was her *conta ūr*, it was surprising that Selvi identified Malaiur as 'her' village; married women normally identified with their husband's *conta ūr*. Thirdly, Selvi repeatedly asserted that she knew everything there was to know about Malaiur. I would realise later that Selvi was one of the few women to associate themselves readily and directly with ethnographic projects.

Assertions of being repositories of knowledge, assigning themselves as researchers' main 'informants' were male prerogatives. Men had prior experiences of being informants, had their own modes of 'objectification and self-reflection,' and had taught themselves to respond to anthropologists' demands for 'explicit self-conscious translation' of these 'into external medium' (Rabinow 1977: 119). Men more readily abstracted from their immediate and routine surroundings, to speak in terms of caste, custom, culture, and *kuṇam*. Astute participants in the dialogic process of ethnographic knowledge creation, men often acted consciously to steer and control the representations of their caste.

I found that women were less inclined to do so. True, they too spoke in terms of caste, custom, culture, and *kuṇam*. Yet when asked to formally extrapolate on these, most women directed me to men – normally towards Liaison Officer Arumugam and others with a reputation of being learned members of village and caste – with the greatest experience in the art of informing. My repeated attempts to turn women into 'key informants' – while recording interviews – fell through the interstices of caste and gender.

Thus it was atypical for a woman to state that she knew everything about Malaiur and was ready to share this knowledge with me. When Selvi offered to help with my research, I wished to explore her links with Malaiur. Did she live there? Selvi clarified, no, but it was her *conta ūr*. Selvi had grown up in Malaiur. She then married a textile mill worker and moved to a small rented house in Madurai city, where they

had brought up their children, two sons and a daughter. They met household, medical, and educational expenses, somehow juggling with the husband's wages. Selvi hoped to supplement the household income through money lending but her husband, a communist, prohibited her from doing so. (There are various frameworks in the Tamil region from which to launch a moral attack against usury, and one of these relates to communism).

Until her husband's death eight years ago, Selvi's attempts to turn into a moneylender had to be undertaken with a degree of stealth. She had pawned her jewels to raise money, which she released into the usury circuits through her brothers, three of whom lived in Malaiur and were part-time moneylenders. After her husband's death, her brothers helped Selvi buy a plot in a new residential colony about four kilometres from Malaiur. Utilising the interest accrued through small-scale usury, Selvi also constructed a house on this plot.

In my later fieldwork period, I often ran into Selvi (or one of her sons) when she (or they) visited Malaiur to track down borrowers or to meet the brothers (or uncles) through whom the borrowers could be 'persuaded' to meet the hyper-social 'contract' of extra-legal transactions. Selvi and her brothers epitomised the usury that Malaiur was known for, in which *ūr* reputation and caste *kuṇam* played an important role. But here are a few snippets from that conversation which are relevant to the discussion of history, essence, and Malaiur's reputation.

Selvi: What sort of an *ūr* do you think mine is! It troubled the white man [*veḷḷaikkāraṅ*] so much that for this *ūr* alone, he built a road, constructed a jail, passed laws... Have you seen [the road, jail, and other related structures]?

Dhivya: Not all of them.

Selvi: Had you gone with me, I would have taken you to these places... The *kairēkai caṭṭam* ['Fingerprint Act,' the Criminal Tribes Act], the white man created it just for my *ūr*. An *ūr famous* for robbery. To somehow bring this *ūr* under their rule. This is why the white man brought such laws. Was it any use, doing all that? [No way, she gestured]. We still thieved, kept on thieving.

Dhivya: What, even now?

Selvi: No, but even now, everyone looks at this *ūr* with fear. What else? Was it only the white man who feared our *ūr*? [The same gestures of negation]. It has brought entire Kallarnatu under its control.

Selvi then positioned her *ūr* in a sacred matrix. She spoke first of the *ūr* Karuppu koil, a temple shared by Malaiur and Tenur. These two villages are administered separately; Malaiur and Tenur are today distinct *kirāmam*. Like others, Selvi used the term *tāykkirāmam* – ‘mother village’ – to denote Tenur as the principal village of Malaiur.

Selvi: Karuppu *koil* was once part of Tenur. But slowly, because of our *strength* and display of power, it became our *koil*. City folk might not even have heard of Tenur. But our Malaiur is very *famous*. Many know the Karuppu temple. Ask anyone, [they will say] it belongs to Malaiur. Today, it is Malaiur that receives *mutalmāi* in the temple.

Selvi then counted other sacred spaces in which Malaiur had gained *mutalmāi*. It is noteworthy that although Selvi shifted from events in colonial history to the sacred realm, she retained an emphasis on process and power. Selvi evoked a sacral matrix in motion.

This cautions us against theoretical models where an all-encompassing religion or an immanent spiritual authority subsumes temporal power as well as theories that split religion and politics into two distinct realms. Historians and anthropologists have stressed that south Indian temples are not just reflector-sites for social relations. As sites of power, south Indian temples’ ‘features are synthesized... unique(ly), both in cultural and structural terms (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976: 189). Temples undergird precolonial social relations, and shaped patterns of dominance, authority, and differentiation (Dirks 1989). In present-day festivals and rituals, we glimpse how social groups continue to regard temples as important grounds for assertion and resistance (Mines 2005). It is no surprise that sacred space is evoked in narratives about caste and place.

Let us pay attention to the terms with which Selvi denoted village–temple relations. When talking about the Tenur-temple relation, Selvi used the word

cērantatu. But she used the word *contam* when linking Malaiur to the Karuppu temple, stating that the temple now belongs to Malaiur. The word *cērantatu* suggests that the temple was joined with, part of, and blended with Tenur. The word easily summons the ‘synecdochal and metonymic associations’ (Mines 2005: 32) between *ūr*, *ūr*-temple, and *ūr*-people. Malaiur residents also used the word to convey their *ūr*’s relationship with the temple. But *contam* allows for greater assertion and extension of these associations; the word connotes exclusive ownership, rights, and belonging. The temple only became Malaiur’s *contam*, residents say, due to *ūr tāṭṭiyam* (coercion, force, aggression).

Malaiur’s mobility and assertion has enabled it to obtain *mutalmāi*, to be honoured earlier rather than later at temple festivals. Malaiur residents admitted, as Selvi had, that their *ūr* had only recently acquired this firstness. They did not think money-incomes or economic prosperity had automatically generated *mutalmāi*. Their stories accounted for a firstness obtained through power struggle. And *ūr varalāru* and *kuṇam* had key roles in the stories of these struggles. Selvi culminated her talk of Malaiur’s notoriety by looping history and essence, saying, ‘Like the white man, Kallarnatu shivers at (the sight of) Malaiur.’

By sharing stories, memories, lullabies, and so on, Malaiur residents participated in an ongoing process of place-making. They actively emplaced selves that were already place-immersed. The point is, although individuals provided their own sequences and stresses, fragments and finishing touches, their narratives showcased persistent entanglements of *kuṇam* and *varalāru*. The next section utilises one particular narrative as a hinge to open wider this discussion between history and essence.

Malaiur’s Past (*Ūr Varalāru*)

One morning, end of February 2008, I found Sunda Thevar sitting in the shade of a tree near the Karuppu temple. Sunda Thevar, along with other elderly Kallar men, spent his days there. Here, he was close to home, food, temple, and friends, and to the stop from which he occasionally caught a bus to visit a doctor.

Sunda Thevar was a gentle and generous Kallar man in his mid-nineties. An equally gentle piety characterised him. He often indicated Malaiur's singularity through notions of sacredness, partaking in a sacred framework he shared with other residents *and* bringing to his narrative his personal piety. That February morning, however, his account took off from colonial history and Malaiur's location in a geography of fear intensified through this history.

Since the beginning, many people of this *ūr* were into theft and burglary. All Thevar *āḷka!* So, its name entered the *gazette*. That it was a thieving *ūr*. During the white man's rule... when the *British* come and rule Madurai... he hears about this *ūr*. Then, he thinks, 'Have to somehow reform (*cīrtiruttam*) these thieves, have to look after that *ūr*' and comes here.

There were no roads then. Only cart tracks. Only the ridges of fields that made do as pathways. The white man comes wandering.

At this point, Sunda Thevar stops to interact with some visitors. When he resumes, some details alter. The generic 'white man' becomes a Superintendent of Police on horseback ('no cars, no vehicles, in those days').

He comes, sees the *ūr*. Lo! Just as they said, there is no *olukkam* (orderliness, decorum), no *mariyātai* (civility, respect). What does the white man do? He calls some important *ūr* men, men with title and land (*paṭṭātār*) and asks, 'What do you do? How does the *ūr* live?' They speak truthfully, 'We survive by thieving.' This is true. Everyone used to thief then. Only one in a hundred did not. This was the profession (*tolil*) of every child born here.

The white man beckons a thirty-five-year-old man, and asks what his *tolil* is. This Malaiur chap does not know English. Lifting all five fingers of one hand, he says, 'Since I was five, I have been in the thieving profession (*tiruṭṭu tolil*).' The white man asks, 'Is that so? What do you steal? How do you steal?'

Sunda Thevar then proceeded to sing the man's reply. Here is a translation.

At five, I started thieving. That was the beginning. By twenty, I committed a major theft. Even if the *British* come with the wind's speed, I will seize whatever they come on and fling it to the ground. Even if men, the police, come hither and tither, I will hit and split open their heads. The jewels women wear on their necks, their ears, I steal all those jewels.

Sunda Thevar stops singing but continues.

That chap goes on and on like this. The white man asks, ‘So, what kind of *kirāmam* is yours?’ To that, he says, ‘The directions (*tisai*) are four; the cardinal points (*tikku*) are four. This *ūr*’s name and fame is known in all eight directions (*aṣṭa-tikku*), all the continents, and all the nine regions.’ The white man asks, ‘How is that? Speak.’

Again, Sunda Thevar sings the Malaiur man’s reply.

This Malaiur of great renown,
to see it, a thousand
eyes are needed.
To the Malai Karuppana-
sami guarding it, three
poojais daily.
The light from
Alagar, Subramanium and
Meenakshi falls here.
We worship them directly,
can see them from here.

Gesturing in the directions of these temples, Sunda Thevar says, ‘Look! Light from Alagar *koil*, Meenambikai *koil*, Velayudham Subramaniyar *koil* reaches the Karuppusami *koil*. We obtain *taricaṇam* of those three right here.’ The reference to *taricaṇam* or sight is suggestive of the powerful sensory exchanges between devotee and deity in Hinduism. Sunda Thevar continues. ‘It is in such a place that Malaiur was created. Not only that...’ (Sunda Thevar continues to sing about the *ūr*)

In this seven-
oceans-ringed earth,
throughout,
it is renowned.
This *ūr* ascends through praise.

‘This *ūr*’s name [and fame] is known in all the cities in all four directions, in all the *kirāmam* surrounding these cities,’ says Sunda Thevar. ‘Known even today. Is that not why the *British* came here, to this *ūr*? What they did for this *ūr*, they did not do for any other. They kept in mind information from all *nāṭu*, and then did so much. In this sort of *ūr*, everyone accepted that, ‘Yes, here, we have been thieving all along.’

The white man again asks, ‘How do you steal?’ The man (from Malaiur) speaks about one theft. When two men tried to steal a goat from a place near a city temple. There, surrounded by high walls, goats were reared, guarded. Someone spotted them just as they were leaving with one goat. Just as they were scaling the high wall. That goatherd caught one thief. The one carrying the goat. The other thief

was already on the wall's ledge. From there, he clasped his companion's hand and pulled. Pulled and pulled. Goat, goatherd, and thief, all three landed outside. A single man yanks and tosses these three on the other side. Such strength.

The white man understands. 'So, is that how you steal?' 'Yes, that is how they stole.' What the white man does, he challenges the *ūr*. Within a month, they are to take a chest from a bank near the Meenakshi temple. At that place, where the bank was in those days, there is a police station today. The *ūr* accepts the white man's challenge. Just as the month ends, one thief goes there. Waits for the guards to rub their eyes in sleep. Goes inside the bank. That chest, it is huge. He carries it out of the bank. But he cannot carry it all the way to the *ūr*. So he goes into the Meenakshi temple, throws the chest into the pond, and returns to the *ūr*. The day breaks. In the bank, they see, 'Oh! The chest is not here. Surely, it is stolen by the chap in that *ūr* which had accepted the challenge.'

They come to the *ūr*. That thief, his name was Pekkathi Kaluvathevan. They say, 'Adey Kaluva, stealing from there is indeed a great deed. But now, you must return that chest.' He agrees. Goes to the Meenakshi temple, throws the chest out of the pond. They ask what he wants as a reward. 'Whatever you want, tell, [we shall] give [it].'

Sunda Thevar then envisages and shares with me a few probabilities. 'That day, had Pekkathi Kaluvan asked for all of Madurai's *porampōkku* (*purampōkku*) *nilam* [wastelands, uncultivable lands, 'outside' lands, classified as 'Poromboke' lands], they would have given it. But

Pekkathi says, 'I don't want any of that. In this town, there is an oil press. If I and my descendants get oil from that mill on all my festival days – that is enough.'

'Now, that,' Sunda Thevar suggests, 'that is a thieving chap's wisdom. Near this railway track,' he says, gesturing towards a track passing near Malaiur, 'even now, there is unclaimed land. Had they given us deeds to all that land, this entire *kirāmam* would have lived well. That day, they said no to land. Then, this land was lying unused. Uncultivable. Nothing. "If we ask for this land, we will not get anything. Who will look after it? Who will pay taxes (*kisti*)?" Thinking so, he asks for oil!'

Sunda Thevar then linked place and caste characteristics. Saying, 'That thievishness, that thieving *kuṇam*. Didn't think of land as important,' he immediately spoke of CTA.

'Then, only after that did the *British*, the white man come to this *ūr* to take fingerprints (*rēkai*). Came and took the fingerprints of all the men above 18 years. For identification. After that, if anyone from this *kirāmam* wants to spend the night in the next *kirāmam*, he has to approach authorities (*kirāma muṇcip, nāṭṭāmai, talaiyāri*) in both villages and give them that *record*. He has to get their signatures. Only if these signatures are there, "He stayed in this place, on this day..." If this is written... if you are without this, and they catch you, then straightaway, *case* [legal case and imprisonment]. If they file a case... Those enquiries... Those lawyers... No one could do anything. They will ask, 'At the time of the roll-call (*hācil*), were you in another *kirāmam*?' Saying 'yes' was not enough. If you did not have that *record*, punishment. Three months. And a fine. This is what is known as CTA (*kairēkai caṭṭam*). That *British*, that white man, he came and started taking *rēkai* everywhere in 1918.

Sunda Thevar had began his account by referring to an encounter between the *ūr* and a white man. At one point, he specified the 'white man' as a Superintendent of Police (SP). Some other villagers' versions of this encounter likewise particularised the white man. In end-April 2008, when Tenur resident Kannan asked me to record Malaiur's history, he started with the dramatic words, 'Having killed a Sub-Inspector...' Specifying the white man's designation highlighted Malaiur's importance. No lowly beat-constable for this renowned village; only top officials visited Malaiur, their own position in the colonial bureaucracy matching the *ūr* and *ūr* Kallar's importance.

Three other versions did not mention the policeman's designation, but stressed that he was killed by irate villagers. In these accounts, the murdered white man had visited Malaiur *after* the village was notified under the CTA; he was not conducting inquiries but initiating the registration of adult Kallar men.

In Sunda Thevar's version, when the Superintendent of Police arrived at Malaiur, *ūr* Kallar readily admitted to thieving, and introduced him to a geographical imaginary that co-mingled notoriety, fame, and sacrality. Despite *ūr* Kallar's repositioning of Malaiur in an absolute space, the Superintendent doggedly pursues his queries on crime. Other narratives about Malaiur's past allude to colonial representatives consolidating an array of property and social relations. The grain of local interpretation is to read the CTA as colonisers' tactic in the battle over

sovereignty but the narratives contain hints to wide-ranging material interests embedded in the Act.

The *Ūr* in Sacred Geographies

This oft-narrated episode must have occurred in the late colonial period. Yet for Kallar residents, *ūr* reputation does not simply emanate from its location in colonial space. Malaiur's fame is taken to predate its designation as a 'thieving *ūr*.' Pekkathi Kaluvathevar, the colonial subject named in Sunda Thevar's narrative, positions his *ūr* in older geographies. Through the stress on specific spatial orientations and directions, and the cardinal points traced outwards from Malaiur, Pekkathi emplotted the *ūr* in sacred geography.

At first glance, the account of *ūr* reputation mirrors spatial themes in post-Vedic or *puranic* texts. When we are told that the *ūr* is renowned in all the eight directions, in all the islands or island-continent separated by oceans, and in all nine regions, we are transported within the reaches of a geography in which 'the earth consists of seven concentric island-continent, each surrounded by an ocean' (Selvi and Peterson 2008: 8). Yet protracted interactions between Sanskritic and Tamil cosmologies transformed regional conceptions of space and place.⁶

Both Selvi and Sunda Thevar moved from events in political and social history to religious notions and practices. Also, Sunda Thevar elaborately sketched one aspect of what Selvi had summarised in her short account of Malaiur – the intimate relations between south Indian religion and polity. Both Selvi and Sunda Thevar charted out their *ūr*'s location within sacred geographies of differing magnitudes. Both accounts emphasised the localisation of sacredness and deities in the Tamil region. While Sunda Thevar narrated Malaiur's location within a broader network of sacred places and scales, Selvi's account was more localised. Selvi concentrated on *ūr* and *nāṭu* temples, providing no reference to Madurai's renowned temples.

Sunda Thevar emphasised the flows between the *ūr* Karuppu temple and Madurai's important temples. He first pointed towards the city's northeast and the

⁶ Examining space, place, property, and polity under medieval Cola rule, historian Daud Ali writes, 'the assumptions [in Cola accounts]... were not part of some generalized Indian worldview but rather parts of a specific group of conceptions that held sway at the courts of early medieval India' (2008: 120).

Alagar temple dedicated to Visnu. He then indicated Madurai's centre and the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple, which is more closely associated with Meenakshi than with Siva. He finally pointed towards the city's southwest and the Tirupparankunram Skanda temple dedicated to Murugan. The temples' current complexes or structures evolved from much older shrines at these sites. Linked with Madurai's Pantiya kings, all three temples are also associated with the later Nayaka rule that brought about many changes to their built form and festival cycles (Hudson 1977, Fuller 1984, Branfoot 2004).

Relations between Piramalai Kallar and Madurai Nayakas are a recurrent theme in collective memory, rivalled in importance only by the community's relations with the colonial state. By networking *ūr* and Madurai temples, Sunda Thevar interlinked political and sacred geographies. These geographies were constructed with 'tools of metonymy' not unique to the Tamil region (see, e.g. Inden 1990: 257).

Singing of Malaiur's fame, Sunda Thevar re-enacted another regional theme important to kingship. Famous emperors in the south Asian region conquered space (*digvijayam*) when their representatives (horses, horsemen, armies) passed unchallenged or victorious through all realms in all directions. Malaiur conquered representational spaces when its fame spread outwards in all directions, continents, and regions, and across oceans. This made the *ūr* so powerful that one needed a thousand eyes to partake of its worth.

Sunda Thevar sang of a sacredness localised through landscape. The visibility of Madurai's bigger temples from Malaiur augmented the Karuppu temple's sacredness. These were sensuous links – since the light from the bigger temples are refracted to the *ūr* temple, those wishing to 'see' these deities need not go to the temples. That highly agentive sight or *taricaṇam* (here meaning the visual exchanges between divine and human beings) can occur from the *ūr* temple itself. Such a telling exalted Malaiur's location in a hierarchy of places by linking it to other sacred sites widely acknowledged as superior and more powerful.

This refracted *taricaṇam* corresponds to socio-spatial relations that have retained many features from earlier social formations termed as segmentary polities (Stein 1980) or alternatively, as imperial formations (Inden 1990). The past does not

simply exist as traces of a pre-capitalist past. Rather, they are aspects of contemporary realities considerably reworked through capitalist development, the latter likewise predicated upon these social relations.

At times, residents mentioned Malaiur's symbiotic links with the Meenakshi temple. Their *ūr* was *inām* land, tax-free gifts to a priest of this temple.⁷ A folksong known to older Kallar women in the village refers us to those older relations, and their contemporary expression in temple festivals. When a Kallar woman in her fifties, Annakili, sang of the votive terracotta horses periodically installed in the *ūr* temple –

Taking clay from the banks,
making horses for Karuppu,
for the five Thevars, five horses,
the first horse, the *paṭṭattu kutirai*

– her verse traced links between the five brothers from whom the *ūr*'s main Kallar lineages traced their descent and the recipient of the first horse. This song describes a ceremony resembling one Dumont observed in another Kallarnatu location. That ceremony required the installation of at least seven horses. Six horses represented the six 'residential clusters.' The seventh horse was known as the *paṭṭattu kutirai*, translated by Dumont as the 'titled horse' (1986: 442). Annakili and others said the horse was called thus because it was the 'Brahmin priest's horse.' Through this horse, the *ūr* honoured the *paṭṭar*, the Meenakshi temple priest who had been gifted the village lands. Older land and labour relations and social spaces still find expression in the realm of honours.

Landscapes of Self and Other

Malaiur residents often summoned aspects of our immediate landscape to emphasise, localise, and enrich their myths, stories, and memories. They did so when I sat down with a tape recorder. (The recorder not only served as a mnemonic device, it magically rendered me a good researcher – my interlocutors took almost

⁷ Marnadu, a Malaiur Vannan ('washerman'), said his family had held *māṇiyam* land in neighbouring villages, land his ancestors had obtained as *kāṇi* for services provided in the Tirupparankunram temple. The services he counted were similar to those for which Vannan caste members elsewhere (Dirks 1987: 428) received grants.

everything else I did to be wasteful walking and talking). They paid similar heed to landscape during '*veṭṭi pēccu*,' 'useless' or 'empty' talk with which they passed time (and which I seldom recorded).

With each mention of a landscape feature, there were reverberations of ancestors, kings, lineage and village founders, gods and heroes, brave and honourable women, loving sisters, clever and powerful thieves. Conversations were marked by statements such as: 'These footprints on our hill – Rama stopped here on his way to search for and bring back Sita;' 'Do you know that this canal [at Koothiyarkundu, a place between Malaiur and the city's centre]? Tirumalai Nayaka constructed it because one of his concubines who was from that village asked him to do so;' 'There, by that banyan tree, Karuppusami humbled a proud ancestor of ours returning from a successful robbery by showing that gods surpass men in everything, including stealing;' 'It was into that field's well that a woman born in Malaiur jumped when her husband's family dishonoured her brothers.'

Landscape is integral to good stories, which 'acquire part of their mythic value and historical relevance if they are rooted in the concrete details of locales in the landscape, acquiring material reference points that can be visited, seen and touched' (Tilley 1994: 33). A considerable number of Malaiur residents – Kallar residents, particularly – who spoke to me about their *ūr*'s past or reputation, utilised landscape to locate their village in broad sweeps of regions, countries, and cosmologies. A recurrent landscape feature in these accounts was Nagamalai – Snake Hill – an almost continuous rocky stretch passing near Malaiur. Villagers drew mythic connections between Nagamalai and the Jain Hill closer to Malaiur. They looped Madurai's *talapurāṇam* or 'place-history' with recent archaeological investigations of inscriptions etched into the Jain Hill.

Place-histories or *talapurāṇam*, usually codifications of existing oral narratives and retaining many of the characteristics of their sources (Shulman 1980b), and oral legends of localised temples and deities infuse Tamil print cultures. Individuals I met in diverse locations in Madurai – in old neighbourhoods within the city, new suburban colonies, Malaiur, and other villages – sometimes broke from conversations to point towards some hills. They would recount legends forming the

corpus of one of Madurai's most famous place-histories, namely the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam*, or *Siva's Sacred Games* (Harman 1989)

This text serves as the *talapurāṇam* (Sanskrit *sthalapurāṇam*) of the Meenakshi temple and, through metonymic association, of Madurai. Attributed to the early-seventeenth-century poet Parañcōti Muṇivar, other versions of this place-history continue to be printed and distributed extensively. Some episodes from the text circulate more widely. It is as though Madurai's landscape and place-names elicited the circulation of these very episodes. Versions also circulate in other media. One is the oft-broadcasted Tamil film *Thiruvilaiyadal* (1965), starring popular actor Sivaji Ganesan in Siva's role, a successful mythological drama focusing on a handful of the text's sixty-four episodes.

By retelling episodes focusing on topographical features in their vicinity, Malaiur residents reproduced the long-standing regional emphasis on place-orientation, place-histories, and the sacrality of specific places. Once, when I was at a tea-stall near the Karuppu temple, a group of Malaiur Kallar men began to trade stories about local appearances of deities. Some of them recollected an incident they had witnessed a few months earlier from the same spot, when a little boy appeared out of nowhere, warned them about four village boys who were, unnoticed by them, drowning in the temple's pond, and disappeared. They surmised that this boy was none other than Virumandi, an important Kallar deity – they had not seen him earlier, they never saw him since, and he was fair, good-looking, just like Virumandi *cāmi*. When one of the men, getting up to leave, rounded off the talk with a 'This is a lucky place,' another corrected him – 'No. It is a sacred place.' This second man was the son of Virumandi *cāmiyāṭi*, known thus because he danced the god Virumandi. A third man, Karuppiyah, pointed to the hill, and asked if I had paid it any attention. I was not sure what he meant. 'There are many writings (inscriptions) on the hill. Samanar (Jains) lived here, many, many years ago.' A fourth villager addressed him – 'Yenpa, if Jains lived in the cave [in the hill], they will also be buried somewhere here.' They were not buried, Karuppiyah emphatically stated. Rounded up by the *Pāṇṭiya manṇan*, a Pantiya king, ordered that all the monks be rounded. The monks were then taken to Madurai city and impaled. Karuppiyah continued:

Once, long ago, Samanar lived in most of the hills surrounding Madurai. What were they doing there? They were creating demons! *Idho*, here, (pointing in the direction of these three hills) look, this Nagamalai here, that Anaimalai ('Elephant Hill'), and that Pasumalai ('Cow Hill') there. Those Samanar created three huge monsters – a serpent, an elephant, and a cow. *Yenma*, you must have seen them. Anyone looking at the Anaimalai will see an elephant. And this Pasumalai – looks like it was born with a horn to tear the sky apart. All these were monsters created by the Samanar. They wanted to destroy Madurai. What could the Pantiya king do? He called Siva to rescue the city. Siva came. Came and cut the serpent into three pieces. Sent Nandi (Siva's vehicle, a bull) to the cow. Turned the elephant into stone. All these were turned into stone by Siva. This way, Siva protected Madurai. In later times, this same Nagamalai protected us from enemies.

Paralleling other religious traditions where 'sacred stories are imprinted in the landscape' (Eliade in Harman 1989: 35) in retelling these episodes from the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam*, my interlocutors immersed landscape within a sacred geography. According to one reading, it is through these features and episodes that the text emerged as so powerful a place-history, codifying and extending the reach and circulation of particular conceptions of space, place, cosmology, and landscape. The account I heard in Malaiur that day ended when the narrator looped these sacred geographies into Kallarnatu. By suggesting that Nagamalai was not simply Kallarnatu's 'natural boundary' but a vestige from Siva's protection of Madurai, he was turning the hill into a 'reminder of and testimon[y] to Siva's involvement in their past, and perhaps more important, in their present experience of the world' (Harman 1989: 35).

Such narratives emphasise specific self-other relations. The Pantiya king could only save his kingdom because Siva heeded his plea. Jain monks appear as evil beings who 'grew' monsters out of sacrificial fires. From this, a framework is routinely drawn wherein Saivism becomes the Tamils' true religion; Siva and, by association, the Pantiya king emerge as the Tamil country's true patrons and defenders; and Tamil itself achieves greatness through divine and courtly patronage. The stories I heard echoed the 'standard historical narrative concerning South Indian Jainism and Saivism, which tells a story of heterodox challenge and Hindu revival and triumph' (Davis 1998: 214). Early and medieval Tamil narratives, with their many references to

Jain-Saivaite encounters, posit Jains as the absolute other (and as Peterson [1998] shows, an alien Other) of a 'Tamil' self. Tamil personhood was constituted through constant exchange between deities, rulers, humans, and the environment. While these imaginaries reveal relational identities and processes, an absolute characterisation of self and other provides another template for contemporary identity constructions in the Tamil region.

In a vein somewhat similar to Karuppiah and his friends, Sunda Thevar continued with his narrative about Malaiur's pasts and placed the Jain Hill within a sacred Saivaite geography by drawing from another narrative about Saiva-Jain clashes. This was the second story he narrated – 'secondly,' he had begun that day, as soon as he concluded the *varalāru* of Kallar encounters with the colonial state – in this case transposing onto the *ūr*, many features of the legendary account of the 'child-saint' and medieval Saiva poet Tiruñāṇa Campantar's victory over Jains. The well-known legend – which circulates through many media, and has even been part of school curriculum – goes as follows:

The Pantiya king in Campantar's lifetime had come under the influence of Jain monks. His devout Saiva queen, fearing that the ascendant Jain supremacy would engulf the entire kingdom, sought Campantar's help to reign in the king. At the queen's behest, he organised battles to pit Jains against the Saivaites. In one of these battles, both groups threw their *ēṭu* or manuscripts (formed by tying palmyra leaves on whose surface text was etched) into the river and waited to see whose manuscript would survive the test. The Jain texts drowned in the river whereas the Saiva texts rushed upstream, unscathed, finally halting at Thiruvedagam.

Sunda Thevar did not once refer to Campantar, nor did he frame the legendary events as a battle between Jains and victorious Saivaites. Instead, it was the '*Tamiḷ matam*,' the Tamil religion, which had won. His story refers to thirty-three crore warring deities. When the manuscripts of all these religions are thrown into the river, all but one fails to emerge from the water. It is only the text of the Tamil religion that leaped out of the water, tore across the surface like river carp, swam upstream, and came to a rest at Thiruvedagam. He again stressed that his *ūr* was located within a network of sacred places, this time evoking the distance between Malaiur and Thiruvedagam. Elucidating Thiruvedagam's place-name, which is said to originate from this legend –

this is the place (*akam*) of the sacred (*tiru*) palmyra manuscript (*ēṭu*) – he said such a holy place was only a few kilometres from the *ūr*. Sunda Thevar began and ended this story by denoting the Jain Hill as a dwelling-site of these religious rivals.

Sunda Thevar's account appears as a mellowed retelling of this legend. But terms such as '*Tamiḷ matam*' have complex histories. In one sense, it simply illustrates a dominant perspective that turns the Tamil region into a Hindu space. This sense is ricocheted in Sunda Thevar's figure of thirty-three crore gods. Sunda Thevar draws this common tally of the total number of 'Hindu' gods from the present back to the past. It also expresses another equation, one between Tamil language and Saivism.

This is a persistent equation, resonating in medieval Saiva texts and bhakti poetry, and reworked at least since the late-nineteenth century by Tamil literary and nationalist movements. These movements anthropomorphised the Tamil language as a goddess, and produced highly devotional and passionate attachments to Tamil (Ramaswamy 1997), and were reminiscent of earlier devotional paradigms such as those provided by medieval bhakti movements. The term, *Tamiḷ matam*, denotes religion in both senses, because the development of Tamil language is itself attributed to divine and court patronage. Such literary lineages are traced to Sangam compositions and grammatical treatises, but the genealogies are refreshed through later texts and accounts of medieval Saiva (and Vaishnava) courtly and devotional canons. Moreover, popular interpretations of these processes elide Jain and Buddhist contributions.⁸ Although 'Saiva Siddhanta and Jainism... appear to share several fundamental attitudes and concepts' (Davis 1998: 214), many individuals who narrated the legends about the Saiva defeat of Jains spoke of the latter as a threat to Tamil country and Tamil language.

Thus, when Arumugam casually mentioned that his caste had probably descended from Jain monks who had taken refuge in Madurai's hills to escape the wrath of Pantiya kings, I was somewhat surprised. This was the only time I heard such

⁸ For an overview of Saiva depictions of Jains, see Peterson 1998, and Walters, who writes that 'the diatribes against... Jains and Buddhists by the Saiva adepts make sense only if both groups actually posed a threat to Saiva supremacy in the region' (2000: 133). See Davis 1998 for a different reading of the long interactions between Saiva and Jain traditions in the Tamil region.

an 'origin myth' of Piramalai Kallar, and tried my best to track it. The only clue I got was from another Malaiur resident, Chinna Kalai, who was sympathetic to CPI(M). He said some CPI(M) leaders tried every once in a while to 'change' local stories and memories and inculcate new values – 'equality,' and peaceful caste relations – in the Kallar community. Many political parties, including CPI(M), had grosser calculations (with subtler veils) when they organised or participated in meetings, gatherings, and memorial events targeting the Kallar community and addressing demands voiced by its dominant representatives. Chinna Kalai thought CPI(M) truly wished to mould memories and stories that would foster equality. I was reluctant to concur with these parties' self-professed motives. We shall see (chapter 5) that despite continuous interactions between political parties, caste associations, and a 'caste public,' it is nearly impossible to annex dominant castes' social memory and create an Indian proletariat 'undivided' by caste.

Even if collective memory can be this easily transformed, it does not automatically foster feelings of equality or shared subaltern subjectivities between Kallar and Dalit castes. The pretext for communist formations' participation in dominant castes' symbolic politics is that these castes would begin to populate a non-caste-marked 'proletariat' class. Its realisation is an elusive project, for it mistakenly locates caste relations outside capitalism and reads them as superstructure.

Arumugam himself only half-heartedly traced his caste's descent from persecuted Jain monks, even though Jains are today seldom taken to be the alien other to a Hindu self. Other religious communities have been cast in this role. In the Madurai district gazette published in 1960, one of the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal Purāṇam* episodes is reworked by replacing Jains with Jesuits as the evil other intending to destroy Madurai (Baliga 1960). At least one historian of the region places this narrative in a government publication alongside 'a number of local legends [in which] early hinterland missionaries actually summon up demonic beings to engage in cosmic warfare for them' (Bayly 1989: 393). I too found remarkable symmetries between previous characterisations of Jains as the other and more contemporary framings of Christian and Muslim communities as the other to a Tamil Hindu self.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on Kallar narratives of place and self because these play an important role in the production of space here. We saw Kallar individuals repeatedly assert that Malaiur is a '*Tēvamār ūr*,' a Thevar village. Kallar *kuṇam* is *ūr kuṇam*; Kallar *varalāru* is *ūr varalāru*. The *ūr*'s fame is a result of *ūr* Kallar's actions. Kallar individuals classifying themselves as 'Hindu Piramalai Kallar' during my household surveys and depicting the *ūr* in ordinary conversations as a Hindu *ūr* sought to turn it into an exclusively Hindu place. Speeches and gifts from representatives of the five Kallar lineages given from the stage at a 'state ceremony,' demonstrated 'another metonymical form of dominance in the village' (Mines 2005: 33). I shall conclude with views that displace and contest the dominant strains in representational spaces – within which the *ūr*'s dominant social group sought to construct *ūr* after their own image.

Firstly, do all castes readily identify and accept such a morphing of dominant caste and village? Anthropologist Gloria Raheja has noted that strangers in northwestern Uttar Pradesh asked each other 'what is your village?' replied by stating the names of their villages, and followed this with responses such as 'it is a village of Gujars,' or Jats, or Rajputs (1988:1). Individuals across castes identify villages with their locally dominant landholding caste (ibid). I did observe such identifications among non-Kallar individuals in Kallar dominated villages. The question is what kinds of identification these were. Here are three instances from Malaiur. A Konar woman on her way to fulfil gift obligations during an auspicious season complained of the increase in money prestations in the '*Tēvamār ūr*' she was going to. An Arundhatiyar woman once told her visiting nephew, her younger brother's son, that she had no money to pay interests (at alarming rates) on household loans, but she had to find the money somehow – 'What else [can I] do, [I have been] married off to a *Tēvamār ūr*.'

As a final illustration, we could look at instances of rural caste conflicts. When conflict between Dalits and the dominant Pillaimar caste in Uthapuram, a village in Madurai district was reported in the local press, I found the events being discussed by a number of residents in Malaiur. At one of the village's tea-stall, I found an elderly

Kallar man whose myopic vision had lent him the diminutive ‘Good Eyes’ peering closely at a Tamil daily’s coverage of the conflict and its ‘mediation’ by political groups and bureaucrats. Busy at the stove, his ‘son’ (who traced himself to the same ancestor – Periyandi, the eldest *paṅkāḷi* – as Good Eyes did) who ran the tea-stall asked what deserved such concentration. A discussion ensued, in which all the Kallar men at the tea-stall participated with gusto. Bringing that round of talk to a conclusion, one of the men emphasised that the problem had only ended quickly because Uthapuram was a ‘Pillaimar *ūr*.’ A Pallar resident I met a few days later echoed this view, predicting a different turn of events had the incident occurred in a ‘*Tēvamār ūr*.’

If these Konar, Pallar, and Arundhatiyar women equated the *ūr* with its Kallar residents, they did so to record grievances, to express the consequences of and the suffering that ensued from sharing that *ūr* with its dominant caste. In sharing that space, they suggested, they had begun to share the practices of the dominant caste. It is in this mode that members of subordinate groups connected the *ūr* and its dominant social group. Unlike Kallar narratives, theirs’ was not an equation readily announced. It was narrated in a sphere of complaint, of resigned acceptance and even, of resistance.

Secondly, do they matter, the stories that inhere in a granite outcrop to individuals, social groups, business entities, and state representatives only interested in the granite? No and yes. Granite is immediately a source of capital for the quarrying industry, and as an input, a source of greater capital accumulation through other industries. The abstract space produced alongside capitalism is a space generated out of the divorce of concrete meanings. It values the granite not the stories about the hill. For all the infusion of sacredness into the landscape around Madurai, the district is also home to a thriving quarry ‘mafia.’ Sunda Thevar had nearly died battling a tiger on the hill in the early-1950s. The incident occurred when portions of this hill and the nearby range were quarried, only a couple of years after the Archaeological Survey of India declared the Jain monuments on this hill and the surrounding region as centrally protected monuments. The hill appears to have turned into a feature in an abstract space engendered by capitalism.

Do narratives of village within sacred geographies, *kuṇam*, and caste and place exist only as trace elements in a social space totally conquered by capitalism? Do they only illustrate that 'no space ever vanishes utterly, leaving no trace' (Lefebvre 1991: 164)? To follow this is to recognise that capitalism is not present everywhere and at all moments homogeneously. It works in and through highly uneven space-times, generated as the 'logic of capital' actively reconstitutes social relations at other scales. (Geographical scales themselves are best understood as being intercalated, rather than existing in a vertical hierarchy).

Harvey captures this when he writes that 'capitalism frequently supports the creation of new distinctions in old guises. Pre-capitalist prejudices, cultures and institutions are revolutionised only in the sense that they are given new functions and meanings rather than being destroyed' (2006: 416). Except that neither caste relations nor perceptions of *kuṇam* are premodern or pre-capitalist. Although capitalism and modernity are perceived to be a radical, even clean, break from the past, caste provides a set of relations through which capital generates the fragmentation of labour (Natrajan 2012: 109).

Caste and place *kuṇam* and perceptions of village and micro-regional pasts are repeatedly emphasised not only in village tea-stalls, temples, homes, streets, and squares but also in buses, university seminars, caste association meetings, tourism-related events, and political parties' public meetings (part III). They generate a 'collective "work of representation"' that 'disorganizes class formation' (ibid). We saw that village and place reputation feeds into the credit market, specifically in usurious practices. Informal credit, which rests on users' ability to enforce debt collection, furthers the indebtedness of groups ranging from marginal farmers to landless labourers.

Stories of the hill become important to the mining or quarrying industry in another sense, when they matter to the individuals and social groups whose interests conflict with those of the industries. Tourists, archaeologists, and other researchers regularly visit the hill near Malaiur, now part of a Jain Tourist Circuit covering other Jain engravings and inscriptions nearby. At the hilltop is a derelict stone structure that Malaiur dwellers denote as the old Karuppu koil. Inscriptions at the structure's

bottommost horizontal blocks reveal it to be a ninth-century Jain temple. Archaeologists suspect that some of the statues in the new Karuppu koil at the foothill, worshipped as lineage founders by Malaiur's five Kallar lineages, are those of Jain monks brought down by villagers and reinstalled.

For archaeologists and Jain tourists, the hill is a sign or monument of 'history,' needing to be protected from the quarry mafia. The mid-twentieth-century notification of the rock-cuts and caves alone were insufficient measures. For yet others – DHAN Foundation, which had begun to organise periodic walks for tourists in this region – a better tactic to end quarrying in adjacent hills and save whatever remains of half-destroyed Jain structures, is to recreate older sacred sites in the image of contemporary sacred sites. Thus, a DHAN newsletter suggests the following measure to end quarrying – 'In order to give *immediate protection* to [the hill] it has to be converted as a temple of a local deity namely Karupparamy or Dhroupathi or Muniyandi etc, with the help of a local Samiyadi [god dancer]' (Aravindan 2008: 19).

A better-known contemporary example is the conflict between Vedanta Resources, with mining interests in the bauxite-rich Niyamgiri hills in south-west Orissa, and the Dongria Kondhs, residents of the region who have fiercely opposed these extractions. The struggle was over many things at once – central and state governments kow-towing to the global Aluminium cartel at a frenzy to extract as much bauxite ore as possible during a global economic crisis; present decisions of governments and business entities taken with an eye on futures trading markets; and a struggle over meaning. What was, to Vedanta and many others – representatives of national-, regional-, and local-level dominant social groups, and the plan's support-base in political parties, the bureaucracy, and the media – only a site rich in resources or raw materials, was also a sacred space to the Dongria Kondhs. One website documenting this struggle suggests:

To be a Dongria Kondh is to farm the hills' fertile slopes, harvest their produce, and worship the mountain god Niyam Raja and the hills he presides over, including the 4,000 metre Mountain of the Law, Niyam Dongar. Yet for a decade, the 8,000-plus Dongria Kondh lived under the threat of mining by Vedanta Resources, which hoped to extract

the estimated \$2billion-worth of bauxite that lies under the surface of the hills.⁹

The hills and forests are, for Dongria Konds, places of cultivation, location of dwelling sites, places for gathering resources, places to rear livestock in. Yet the mountain's sacrality is foregrounded. These are but two instances of social groups using 'absolute space' and 'historical space' (Lefebvre 1991) during moments of heightened conflict in an abstract space that has been producing and produced by capitalism. In the South Asian region, absolute space appears not as a relic or remnant but as a constitutive element of contemporary social space. Absolute space holds relevance not only for groups opposing events or instances generated by capitalist development but also to capitalism. In part II, we shall continue with these examinations by asking another obvious question – 'What is a road?'

The previous and current chapters demonstrated the union of method and context, audience and purpose, and exposition and representation. One of my concerns was to reveal the relationality of places. This aspect of spatiality is extended in parts II and III. An acknowledgement of different dimensions of spatiality in the analysis of space and society shall materialise in later chapters. The analysis of spatial imaginaries pegging Kallar subjectivity and place-making, and connections made between the evoking of the past and subjectivities, and history and essence, in the production of caste identities avowedly poised, forever, at the edge of aggression and violence, shall be of use to later discussions of conflictual space and social relations.

⁹ <http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/dongria/sacredmountain>

PART II WHAT IS A ROAD?

In 2007-08, a period of rapid transformations in India's road networks, I often travelled between Madurai, Chennai, Bangalore, and Delhi. These inter-city journeys were additional to my daily travels within Madurai. Travel was integral to my research process. It enabled fieldwork, archival and library research, and conference participation. It also altered my research interests. Roads' hyper-visibility led me to investigate the relation between road building, circulatory regimes, and socio-spatial relations.

Part II examines road infrastructures as an 'infinite regress of relationships' (Bateson in Star 1999: 379). It analyses relations between people and objects, and relations between objects. This shift in research interests also led me to reimagine research practices. Chapters 3 and 4 combine ethnographic observations with an analysis of court judgements, and reports by international and national agencies, market analysts, and media houses. While the entire thesis reflects on the multiscale nature of space and social relations, the jumps across locations and scales are most evident in part II.

Policy and popular literature on infrastructure projects posited immense urgency to road-building and road-upgradation. This literature called for re-networking an array of locations – 'remote' mountain hamlets, port cities, congested urban centres, tier-II cities, and villages. Presumably, these locations only awaited better road connectivity to turn into efficient commercial hubs.

Many of these projects were sanctioned under turn of the century infrastructure policies. In 1998, India's Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government announced the NHDP, National Highways Development Project, to be implemented by the NHAI (National Highways Authority of India).¹ NHDP envisioned phase-by-phase upgradation and expansion of India's national highways network. The most celebrated mega-infrastructure projects were the

¹ Constituted under the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988, NHAI became operational in 1995 (NHAI 2008).

North–South corridor between Srinagar and Kanyakumari, the East–West corridor between Porbandar and Silchar, and the project popularly known as the ‘Golden Quadrilateral,’ connecting India’s largest metropolitan cities, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, and Mumbai. In addition, there were many port-connectivity projects, upgradation of existing highways, and bypass road constructions.

In 2000, the NDA government announced the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, PMGSY, a rural roads project. PMGSY aimed to provide all-weather access roads linking unconnected rural habitations to the nearest market centres, towns, or cities.² In 2005, when the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government introduced a national rural employment guarantee scheme that allowed roadworks, it further boosted rural infrastructure.

These projects altered urban, semi-urban, and rural land use patterns, circulatory practices, environments, and livelihoods. They ushered new rhythms and space-times. They relocated and re-networked work, leisure, and dwelling sites. It is therefore important for us to analyse the role of roads in the production of space.

An immediate factor to the shift in my research interests was the four-laning of the North–South corridor’s national highway NH7 passing near Malaiur in 2008. This highway upgradation and an emergent speculative property market influenced many of the issues that interest anthropologists of rural India – property and inheritance disputes, and land, family, and kinship relations, settlement patterns, and even responses to household surveys. Fieldwork led me to understand circulatory infrastructure as generators of new rhythms and space-times.

I locate the escalating desire for roads in contemporary India alongside the global economic crisis. Chapter 3 links this desire for infrastructure with the overaccumulation of capital. It correlates the heightened emphasis on road-building with the infrastructure sector’s capacity to provision temporary spatial fixes for overaccumulated capital. Chapter 4 reveals roads as entities transforming not only

² PMGSY is implemented by the Government of India’s Ministry of Rural Development.

land relations and circulatory practices but also caste relations and sites such as tanks.³

Contemporary policies related to rural India, particularly in the field of transport infrastructure, author new 'geographies of urbanization, which...ultimately explode the erstwhile urban/rural divide' (Brenner 2013: 87). Rural spaces are colonised directly through state policies and indirectly through the amorphous and multi-authored actions that attach to or follow these plans. The next two chapters demonstrate that highway upgradation and rural connectivity enable the consumption of space through urbanisation.

While roads affect human mobility, everyday rhythms, and work and leisure practices, they also affect other objects. Rather than frame them as 'slave, master and substrata' (Latour 1996: 235) of signs such as development or progress, chapters 3 and 4 attend to roads themselves. An associative account (e.g. Latour 1993, 1996, 2005), would reveal that roads are sound gavels for shattering the silence over the objects that surround us but are marginalised, rendered formative absences, through modernity's projects. Part II examines how roads reassemble subjects and objects without taking recourse, however, to a flat ontology or a flat social.

³ Transport infrastructures transform a number of practices. For links between roads and religious practices, see Flower 2004 for China and Ahuja 2009 for eastern India.

CHAPTER 3 'IT IS NOT A RIBBON:' REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIA'S ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

The whole Mediterranean consists of movement in space... [Land and sea] routes are the channels of this movement. But they are more than mere ribbons over the land, lines across the sea.

Braudel (1995: 277)

Let us look at ethnographic research in the light of what historian Fernand Braudel emphasises – that regions are in perpetual movement and that routes are constitutive of regions. Typically, ethnographic research elides the travel routes that enable it, taking fieldwork to be 'intensive, "deep" interaction... something canonically guaranteed by the spatial practice of extended, if temporary, dwelling in a community' (Clifford 1997: 59). Ethnographers may attend to roads at specific points in their research – in the initial fieldwork period, for example, as they travel in search for a field-site. There was another reason why I could not gloss over the 'routed/rooted' (ibid: 68) nature of my research – the routes were so obviously in sight.

Some anthropologists (Star 1999) have suggested that infrastructure is normally invisible to us, while others (Larkin 2013) emphasise the situatedness of infrastructure's in/visibility. Secure occupiers and users of roads, especially efficient ones, might have little need for consciously noticing roads. Roads under construction or in disrepair and new roads are more visible since they overturn daily rhythms. An engagement with this infrastructure is part of daily life for road workers – 'what is background for one person is a daily object of concern for another' (Larkin ibid: 336). This debate throws into relief differential motility and mobility of bodies, and the effects of corporeal knowing in specific perceptions of space.

Despite these differences, policy and project literature flattens road infrastructure, representing it as neutral and homogeneously accessible and experienced. This literature forwards representations of space that attend to abstract space. We may recall that each historical period produces its own social space, that the transition to capitalism synchronised with the emergence of abstract space, and that abstract space is produced through an ensemble of particular representations of space, spatial practices, and representational spaces (Lefebvre 1991).

Abstract space, like abstract labour, is space fallen prey to abstraction (Lefebvre 1991: 49). It is space created in the language of volumes and quantity, of empty homogeneity, and easy substitution and exchange. It attempts to turn space into a commodity. Abstract space is ‘the locus, medium and tool of [the] “positivity”’ derived from the positive relation towards technology, planning, and ‘knowledge bound to power’ (ibid: 50).¹ The emergence of abstract space is linked to the emergence of particular ways of seeing space.

We need also recall two additional characteristics of conceived space. Firstly, representations of space affect material changes, re-network locations or points *in* space, and transform spatial practices. These representations generate material outcomes, and this capacity is geared towards generating space in the image of capital. Secondly, despite their hegemony, representations of space neither completely nor permanently produce the outcomes intended by planners, builders, banks, or bureaucracies.

It is in this light that this chapter frames its analysis of the representations of roads and road construction in India’s recent infrastructure policies and schemes. The first three sections connect policy imaginations and representations of roads to capitalist crises and to the representations of space from which infrastructure projects seemingly derive their force and design. These sections are also interspersed with descriptions of concrete socio-spatial relations and practices that destabilise

¹ Lefebvre also argues that abstract space is *negatively* related to ‘the historical and religio-political spheres’ which ‘perceive and underpin it,’ and to the ‘differential space-time’ which it carries within itself (1991: 50).

abstract representations. The fourth section explores divergences between representations of space and representational space by investigating Malaiur residents' memories and perceptions of a road leading to their village.

Urgency, Uneven Development, and a 'Pathology of Space'

State-, corporate-, and media-generated literature on India's transport infrastructure evoke a sense of urgency to road development. The question is whether this rhetoric of urgency links with a capital-generated valuation of urgency in the production of space-time.² This leads us to examining the processes by which the rhetoric of urgency becomes an art of persuasion, a technique utilised by states, lending agencies, and infrastructure corporations. This rhetoric readily illustrates a recent trend in the anthropology of infrastructure, which highlights infrastructure's powerful affective presence, its centrality in many projects of modernity, development, and nation-building (Larkin 2013). Anthropology inadequately addresses how the emphasis of urgency in infrastructure projects enables what David Harvey (e.g. 2006), following Marx and Lefebvre, terms a 'spatial fix' to capitalist crises. A spatial fix is the temporary postponement of the generalised crises periodically affecting capitalism, crises which emerge not from extraneous agents but from the internal workings or the *tendencies* of capital.

Policy literature typically conjures up infrastructural exigency as follows. It first posits an urgency to upgrading India's road networks, especially to avoid global capital's flight to China, where an ever-expanding infrastructural net awaits to trap it.³ It then seeks a hastening through of every road project. Project delays are taken

² As rhetorical and material practice, urgency is not unique to infrastructure. In the biotechnology sector, 'first the government and then the public and other companies' pursue a similar 'breathless rhetoric of speed' and utilise it as a 'material-rhetorical fulcrum' (Sunder Rajan in Müller 2006: 6). Infrastructure's sectoral specificities – massive capital investment, land-related conflicts, and the significant time-lapse between capital investment and realization – lend a different order and weight to the actions of states, public, and companies in road-building.

³ Reports published by governments, the media, international institutions, and by think-tanks (embodiments of Friedrich Hayek's dream for 'second-hand dealers in ideas' Mitchell 2009: 386-7) are replete with such arguments. Maj Gen Khanduri, head of India's Ministry of Road Transport and Highways in the Vajpayee-led government, bemoaned India's difference from China. Khanduri posited that since China was unburdened by democracy, it easily overrode objections to policies. *The New York Times* reporter interviewing Khanduri then writes that, 'Having invested more than 10 times as much as India since the mid-1990s, China now has 15 times the expressway length' (Waldman 2005). In 2014, former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, and then Director of Brookings India Centre

to result not from present conflicts or from differently imagined futures, but from the obduracy of India's past. Objections are seen as the intrusion of politics into a purely economic and technical realm. India's past is reduced to its 'licence and permit' raj; this has to give way to bold, new modes of administration.

Urgency invigorates a particular notion of time. It privileges immediate time. Policy literature posits infrastructure development as so urgent and important as to compel us into thinking that the moment a road is conceived, it must be constructed. Many reform initiatives – single-window clearance and the recent idea of abolishing 'planning' itself – seek to shorten the (time) gap between a project's conceptualisation and its materialisation and completion. For how else, this breathless prose of policy suggests, can India trap something as fickle as international capital within its territory?

In addition to shrugging off the deadweight of outdated bureaucratic machineries, India is then urged to tick off its unruly publics. Institutional frameworks and unruly publics appear as logjams to infrastructural development. Both are taken to emerge from the refusal of private interest (of corrupt bureaucrats, rent-seekers, and objecting individuals or social groups) to give way to public interest.⁴

Nearly every policy is a pretender to the throne. Road-related policies gather the additional force of being about *infrastructure*, the ground from which other policies take off. Infrastructure policy and project literature forwards older developmental frames of village India but also reframes the rural – attributing agrarian distress to the lack of proper roads for timely transport of farm produce to markets, and ascribing rural poverty to the lack of non-farm employment opportunities, in turn linked to inadequate road infrastructure.

(branch of policy research institute, Washington D.C. Brookings Institution), likewise compared China and India's infrastructure-ranking. Subir Gokarn. 'Slippery slope for infrastructure,' *Business Standard*. 09.03.2014.

⁴ In May 2015, India's BJP-led NDA government 'prioritised unblocking infrastructure projects that had gathered dust because of either an obstructive bureaucracy, a lack of private sector investment, or in some case [*sic*] public interest litigation.' 'Faster than China? India's road, rail drive could lay doubts to rest.' *Reuters*. 31.05.2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/01/india-economy-infrastructure-idUSKBN0OH17Z20150601>.

Policy literature on India's infrastructure-building recreates a 'pathology of space' (Lefebvre 1991: 99). New roads supposedly energise not only 'ailing neighbourhoods' (ibid) but also the entire national economy. Pathology emerges not only at subnational scales (regions, cities, districts, neighbourhoods) but also at the national scale. This signals the state's continued role in producing the path dependencies to capital circulation. Pitching urgency at the level of state-space also conceals the multiple ends for which state officials, bureaucrats, and politicians pursue infrastructure projects. The reification of infrastructure allows a reified state, charged with building an efficient road network to heal the national economy, to emerge as the main planning agent.

There are other effects of ascribing pathology at the national-scale. The problematic of uneven development and global patterns of territorialization and reterritorialization are construed within national boundaries. Uneven development is recast as a national problem, not as a reflection of inequalities partly structured at the global-scale. The illustrations that generate this pathology of space emanate from existing geographical patterns of development but turn into managerial and technical problems of inadequate infrastructure. This literature suggests that what is needed to iron out uneven development is a renewed attempt to integrate places to the 'market,' although markets themselves – whether spot markets, the abstract Market, or virtual markets – are product and tool of uneven development.

The notion of an abstract economy, emerging alongside abstract space and capitalism, also poses challenges for scholarship on this region. Historians suggest that this notion incapacitates us from grasping regional institutions and sites – temples, tanks, towns, royal centres, and markets – as co-constitutive.⁵

⁵ Interestingly, Arjun Appadurai's (1981) influential study of south Indian temple worship as a redistributive process drew inspiration from economic anthropology. Appadurai acknowledges (1981: 33-4) Marshal Sahlins' distinction between reciprocity and redistribution as the inspiration for understanding temples as the nodal points in redistributive economy (cf Dirks 1987: 287-8). The difficulty in abstracting and separating the economy is visible in Aidan Southall's (1988) revisit of the segmentary state (the model which inspired Burton Stein's history of the Tamil Cola Empire). But built structures reveal what analytical frameworks fail to grasp. Although considerably transformed under colonialism, traces of the constitutive collusion of temple and market may still be found in the spatial arrangement of many Indian cities and towns. What modernity split into distinct realms (religion and market, religion and state) are located side-by-side, if only as structures in the built environment.

Contemporary spatial practices can only be understood by attending to historical processes. In India's small towns, cities, and peri-urban regions, weekly markets (*haat, cantai*) still reflect the characteristics of a social space that predated the availability of cheap and extensive transport infrastructure, their locations determined by the distance that an average adult person could traverse on foot in a single day.⁶

Mobility's dependence on human (or animal) energies does not indicate weak circulatory regimes in precolonial south India. Nested hierarchies and relational arrangements for resource extraction and redistribution produced well-networked places and communities, a complex 'historical geography' of circulation in the peninsular south (Stein 1977, 2005).

Here, centres and peripheries were knit into a loose fabric, characterised by segmentary rule, redistributive mechanisms routed across settlements, and relational ties between emperors and kings, overlords and lords, and lords and chieftains. By the late medieval period, these spatial fabrics were thickly knotted at certain places through 'state building... tank building... and the raising of temple towns' (Stein 2005: 24). Practices of merchant groups, territorial overlords, local retainers of shares in agrarian produce, heads of sects and pilgrim centres, and many other social groups looped pilgrim routes, rest-houses, market-centres, tanks, and temples. These practices directed regional circulatory networks.⁷ The co-constitution

⁶ In late-nineteenth-century Gangetic Bihar, even as the circuits for petty traders (usually also moneylenders and rich peasants) became more extensive, one estimate placed this circulation's extent as a perimeter of about twenty miles, the distance traders could cover on foot in one or two days (Yang 1998: 248).

⁷ These directions differ from path dependencies generated by capitalism's circulatory infrastructures, a point worth stressing, given the tendency to trace lineages of capitalism and neoliberal entrepreneurship back in time. Gurcharan Das, leading 'market guru' exemplifies such anachronistic readings. Das applauds treatises such as Kautilya's *Arthashastra* for provisioning tax rebates, and reads trade between ancient Tamilakam (Tamil country) and Romans as evidence of free market ('Gurcharan Das: We raise questions that are relevant even today,' *Mint* 14.12.2012, <http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/7i3qXi4UkBGftr9cDTG2xM/We-raise-questions-that-are-relevant-even-today-Gurcharan-D.html>). India's Central Public Works Department also exhibits this tendency, giving us the following 'historical background' to 'public works' – 'the execution of public work [*sic*] has been an organized function of the State from times immemorial in our country.' It treats Mohenjodaro and Harappa as evidence of 'the building traditions of India prevalent 3,000 years before the Christian Era,' and celebrates the *Arthashastra* for 'anticipat[ing] the community projects ideas of those (*sic*) days, (and) remind[ing] us...that ideas of modern town planning are not really modern' (<http://cpwd.gov.in/> accessed last in June 2010). Ravi Ahuja cautions us against anachronistic

of centres and peripheries in segmentary polities resulted in the dispersal rather than centralization of resource extraction and redistribution.

Many old market centres turned into colonial administrative and commercial centres, and thus into thick nodal points in Madras Presidency's infrastructure networks. At a micro-regional-scale, administrative and commercial centres still exhibit the characteristics of locations that emerged before the advent of modern transportation. Most markets and administrative centres in and around Madurai city are situated at the distance of a day's walk (Blackburn 1978: 41).⁸

These phenomena affirm social space's historicity, and that the 'space of the present is interlaced with spaces of the past' (Ahuja 2009: 36). Current spatial practices, the emplacement (and networks) of sites of production, habitation, and consumption, emerge from the reorganisation of earlier social relations, social space, and spatial scales.

New spatial practices may outmode older spatial hierarchies without eliminating them altogether. Tamil Nadu's urbanisation is a case in point. Some scholars attribute the state's extensive urbanisation to its 'decentralised and dispersed physical infrastructure' (Harriss-White 2003: 201). Yet contemporary urbanisation patterns are linked to colonial and postcolonial reorganisation of earlier social spaces. Since segmentary rule and historical geography generated a well-connected region, these histories are as important as modern transport infrastructures in shaping contemporary spatial practices.

This does not mean one-to-one correlations between older and newer spatial practices. Historical research (e.g. Ludden 1986) reveals instances when older

interpretations of circulatory networks, and stresses, after Marx, that circulation becomes internal to production only with capitalism (2009: 88-9).

⁸ Stuart Blackburn's interpretation of this as evidence of weak Nayaka control, whose 'political power... extended only as far as their economic control' (1978: 41), misapprehends centre-periphery relations in segmentary polities. This recalls the myth of total Kallar independence and intractability. My Kallar interlocutors represented themselves as warriors of an independent territory primarily on the basis that they did not pay taxes to the Madurai Nayakas or the colonial state. They downplayed other tributes, gifts, grants, and exchanges particular to centre-periphery relationality in segmentary polities, and more complicated relations with the colonial state (see Introduction and part I). Memories and narratives of caste history and essence, and commemorative practices highlighting Kallar valour and independence vis-à-vis colonialism undergird a contemporary political project – that of turning class-differentiated caste groups into united moral communities (part III).

market-temple-polity centres were bypassed, their importance reduced with the construction of rail networks and new roads. Abstract space generates new patterns of urbanisation, where a place's importance depends on its physical proximity to cities, to production centres, and to sites for circulation and logistics. Recent studies show that Madurai's 'urban sprawl' follows national and state highways and other main roads (Saravanan et al 2012).⁹

How does this discussion link to the imagination of urgent cause in India's infrastructure projects? Historical processes shape the formation of clusters and the location of production and commercial enclaves. Transport infrastructures seldom create entirely new spatial arrangements; they often reinforce existing tendencies and reproduce uneven development. This is worth stressing, since contemporary infrastructure projects forward the view that 'spatial chaos' or 'disparity' (Ahuja 2009: 53-60), outcomes of uneven development and capitalism's regional specificities, can be overcome by a 'more of the same' approach. Support for infrastructure projects – at the level of both arterial highway networks and rural road networks – is sought in the name of efficiently networking points *in* space. Roads turn into magical agents that can eliminate chaos by annihilating the supposedly empty space between locations, or between a village and a market-centre.

In any case, small- and medium-scale spot markets are not the main targets of mega-infrastructure programmes. Upgraded national highways are oriented towards nodal points, the big cities, key districts, centres of production, and circulatory and logistics-sites such as wholesale markets, godowns, airports, and ports.¹⁰ Following freight-volume trends towards metropolitan cities and transport hubs, upgradation projects generate distantiation effects vis-à-vis places they bypass.¹¹

⁹ When such studies provide metric measurements of *sprawls*, they partake in a *representation* of space geared towards a *consumption* of space.

¹⁰ Such trends are also visible in other regions. Campbell, writing of a long-awaited highway upgradation in Amazonia, sees highways as 'colonization corridors' (2014: 242). For Campbell, this road project deserved ethnographic consideration because it failed to exemplify the colonization trend and instead turned into an 'odd kind of frontier' which illuminated the 'conjuring [of] property' (ibid: 247) and the 'speculative accumulation' along its stretches.

¹¹ In their account of a Sino-Mongolian region, Pedersen and Bunkenborg focus on *technologies* of distantiation, where roads are 'carefully crafted social tools that ensure that people can remain

Even as India's new rural roads connect villages to nearest markets, spot markets may simultaneously be relocated. Wholesale vegetable markets are shifted to peripheral locations through continuous urban restructuring. New city bypasses, interfering with production and circulation networks and other infrastructures, reconfigure rural space (chapter 4).

With regards to highway development, we are told that the national highways network require urgent upgradation, since they constituted less than two per cent of the total road length in India, while servicing over forty per cent of the total traffic (NHAI 2008: 1). This low proportion of highways to the entire road network compares unfavourably with other countries.¹² Planners and technicians of space oversee a reductive interpretation of these statistics. That such heavy traffic plies on such a miniscule portion of the roads network becomes a measure of highway overuse and inefficiency, and then a reflection of an infrastructural block to India's economic take-off. This technicalization of India's transport infrastructure dodges important questions. What happened in regions serviced by the remaining 98 per cent of roads? Why did these roads not generate dispersed and universal development? Why were they not used as conduits for the dispersal of production and consumption? If anything, the logic that extensive road networks are automatic forerunners of development ought to reflect in well-developed countryside and small towns.

Once again, we must note that the Golden Quadrilateral, the North–South and East–West corridors, and many other NHDP highway projects are *upgradation* projects. They are likely to recreate patterns of uneven development. The metropole-

minimally connected over time' (2012: 557). Marc Augé explored distantiation vis-à-vis France's autoroutes. Augé takes these roads to be paradigms of 'the two complementary but distinct realities' of *non-place*, stressing that the production of space for certain ends (such as connectivity) is distinct to the experience of space (with individuals experiencing alienation and distance) (1995: 94; cf. Moran 2005).

¹² In 2009, highways constituted five per cent of the road infrastructure network in the U.S.A., Japan, and Brazil, and thirteen per cent in the United Kingdom and Korea (Ghani et al 2014: 3). The recent worldwide emphasis on infrastructure – substantially translating into projects for territories in Africa and Asia – is wrought by new statistical devices such as LPI (Logistics Performance Index) scores of each country. LPI scores (derived mainly from the experience of global freight forwarders) are annexed to the projection of urgency for restructuring infrastructure networks. India's low rank (in comparison to China or Brazil) was a tool for building opinion favourable to large-scale investments in its transport infrastructure, even though the World Bank (which kick-started the LPI index) admits India as an 'overperformer,' a country whose logistics networks are relatively higher than its corresponding national income levels (Arvis et al 2010).

oriented Golden Quadrilateral project and NHDP's port-connectivity projects are in continuation with the colonial prioritisation of 'radial axes directed at the colonial metropolises over local networks of circulation' (Ahuja 2009: 112).¹³

Highways also affect other locations along the routes, evidence of which is quickly paraded as projects' success. In little over a decade, World Bank-led impact assessments (Ghani et al 2014) of the Golden Quadrilateral showcased new industrial activity and efficient resource allocation within a ten kilometre radius of non-nodal districts.¹⁴ When networks stabilise and strengthen path dependencies, the effects of new highways can be seen beyond this radius. The point is that impact studies take up specific quantifiable effects to garner support for the ongoing thrust on infrastructure building. Impact evaluation studies not only garner support for future land acquisition and huge capital loans, they also rework the social *after* 'rendering [it] technical' (Li in Mosse 2013).

Rural roads programmes are different from mega-infrastructure projects. With their low traffic densities, rural roads projects have witnessed little private participation. They are financed almost entirely by states. Their impact assessments are radically different from the assessment of arterial roads.

Rural roads project assessments also promote infrastructure's representation as universal public good. Since conventional assessment studies display little impact of rural roads, new impact measurement criteria have emerged. The shift in criteria responds to crises of representation in neoliberal frameworks. The disproportionalities between large funding and small impacts have necessitated new, non-economic modes of reckoning 'impact.' A reworked social is looped back to the technical in rural roads assessment studies. These studies employ new frameworks and ways of creating a techno-social (van de Walle 2009). For instance, an assessment study of PMGSY in three Tamil Nadu districts involves considerable effort

¹³ While centres and peripheries of post-1947 India retain these orientations, new centres and peripheries have emerged out of 'supply chain capitalism' (Tsing 2009) and 'flexible accumulation' (Chari 2004) – for e.g. the development of cities such as Bangalore and Hyderabad reflect their emergence as peripheries in a global spread of information technology industries.

¹⁴ The Ghani et al (2014) study identified the Golden Quadrilateral's non-nodal districts as districts other than Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai, and their suburban areas.

in tracing the roads' effect on 'social indicators' of health, education, poverty alleviation, and housing (Chathukulam 2012).

Impact assessment studies themselves mirror capitalism's ontic commitment to urgency. These studies begin to evaluate impact even before we comprehend the ways in which new roads or networks recreate or destabilise existing circulatory paths. The urgency to assess impact mimics the utilisation of urgency in rebuilding infrastructure. It attempts to contain contending temporalities and spatialities at the level of the *moment*, at current duration.

As noted earlier, pitching pathology at the national-scale erases the intercalation of spatial scales and practices generating uneven development. The temporalities and conception of history in the literature of infrastructure are similar to those prevalent in development literature. In development literature, questions of social space and uneven development are subsumed by projecting India's development as a matter of time. These projections create a formulaic 'let us catch-up' answer to structural and historical issues that have shaped regional trajectories of capitalism. Within such a framework, India's recent infrastructure projects become the magic wand for catching-up. Massive highway-building has been pitched as the road to 'catch-up' with the industrialised and urbanised West.

When characteristics of uneven development are attributed to inadequate infrastructure for attracting capital investment, national policy frameworks are reassembled. State-space is mobilised so that global capital can be invested in infrastructure projects, and temporary fixes are obtained for crises of over-accumulation. The support these spatial fixes derive from the articulation of infrastructure projects as universal and public good is discussed in the next section.

The importance of 'urgency' to infrastructure rebuilding recalls many of the themes an anthropology of space encounters. Urgency relates to contending temporalities and spatialities, contestations over spatial practices and rhythms, and differences between representations of space and representational space. The evocation of urgency also enables political fixes. It addresses the political challenge of meeting capitalism's ontic commitment to urgency while allowing for the co-existence of participatory governance.

It is commonplace in some circles to take neoliberalism as a retreat of the state and a celebration of the auto-correcting market. This view, as historians of neoliberalism have shown, is a myth. Neoliberal thought, since its emergence through the Mont Pelerin collective, has been vocal about having an active state. Neoliberalism is no 'mere epiphenomenon of a certain type of economics;' it is a primer for politics, a persistent command for states 'to act,' a push for constructing a 'strong state as both producer and guarantor of a stable market society' (Mirowski 2009: 433-5).

But the popular imagination is one of neoliberalism strongly opposing state intervention, planning, and funding. There is now an anti-planning atmosphere across the world. Fashioning this atmosphere among dominant social groups has been easy in India, with its 'burden' of licences and permits. Yet planning 'is not going away,' and across the world, the subcontracting state 'is increasingly bound up in proliferating forms and domains of planning' (Abram 2014: 130). This additionally burdens (indeed, becomes a ruse for burdening) the process of participation. The rhetoric of speed contends with the emphasis on participatory models of governance. We can see (chapter 4) in conflicts over road projects that the commitment to urgency, neoliberalism, and participatory democracy sit uneasily with each other.

Participatory democracy surfaces as a template for bureaucrats, who have to publicise policies, schemes, and tenders, award contracts with transparency, and organise meetings with stakeholders. This ought to increase the scope for objections and allow greater participation in decision-making. Yet there are major disjunctions in the notions of space and time held by different actors.

These disjunctions become obvious in disputes over road building. Conflicts reveal the bureaucratic field and businesses coming down heavily upon participatory processes by portraying objections as delay tactics. Curtailing the time necessary for participatory democracy serves many purposes. It releases capital held back by objections into circuits where it again becomes mobile. It translates participation as quick-flowing procedure rather than time-consuming process. It caps contending notions of space, time, and rhythms.

In corporate and bureaucratic notions, infrastructure projects are for the present and immediate (and maybe more distant) futures. It is the past that is given the short shrift (Abram 2014). Nothing matters but for the execution of the current road project. Thus, infrastructures for circulation can take precedence over irrigation infrastructures that have been produced through previous rounds of labour extraction and investment for agricultural production. Neoliberal tight-fistedness on project duration, shared by most of India's political parties, seek to contain conflict using the sense of urgency. Yet the template of participation can be utilised to create a wedge, to fold back the past into projects, to expand time horizons, and to unfurl different spatial and temporal practices. Space need not be recreated purely in the image of capital (chapter 4).

Viewed alongside the role of large-scale infrastructure projects in absorbing capital and keeping it temporarily in motion, the urgent-requirement argument turns out to be more than rhetoric. Urgency is not just one of neoliberal capitalism's 'epistemic commitment' (Mirowski 2009: 418). It is, and has been, an ontic commitment under capitalism. Indeed, as rhetoric, urgency not only marshals one temporality to seize command over contending temporalities but also enables a particular rhythm to the realisation of capital. The bureaucratic and corporate evocation of urgency fits with the thrust to continuously decrease the turnover time of capital. It effects quick spatial fixes by the absorption of devaluing, overaccumulated capital into built environments (Harvey 2006). Packaging infrastructure as a universal good becomes even more imperative.

Imagining the Public, Imagining Mobility: India's Rural Roads Programmes

As capitalism rendered circulation integral to production, transport networks were reimagined as public goods with universal accessibility. Although colonialism imparted certain specificities to the history of India's modern infrastructure (Ahuja 2009), a shared conceptualisation of roads as more than circulatory networks was generated in both metropole and colony.¹⁵ In colonial representations of space, 'the

¹⁵ The pull of infrastructure is strongly felt in other regions such as the Soviet (see Larkin 2013 for a summary), and Albania (Dalakoglou 2010, 2012). Recent anthropological investigations posit

creation of a “good” transport infrastructure was considered an incontestable boon for an imagined all-embracing “public”... and those who opposed colonial efforts to transform social space [through infrastructure building were deemed] irrational.’ (Ahuja 2009: 30-1).

These representations were more or less adopted by proponents of economic nationalism in the early-twentieth-century (Ahuja 2009, Goswami 2004). Similarities in nineteenth-century colonial, early-twentieth-century nationalist, mid-twentieth-century postcolonial, and early-twenty-first-century conceptualisations of road infrastructure are noteworthy. Across different moments, road development is portrayed as a boon for an undifferentiated public. Roads are imagined as irrefutable ushers of rationality, modernity, thrift, and industry.

Recall PMGSY, the rural roads project announced by the BJP-led government in 2000. The next, UPA-led, central government launched this scheme in 2004 under *Bharat Nirman*, a six-point scheme for rural development. The same year, the World Bank announced its assistance to PMGSY in the form of a US\$400 million Rural Roads Project.¹⁶ Initial Bank assistance concentrated on four states – Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. Subsequently, the Bank provisioned US\$500 million towards project implementation in five other states.¹⁷ Other World Bank projects also emphasised rural connectivity – the need to take India’s

infrastructure development in these ‘post-socialist economies’ as ‘vernacular expressions of anxiety and efforts to come to terms with the relatively new ethics of the market economy’ (Dalakoglou 2010: 139). We must be cautious while attributing distinct ethics and values to particular periods and political formations – the Soviet effected a homegrown version of capitalist development, thereby recreating uneven development within its territories (Lefebvre 1991: 421). Lefebvre also criticised the Soviet for not comprehending socio-spatial dialectics and introducing new built environments and spatial architectonics contradictory to its stated visions.

¹⁶ World Bank and Asian Development Bank loans have partly financed these projects. A fuel cess, routed to a central road fund, also finances the projects. By linking fuel cess and road development funding, the state introduced new ways of taxing the public, strengthened an idea of self-sufficiency, and recreated the public in the image of a user or consumer of road space.

¹⁷ Details are from the World Bank website, last accessed, June 2010. <http://www.worldbank.org.in/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/INDIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21479699~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:295584,00.html>. Interestingly, assistance to the rural roads project became an occasion for the Bank to decry, and render technical, the state’s inability to manage funds – ‘rural road agencies lacked the technical expertise to deploy the large sums that were disbursed to them under the program.’ Last accessed, June 2010 at <http://www.worldbank.org.in/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/INDIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21742596~menuPK:295589~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:295584,00.html>.

‘agriculture to the market’ – and suggested an opening up farmland for global land markets by strengthening farmers’ access to supply chains (World Bank 2008).

In four years, the Bank found evidence of new roads transforming rural India. Bank documents described transformation in terms of greater (economic) opportunities as well as higher human development indices or quality of life. Take a January 2008 Bank newsletter, reporting changes in a ‘nondescript’ Himachal Pradesh village. It triumphantly celebrates the transformation of ‘once-sleepy hamlets that dot the hillsides into great hubs of enterprise.’ It also states, ‘mobility is indeed the key to opening up new opportunities in rural India. A new vitality is now palpable in countless remote hamlets that have been linked to main trunk roads under the PMGSY.’

The representation of space in these impact assessments is similar to that found in colonial literature on public works.¹⁸ The difference lies in the Bank literature’s incorporation of new frames of reference such as programme-impact on ‘target groups’ – the poor, women, adivasis, Dalits. I shall now examine the framing of road infrastructure as the single-most important catalyst for poverty alleviation, for physical mobility or circulation of people and things, and for social mobility in the light of ethnographic observations from Malaiur.

¹⁸ Consider John Norton’s mid-nineteenth-century work, mostly a compendium of Company literature on Madras Presidency addressed to the Joint Secretary, Board of Control, East India Company. To highlight the importance of roads, Norton mobilises the deposition of a Colonel to the Lords’ Committee – ‘*Cultivation has been extended; manufactures have increased, and the price of food has been cheapened. I may instance Tanjore especially, where the value of land has been raised, cultivation generally extended, and the condition of the people ameliorated materially*’ (Norton 1854: 49). In their late-nineteenth-century study, Strachey and Strachey make a series of claims regarding the all-round improvements effected by public works. Their preamble states that ‘progress... is seen in every branch of the administration, and in the whole condition of the people... [T]he reforms... have served to lighten the burdens pressing upon the people, to give them greater means of material progress, new markets for their produce, cheaper salt and cheaper clothing’ (1882: viii-ix). A road development committee appointed in 1927 to consider means of financing road networks and the formation of a Central Roads Board represents infrastructure in similar terms. ‘The social and political effect of good communications, especially on the rural population, is not less important than the economic... It is commonplace that social and political progress is advance by intercourse, and retarded by isolation’ (*Report of the Indian Road Development Committee, 1927–28*. Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publication Branch, 1928: 18-9). The idea of isolation, which fit with colonial conceptualisations of the village republic, continues in contemporary pathologisation of rural space. Contemporary policy documents and impact studies propose infrastructure as a technical solution to contradictions of capitalist space, and to the ‘spatial chaos’ and the disparities generated.

One of the changes attributed by impact studies to the rural roads project is a dramatic increase in the school attendance of girls. Governmental regimes in India have for long emphasised literacy, connecting it to the very capacity of rural citizens to represent themselves (Cody 2009: 352-4). Since state emphasis on formal education combines with the widespread belief that education is a sure-shot route to social mobility, educational access becomes an easy addendum with which to secure public support for infrastructure projects.

Consultants, lenders, and bureaucrats are not the only ones to link road construction and school attendance. Individuals, families, and social groups may similarly link transport and educational opportunities. Roads and schools index 'formative absences' (Li 2014a: 112) for villagers in many regions but Malaiur residents seldom connected the two.¹⁹

There were a number of educational institutions near Malaiur. In addition to government schools, there were many private schools in nearby peri-urban colonies. Madurai had many such good 'school districts.' Gender differential in school attendance was not very high in the district. In Malaiur, girls (and boys) set out each morning for their schools in public buses or private vehicles. Some older children pedalled the pista-green cycles recently distributed by the state government (to students from Backward Classes, Other Backward Classes, and Denotified Communities, ostensibly to increase representation from these administrative categories in higher-secondary schools). Children from families that could afford it, had an additional daily-dose of 'private tuitions' outside Malaiur. Others were tutored by teachers who visited Malaiur each evening for some moonlighting before returning to their own homes.

Actually, a girls' school was established in the 1920s in Malaiur, as a measure to turn village Kallar away from crime. Most elderly residents spoke as though this school had little impact. Malaiur girls had preferred goat rearing and agriculture to attending classes; the school was too much of a disciplinary space to be a venue for

¹⁹ In Indonesia's Central Sulawesi region, highlanders associated roads and schools with 'modern village life' (Li 2014a: 57), and petitioned for roads, hoping good roads would ensure that schoolteachers showed up for work regularly (ibid: 112).

social mobility. Even children from Malaiur's 'elite' families, members of the Kallar panchayat, and supervisors, contractors, and beneficiaries of the credit association, weaving centre, and coir production unit – all an outcome of colonial efforts towards Kallar reformation – had stayed away from the school. Allikodi was one such person. The only child of the family that had housed the weaving unit, she and her husband had continued to stay in Malaiur. The family was unable to hold onto and translate this opportunity. In Allikodi's terms, evil eye had resulted in the once impressive house to lie in a state of ruin. Her reminiscences hinged on two aspects – the decline of her house, and her refusal to go to school. The sight of girls returning from school in the evenings often led Allikodi to contrast their mobility and her own immobility when she was at that age. She and other young girls of Malaiur had refused to take the two steps necessary to go to school whereas now, every little female donkey took a bus, an auto, or a van and attend schools outside the village, disregarding the one in Malaiur.

Now administered as a government Kallar Middle School, it is bunched up with Malaiur's panchayat office, bus stand, *anganwadi* (day-care cum crèche set up under a government programme), and Public Distribution Scheme outlet. That is, this school is one of the structures through which the *kirāmam* manifests itself in the *ūr* centre. But caste representation in the school is uncharacteristic of village as caste space, typified by this folding in of *ūr* and *kirāmam*. Children from poor families across castes attended this school. Their families did not have the resources for 'quality' (private school) education. In Malaiur, road infrastructure had little to do with families' ability to send children to desired schools or colleges, although nearly everyone wished to secure good education and ensure social mobility.

For decades, very few children attending the Kallar School pursued higher education. By the time Arumugam had finished his school education, the state had established the Madurai Kamaraj University (MKU) in a sprawling campus in the middle of Kallarnatu. Had he wanted to, Arumugam often said, he could have gone to college, to university; his mother's *conta ūr* was near a Jesuit-run college and to MKU, and he could have stayed with relatives. But he and most of his peers did not know what good would come of education.

Although Arumugam seldom rued this, the desire for education sometimes re-emerged as allegory in the poetry he wrote. In one poem he authored, a man addressing his love interest, and bemoaning his inability to marry her, says, 'Your eyes are the University's gates/ I stand at the threshold, unable to knock.' But what about Malaiur girls of his generation? *Girls?* Girls, he said roughly, they had too much going on, days packed with chores – collecting firewood, caring for younger siblings, cooking, cleaning, grazing, weeding. Which girl could find the time to attend school? Forget about college, and university.

Roads only serve as infrastructure for connectivity. Actual mobility depends on reliable and cheap (or free) public transport. Of course, the promise of a better life is linked to rural road projects through extensive frameworks. These representations include the argument that roads enable improved economic conditions, allowing adults to earn more and spend more on children's education. Put another way, policy literature portrays transport infrastructure as catalyst of universal *and* particular goals.

One facet to this imaginary was the relation posited better transport infrastructure and labour circulation. We may recall that a section of Malaiur Kallar gained social mobility with their employment in Madurai's textile mills. None of these men connected transport infrastructure and mill employment. Rarely did a bus route cover the daily commute between Malaiur and their work-sites. Only a handful of mill workers had cycles. Most workers had traversed fields, walked on tank bunds, took short-cuts, and made new pathways. This was possible because the mills they worked in were located in nearby Kappalur, Tirupparankunram, and Tirunagar.

Although most men had lost their mill jobs by 2008, they vividly recalled the time when wages allowed for small pleasures – going to the cinema, buying flowers for their wives, or buying snacks for their families. But mill workers had money incomes – a rarity in the '60s and '70s – which they began to use for small-scale usury. These changes led to the perception that mill employment had played a substantial role in the social mobility of not only workers and their families but also of Malaiur. As workers associations began sponsoring special dramas in Kallarnatu temple festivals, the *ūr* itself became upwardly mobile in the micro-region.

In postcolonial societies where ‘capital is not hegemonic through bourgeois-democratic politics,’ and development is a sign under which subaltern groups make claims (Chari 2004: 33), mill labour signals mobility. For landless and cultivators alike, factory work was a firm step towards upward mobility. In November 2007, Valaiyar caste women (in a multi-caste settlement, a rarity in Kallarnatu) rubbished my queries about community and caste; these construction workers held that useful research is only that which generated occupation (*tolil*) in their village.

In the first round of factory employment from Malaiur, transport infrastructure had little influenced labour flows. This was not the case during my fieldwork period. Malaiur was then home to a small group of Kallar and Dalit women that had temporarily migrated to work in the garment units that comprise Tamil Nadu’s textile clusters of vast, global subcontracting chains. These were young women; as per my 2008 surveys, 17-23 years old.

At the time, a campaign to highlight the bonded or unfree nature of their work was gaining ground in Madurai. Yet villagers lauded these young women for returning to Malaiur with town-ways and fairer skin. If at all, the prison-like arrangements in factory-sites assuaged the mothers of these young women. There was little talk of bonded labour. Instead, recruiters were termed as ‘known people’ (distant kin, and local or familiar recruiters). Parents and neighbours stressed that the young women could return home in case of severe illness or deaths in families. But they preferred the restrictions on mobility in these work-sites.

Better transport networks may facilitate labour circulation, thereby serving as infrastructure to escape the village (Mines 2005). They do not automatically destabilise unfree labour’s mobilisation through kin and caste networks and place-based affiliations. For these young women, labour migration also generated new modes of gendered exploitation. These modes deploy affective categories that contradict gender’s regular appendage in government policies and financial institutions’ literature. This deployment is visible in the names – *cumaṅkali tiṭṭam*, *tirumakaḷ tirumaṅa tiṭṭam*, *māṅkalya tiṭṭam* – of the work schemes floated by textile manufacturers. Both *māṅkalya* and *cumaṅkali* have offered key frames to gender relations (Reynolds 1980), connecting auspiciousness and women’s marital status to

prosperity and abundance. The names of these 'schemes' reveal not only the means by which these young women are affectively bound through exploitative contracts to the textile industry but also the criss-crossing of global capital, flexible labour, local patriarchies, and the state.

Recruiters cite marriage transactions to mobilise this migrant labour, projecting the small stash of money paid at the end of the contract period as a dowry fund. The flexible accumulation of capital heightens the exploitation of migrant women workers. But as it conjoins the promise of immediate access to the city and a better future (through better marriage alliances), circulatory practices travel inwards, into the interiors of the self. Expropriation of labour power operates as a trade with time, with present hardships traded against the security of future marriage.

Additionally, since marriage to 'suitable' men is a significant dream-space, a desire for the domestic emerges. This desire expresses the hope that a good marriage alliance will lessen the burden of domestic work (e.g. if the home includes necessary domestic appliances not already supplied by the state government in rounds of populist schemes), if not enable women to move out of the sphere of social production. Thus, while road networks increase the net of locations for labour migration, they also effect new 'technologies of servitude' through the creation of 'certain dispositions toward others and oneself' (Rudnyckyj 2004: 412). They also increase the use of migrant labour to keep wages at bare minimum.

Road networks also do not ensure that mobility is safe and substantively accessible to all. As I traversed Kallarnatu on buses from Madurai's Arapalayam bus station to Usilampatti and back on the NH49, the specificities of women's relation to social space was brought home to me many times. This occurred not only through the usual fare of harassment from men but also through casual conversations with other women travellers. On a busy festival day in late-October 2007, I sat next to an elderly woman who was returning from her lineage temple to her home in Madurai city. The woman cautioned me against travelling alone. When I said I could not avoid travel, she instructed me to visit a renowned temple in the city, obtain a protective amulet, and wear it on my body at all times.

In instructing me to seek divine protection, my travel companion was not simply utilising absolute space as a prosthetic with which to prop up abstract space. Her advice signalled a 'mixing and mating' of global labour outsourcing and resignification of work 'outside earlier labour struggles' (Tsing 2009: 151). In this sense, my situation as migrant ethnographer recalls that of Malaiur's young women whose migration emerged through 'supply chain capitalism's... use of diverse social-economic niches through which goods and services can be produced more cheaply' (ibid: 171).

My companion's advice was but one instance of existing social relations which infrastructure projects do not automatically contend with. Better transport networks and public transport might be effected from above, but the mere presence of roads and motor vehicles does not guarantee substantive access to everyone. Malaiur men often joked that even demons [*pēy picācu*] have fled the *ūr* – such were the overpowering effects of modernity on the countryside. Attending to women's experiences of this modern space, however, suggests that the demons have relocated themselves, not permanently migrated. At first glance, the limits of abstract space apparently re-emerge as a haunting of absolute space. Consider the numbers of young girls and women who are possessed by supernatural entities while returning from schools and colleges. Women often recounted such instances, saying, 'Do not know what or why! She just came back from school and this happened.'

Anthropologist Isabelle Clark-Decès discovered that many of the demons, while responding to exorcists' queries on their identities, recalled their initial moment of possession of the female body in places such as bus stops or buses – 'not in any of the traditional wasteland landscapes but in the heart of large urban centres' (2008: 187). The space engendered by modern transportation annexes older representations of space. These representations rematerialize as elements in new representational spaces. Take the regional spatial concepts, *nāṭu* and *kāṭu* (forest, wasteland, uninhabited space). The two distinguish between settlements and territories tied differently to agrarian production and rule. The *nāṭu-kāṭu* distinction was once of essence to social space; for centuries, it was part of conceptions of space. This opposition highlights region-specific histories of differentiating between *kinds of*

agrarian territories rather than cities and villages (A. Pandian 2009). In contemporary spatial imaginaries, the *nāṭu-kāṭu* distinction reworks new fears and dangers. With bus stops and buses assuming the characteristics of *kāṭu*, 'new landscapes' come to be as dangerous as those traditionally associated with danger, anonymity, death, or possession (Clark-Decès *ibid*). The upshot is further restrictions on women's mobility.

Thus, transport infrastructure seeks to generate connectivity but many social groups experience the same space via alienation and social distance (Augé 1995: 94). Put this way, these processes emerge not simply as test cases of abstract space or as the haunting of absolute space. They characterise the hybrid space in which space-time compression and mobility conjoins with new ways of appropriating labour and policing women. They also demonstrate the space-society dialectic and disclose roads in social, rather than physical, space. It is not *physical* space, expressed in terms of road length, availability of vehicular transport, or distance between points in Euclidian space, but *social space* that interacts dialectically with social relations. Yet road-building projects have the capacity to enchant, and to pull 'culture' into the technical; many social groups thus welcome roads (Li 2014a; Campbell 2012, 2014; Harvey and Knox 2008, 2012). Concrete illustrations of passive acceptance, disruption, objection, and enthusiasm over road-building are taken up in chapter 4. With the next section, we move from examining the projection of road projects as urgent necessity and universal good to considering how infrastructure projects help overcome crises wrought by capital's internal contradictions.

Future Estimates and Present Fixes

Mega-infrastructure project implementation provide opportunities (Davidson 2015) to criticise postcolonial states for political failures – corruption, 'rent-seeking,' and the overestimation of future necessities to award unnecessary contracts in the present. What is seldom touched upon is the global scales at which megaprojects are imagined and implemented, and that roads are not just routes for capital relocation but also a great sponge for absorption of devalued capital, a venue to engineer spatial

fixes.²⁰ A recent report on corruption in India's NHDP implementation gives me a window to explore these connections.

In May 2015, the news website *Cobrapost* posted a report on high-level corruption in India's highway upgradation projects.²¹ The news item begins with the assertion that in 2005-06 the UPA-led central government approved the six-laning of existing four-lane highways to 'steal the thunder' from the previous NDA regime which had bequeathed one of its 'greatest gifts' to the country in the form of the Golden Quadrilateral. In September 2006, the Committee on Infrastructure lowered the traffic volume specifications necessary for lane upgradation, and this was only 'the first of many norms/ rules changed to hasten project implementation.' The report also levelled specific corruption charges in two six-laning projects where the government increased the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) from a limit of 5 per cent of total construction cost to a phenomenal 36 per cent. The central government audit body later reported the current traffic flow on one of these projects to be so low that the government was burdened not only by high VGF but also by having to forgo toll revenues for the next 24 years.

In Public Private Partnership (PPP) models of infrastructure building, VGF is ordinary procedure. VGF is a state grant contributing to capital outlay, thereby making road projects more 'viable' and attractive to private companies. It is a procedural means to overcome the sectoral peculiarities to capital's fixity-motion in road projects (or other spatial fixes in the built environment). Although road projects absorb enormous amounts of devaluing capital, the realisation of this capital takes effect after a long period. States not only continue to absorb project costs (either directly through fund allocation or indirectly by agreeing to conditions imposed by lenders) but also absorb risks to private infrastructure companies.

²⁰ The idea of space as a sponge for absorbing overaccumulated capital is widely accepted. Schoenberger, for example, summarises Harvey's concept of the spatial fix as that which 'provides a way to productively soak up capital by transforming the geography of capitalism' (2004: 428).

²¹ <http://cobrapost.com/index.php/news-detail?nid=8723&cid=64>, accessed 30.08.2015. Unless specified otherwise, quotes in this section are from this report. Other national dailies such as the Times of India also published the report within days.

These governance techniques and political projects appear as economic incentives to induce private participation in 'risky' fields. Risks include the non-materialisation of projected increases in a route's traffic flow – when there are not enough people renting the commodity of a tollway, it takes longer for achieving target revenues.²² PPP risk management means that gaps in intended and actual toll revenues are already folded into initial project design and funding. States insure private builders against these risks with public monies. It is widely recognised within the infrastructure sector that 'risk allocation is... a critical component of all links between government[s] and the private sector' (Lay 2009: 43). Risks continue to threaten these projects, even as big data and mathematical modelling seek exact estimates and projections.

When a road is conceptualised, it is standard procedure to predict future traffic density on the route and to rework these projections back into the present. There is always the possibility of major statistical error. The backcasting of overenthusiastic projections appear to be shaky grounds for infrastructure companies to build roads on. Road builders, engineers, and bureaucrats are aware of this and count it as one of two key risks for national road authority bodies (ibid).²³ Since the construction of a road with some 'initial over-capacity' is taken to extend the life of the road itself, and seen as 'economically justifiable' (Lay 2009: 65), corruption is an inadequate analytical tool to understand UPA's approval for six-laning.²⁴

Large-scale corruption undoubtedly exists in mega-infrastructure projects. Politicians, bureaucrats, and planners utilise such projects to line their own pockets.

²² The *Cobrapost* reported specific corruption in two projects – NH5's Chandikhol–Jagaptur–Bhubaneswar section, and about 192 km of NH2's Varanasi-Aurangabad section. Other factored risks, according to the government and NHAI, was that since nearly 140 km of the NH2 section passed through Bihar, no company was willing to take up construction on a BOT basis. The government justified VGF increase on the grounds that companies had a 'risk perception for working in Bihar,' and that the highway passed through 'Naxal-affected area.'

²³ According to this author of a road technology handbook, the other risk is that in road construction, 'funds invested are 'sunk' in the construction of the project, and cannot later be withdrawn or re-allocated' (Lay 2009: 43). Where road projects are financed by loans (as most roads are), lenders are 'particularly interested in the extent to which the Government guarantees loan repayments' (ibid).

²⁴ Recent ethnographic research on infrastructure sites elsewhere in India adds that the 'techniques and inequalities previously associated with the "shadow state" or "corruption" have become central to the realization of state projections and revenue' (Bear 2011: 57).

Infrastructure projects also allow politicians to sanction works in their own constituencies. Indeed, these projects find favour among politicians because roads easily exceed their ‘technical function’ (as infrastructure for the circulation of people and goods). They offer many opportunities – via, for example, government contract dispensation – to forge and sustain patron-client relations (Larkin 2013: 334).

Each government attempts to reframe road projects to its advantage. Thus, a highway project initiated by one regime can be construed as the ‘greatest gift’ to the nation, and a successive regime’s upgradation of these highways can be construed as ‘stealing the thunder,’ as is the case in *Cobrapost*’s opening frame. In addition to these ‘poetics of infrastructure’ where road projects are ‘concrete semiotic and aesthetic vehicles’ (ibid: 329), roads also materially serve political networks.

Dividing a road construction project into smaller projects has many uses. One is the ease of managing and funding. The per kilometre construction costs of four- and six-lane highways are unimaginably high.²⁵ The other is that awarding contracts for smaller stretches of a road generates more contracts that can be awarded. In turn, these can be apportioned to smaller and local businesses that are roped in as subcontracting firms. Politicians can thus accommodate more clients.

²⁵ When the NHDP was set up, the cost of constructing a four-lane highway was Rs 4 crore per km. By 2010, when costs had increased to Rs 9 crore per km, NHAI requested the Planning Commission to increase its allocation to Rs 12 crore per km. The Planning Commission disagreed, terming it inflated cost-estimation. It estimated that, adjusting for inflation, the cost would go up to Rs 9.6 crore per km. Industry analysts agreed with the Planning Commission, with one infrastructure consultancy firm estimating an increase to a maximum of Rs 9.7 crore per km (‘NHAI, Plancom differ on cost of 4-lane highways.’ *Business Standard*. 10.08.2010). NHAI estimates for revising highway construction cost allocation were then calculated on the basis of changes in construction material costs and India’s Wholesale Price Index (WPI). Labour costs are only a small portion of highway construction costs in India. The approximate material-equipment-labour cost ratio in June 2015 stood at 64.1:21.5:14.2. NHAI then revised its methodology for cost estimation and came up with an independent sector index, the NHCCI (National Highways Construction Cost Index) to overcome difficulties in using WPI in ‘price escalation clauses for settling claims’ (NHAI. 2014. *Discussion paper on compilation of NHCCI*, <http://www.nhai.org/Doc/27june14/discussion%20paper%20on%20NHCCI%20-%20website.pdf>, accessed 18.07.2015). Experts argued that relying on WPI index leads to errors in calculations of price escalation – the composition of road construction’s ‘item basket’ was specific whereas WPI is too broad and too inadequate an index (it did not include all elements of the road construction ‘item basket’) for arriving at a road construction cost index (NHAI. *NHCCI: Methodology*, http://www.nhai.org/NHCCI_methodology_Jun15.pdf, accessed 18.07.2015).

This allows for the doubling of infrastructure (Larkin 2013), wherein roads act simultaneously as substrata for circulation, as unifying projects, and as political and social projects (also Harvey and Knox 2008). In the instances reported by *Cobrapost*, the division of a road construction project also provided governments an easy exit route from following mandated procedures and safeguard measures. *Cobrapost* reveals this much, through its interpretation of why the entire 6500 km of highways that were to be six-laned in this NHDP phase were divided into 65 projects of 100 km each. Since road segments lengthier than this require cabinet-level approval, apportioning a road into smaller projects dispenses with the necessity.

But the category of corruption makes for lazy scholarship. It disables us from seeing how structural priorities at the global-scale dictate infrastructural projects. The impetus to exaggerate present necessity and future realisation exists at the moment of a project's conceptualisation. That is, exaggeration exists prior to contract dispensation and any attendant corruption. What Poovey says of futures trading is equally applicable to infrastructure projects, that 'the representation of future profits actually generates those profits' (2003: 28).

Predictions of exaggerated increase in traffic flow serves to augment costs of projects. In general, bagging contracts in megaprojects present companies with opportunities to author great forward-looking statements. Growth forecasting affects the way financial analysts interpret and report new developments. The company's share prices shoot up and it is able to raise capital more easily (Poovey 2003: 29-30). Thus, greater the traffic flow predictions, bigger the market for roads.

The extension of road networks also generates new users. More cars mean more revenue for toll companies, quicker exhaustion of a road's life, and swifter oversaturation of traffic corridors.²⁶ This calls for newer, more expansive roads.

²⁶ It is the car – not the public transport bus – that appears most frequently in current government reports on highway building. For example, the Ministry of Shipping, Road Transport and Highways' *Manual of specifications and standards for six-laning of national highways through public private partnership* suggests, 'if the Project Highway has regular movement of buses either through Government or through private sector, bus bays shall be planned, designed and provided' (2008: 8; emphasis added). This cues us to the greater planning emphasis on spatial practices favouring car owners and freighters as consumers of road space, and the slow dismantling of public transportation. Of course, heightened road building carries on across the globe (more so in developing economies), undeterred by issues such as climate change. We here see the continued operations of the agnotology,

Besides, road-building technologies also keep changing; the best material mix and design twenty years ago may now be outdated. Diverse interests uphold the continued focus on upgradation of existing routes.

At the global scale, statistical forecasting and backcasting in the infrastructure sector provides many fixes in the game to ricochet capital between the poles of fixity and motion. Fixed capital, as Marx defines it, is not just the set of instruments of labour (such as machinery), themselves commodities to be traded in capital goods markets. It also envelops the actual physical routes through which all commodities and people circulate. More the spread of transport networks, greater the scope to annihilate space through time – ‘fluid movement *over* space can be achieved only by fixing certain physical infrastructures *in* space’ (Harvey 2003: 99).

But to construct a highway is to sink enormous amounts of capital into place, and unlike other kinds of fixed capital, the potential for a second-hand market for roads is of a different kind. Markets in recycling are fields in which to productively dump devaluing capital. Medical instruments that are outdated in one territory can be exported to another, thereby extending the value that accrues from them. Ships that ‘expire’ or outlive their regulated lifetime in one region can come to Alang, Gujarat, or somewhere else, for recycling or death. That is, some kinds of fixed capital can be dismantled, and its components reused as raw material in other industries.

But a road is not a ribbon (Braudel 1995) that can be rolled up and shipped to another location where it can be unrolled. The second-hand market in roads is more complex. When a road dies, it is unceremoniously buried and papered over with another bout of construction in some locations but recycled in others. The extent to which road construction materials are recycled varies. Given the impetus to use roads as a sponge for absorbing overaccumulated capital, efforts to coordinate the market for recycling materials may well be ‘one of the best-kept secrets.’²⁷

a complete denial of climate change, which was one of neoliberal capitalism’s early responses (Mirowski 2013). Broadly speaking, though, by representing better and more roads as more energy-efficient, road projects draw climate change as though it were a trump card – better roads are needed because they are a means to save fuel and thereby contribute towards climate change mitigation.

²⁷ *Equipment World*. 02.03.2008. ‘Technology: Road recycling.’ Accessed at <http://www.equipmentworld.com/technology-road-recycling/>. Asphalt recycling is well-developed in the US, where 80 per cent of about 73 million tons of recycled asphalt returns to road construction.

A final illustration follows, one last allegorical vitalisation of road before I pronounce it overused. State policies also engineer sudden deaths of existing roads by favouring new constructions over repairs. New roads allow for investing more over-accumulated and devalued capital into transport infrastructure. This is true not just for high-intensity and heavy traffic corridors such as national and state highways but also for rural roads. Tamil Nadu government's 2007 guidelines for fund allocation under its Infrastructure Gap Filling Fund (or IGFF) for rural areas, gave considerable leeway to district administrators on project selection and financial outlay. The guidelines did say that there was no baseline or minimum value of projects.

Technically, the IGFF could finance small-scale works. The government seemed fiscally cautious and favouring works that were small-scale yet out of reach for panchayats. But the thrust was on overspending. The State Finance Commission's guidelines actually stipulated that district collectors avoid sanctioning piece-meal works and instead take up 'substantial works,' stating that 'if a road work is sanctioned, the entire length of the damaged road should be taken up instead of taking up only a stretch of the damaged road.'²⁸

Internal contradictions and the characteristics of road construction such as the ones examined above (including the poetics of infrastructure), and the constant back-and-forth movement necessary to keep capital bouncing between the poles of fixity and motion, ensure that road building is a favoured activity. This brings us to another set of problems for the circulation of capital in the infrastructure sector. How to ensure that the enormous amount of capital sunk in a highway continues to be realised? One way is by ensuring that production itself respects the path dependencies produced by transport networks.

Roads 'act as a significant drag upon geographical transformations and the relocation of capitalist activity' (Harvey 2003: 100). While cautioning ourselves

Manufacturer associations for other road construction material similarly extend markets. One US cement manufacturers association lobbies for, and provides technical skills to road authorities on, using cement-based techniques for 'in-place recycling of worn out asphalt pavements with cement' (<http://www.roadrecycling.org/About-FDR-with-Cement.html>, accessed 31.08.2015). The thrust on recycling may be connected to the housing sector crash, when cement manufacturers had to invent new uses for their commodity.

²⁸ http://www.tnrd.gov.in/Pt_Raj/linkfiles/go_rd_182_07_pg282.pdf accessed 23.08.2015.

against reification of capital, we must also bring to bear the interconnectedness and systemic interactions between production, circulation, distribution, and consumption; between port authorities, road builders, raw material extractors, and factory owners. As Marx writes, ‘fixed capital is as much a presupposition for the production of circulating capital as circulating capital is for the production of capital’ (in Harvey 2006: 215).

Firms engaged in production or the extraction of raw materials double up as financiers of ports, and rail and road corridors. Oil firms, fruit exporting companies, and bauxite extraction businesses have stakes in keeping their commodities on the move, and therefore on the building and maintenance of transport networks.²⁹ Toll companies have their own interests in keeping industrial production intact along their routes, and are interested in routes that maximise the number of road users willing to pay rent for using this commodity.

Resource extraction and production, however, have their own rhythms and temporal frames, which incorporate both non-human space-time and abstract capitalist space-time.³⁰ Oil and bauxite sources run dry. Banana plantations become unproductive over time. Crop diseases may wreck entire cacao plantations instantly (Li 2014a). Without cotton production, cotton roads and railway stations fall into neglect unless they come to serve the circulation of another commodity, or local groups appropriating these infrastructures successfully petition the government to keep them intact. The lack of commodities for circulation normally means lesser interest in keeping the means of circulation intact. Roads then fall into disrepair, railway tracks abandoned, and ports shut down.

Some dramatic moments and processes sustain and increase the opportunities for capital investment in infrastructure. Roads sink and drag capital but what is sunk may also be drawn out. Natural disasters and wars offer moments to

²⁹ Korean giant POSCO was accorded land to build a steel plant in eastern India, and given additional land and promises to allow the sinking of a new captive port and road and rail networks.

³⁰ Recent ethnographic work explores these tensions. For instance, Laura Bear draws upon Alfred Gell’s characterisation of time existing in three forms – ‘as a non-human timespace phenomenon traced in Einsteinian physics; as a social framing of time; and as a personal experience of time’ – to call for anthropological explorations of ‘the full range of time-maps and their different social effects’ (2014: 25-16).

ward off the effects of capital being sunk into space for unproductively long durations. War victors benefit from both the destruction and the rebuilding of infrastructure in territories they gain (Harvey 2003, 2006). Less obvious is freeing of capital sunk in transport infrastructure through continuous transformations of geographical chains of production and reproduction.

Production sites shift due to the effects of non-human time on capitalist production. Production sites also shift in accordance to the abstract space-times engendered by capital. The global spread of JIT or just-in-time production and 'supply chain capitalism' (Tsing 2009) have required states and regions to modify road networks (and ports, airports, and railroads) and pay adequate attention not only at the arterial level but also at the capillary level. The worldwide extension of and constant modifications to supply chains ensure that capital is not 'sunk' for too long in transport infrastructures. The combined effect is that of an industrial, technocratic, and bureaucratic thirst for infrastructure. This is a thirst that cannot easily be quenched – since technically capital shifts towards territories that enable greater value to be realised, infrastructural networks have to be constantly modified.³¹

Decisions over when, where, and what kinds of roads and road networks are built, sustained, or neglected are influenced by capitalism's internal contradictions, the need to balance capital's fixity and motion, and changing patterns to the realisation of value. What about road-related local conflicts more easily grasped by ethnographic research methods, the kinds of conflict that geographical analyses of capital and transport infrastructure over large territories are less likely to address? The next chapter examines conflicts in locations re-networked and transformed through road construction. But before that, I turn from plan documents and representations of space to modes by which Malaiur Kallar turn a village feeder road

³¹ These changes are visible also in port development. For instance, new ports and railway lines were planned alongside projects for mineral extraction in parts of eastern India. Take Odisha's Dhamra port, one of the first minor ports to come in the purview of PPP models. As the rate at which mineral extraction from nearby regions increased, the older port required urgent upgradation – a new port, in effect – to 'serve this hinterland with the greatest efficiency.' This included building new rail routes from the port to the point of loading commodities, which was over sixty km into the hinterland. <http://www.dhamraport.com/profile.php>.

into an aspect of representational space. By re-entering village feeder roads, memory, and affect, we also return to Kallar self-representation.

A Road in Representational Space

Of all the built structures pointed out by Malaiur's Kallar residents as the remnants of a village-colonial state confrontation, the Willingdon road was the only one not in a state of ruin. Also, when compared to access roads of a few other Kallarnatu villages I had visited, the Willingdon road was in a good condition. On the morning of the tourist Pongal in 2008, Sachin and other Kallar men stressed the importance of the road we were travelling on, and briefed me on its history. Researchers are likely to know of this road's significance well before visiting Malaiur. Kallar individuals in Madurai city and Usilampatti had notified me of it long before I visited Malaiur. Two months later, in March 2008, speakers and audience members at a seminar organised by Madurai Kamaraj University on 'The impact of the Criminal Tribes Act: Yesterday, Today and the Days to come' referred to this road.

This road has multiple significance. It opened up the country in ways commensurate to colonial rule, enabling surveillance over village Kallar, transforming circulatory practices, and allowing officials and missionaries to implement an array of small-scale schemes for Kallar Reclamation. The Willingdon road transformed many spatial practices but Kallar collective memory now anchors it as evidence of CTA-related repression.

We shall examine Malaiur-specific memories of this road but the widespread trend in Kallarnatu was to compress its significance as follows. Malaiur was the first village in Madurai district to be serviced by a metalled road. The road was built to control this *ūr*. The Earl of Willingdon (one-time Governor of Madras Presidency, later Viceroy of India), took this road to visit Malaiur. This visit gave the road its name.

During our initial interactions, Malaiur Kallar residents often stated that I was using the same road that this famous visitor to their *ūr* had taken. Although repaired and rebuilt many times, according to villagers, the road was never realigned. The social relations, spatial practices, and representations of space involved in road design, in maintaining the original alignment, in realignment, and in repairs, are

questions for the next chapter. But here is a sample of the standard reasons Kallar villagers attributed the Willingdon road's original alignment to.

Arumugam: Before Malaiur was notified under the Fingerprint Act, the white man tried many times to control us. To bring an entire *ūr* under control [*kaṭṭupāṭṭu*], the white man needed police, horses, and a path. Those days, there were no roads. There were only pathways amidst fields. Horses and policemen could not move quickly. Kept sliding, falling. So [the white man] built a road. When he hears that Malaiur people stole here or there, he can reach quickly... But what did we do? Just so he cannot come quickly, we built a road with many curves... Dhivya, did you ever think why this road is not straight?

Dhivya: No.

A: This is why. Those days, only very comfortable folk had horses and bullock carts. No one that comfortable in this region. Our grandfathers, fathers, they would climb this hill. If they saw a horse or a bullock cart, they knew it was the police. They would wave a white towel from the hilltop. To inform the *ūr*. By the time the police or other officials reached, the *ūr* would be silent [with everyone fleeing]. For the sake of *time*, Dhivya, to escape before the police arrives. That is why this road has so many curves.

D: So, did Malaiur people build this road?

A: No. How? Why would we build it?

D: Then who did?

A: People of nearby villages. For *labour coolie*... See this new road, this four-lane [the NH7, then being upgraded near Malaiur]. From Bihar, from Maharashtra, from all these places, these men come. To build roads in places of unfamiliar tongue. Then too, Dhivya. To build a road to this *ūr*, the white man used other village coolie.

In such accounts, the Willingdon road is an eye of the empire, built for surveillance over Malaiur Kallar. It was built to bring the village physically closer to the police, an infrastructure necessary for other instruments and institutions of surveillance. It was to help the state keep a close watch on villagers whose own watching rights as *kāvalkārār* conflicted with new colonial arrangements for power

and surveillance in the countryside. This was also a road to protect other roads, built to control those who had gained notoriety as highway robbers.

According to Arumugam, the colonial state built the road to 'gain' time whereas villagers aligned it such that it was they who gained time. It was an account I heard on many occasions in that period. In 2014, during an event commemorating the CTA's implementation in Malaiur, Arumugam spoke about the road alignment. From a newspaper report, I gathered that Arumugam had termed it a tactic to delay the police.

These road-related memories turn from conceived space to lived space. As we shift our focus from representations of space to consider a road with respect to representational space, curvatures and alignments barely connect to technologies of road building and designs. In abstract representations, existing ecological (perhaps also social) frameworks dictate road alignment. We presume that experts decide on road curvatures for reasons unclear to non-experts.

For Malaiur Kallar, the excessively curved feeder road is but a material and design manifestation of representational space. The road emerged only because the state feared their village. This fear, in turn, was caused by qualities of caste and village – Malaiur was notorious as a *payaṅkaramāna ūr*, a terrifying village (chapter 2); Malaiur was also the place where caste *kuṇam* or essence, Kallar valour, best exhibited itself (see chapter 5).

Significantly, Malaiur villagers did not mutely accept the colonial conception of the road as an instrument of control. They connived to redesign the road and give themselves sufficient time to avoid arrest. Their action swelled up the road, destabilising the time-space compression the state intended.

All this is not much by way of explaining why this was the first metalled road in rural Madurai. We do not know whether colonial officials built a metalled road simply to ensure speedy police movement. We do not know how production relations affected road construction and alignment. We do not know how the efforts to turn Malaiur into a site of commodity production – district officials set up a

weaving centre and an agricultural credit society in the village – linked up with the circulatory practices this road affected.

I was unable to conduct extended, well-designed archival research that would help me address these queries. But I address a different set of linkages between road infrastructure and social and spatial relations in the next chapter. These explorations concentrate on the NH7 near Malaiur, which has influenced land ownership and land use, kinship, and other aspects.

Conclusion

By taking the representations of road projects as its main object of analysis, and juxtaposing these representations with spatial practices and representational space, this chapter hints at the incomplete production of social space in the image of capital. Abstract space can only *attempt* to project space as though it were empty and homogeneous (Lefebvre 1991). Cities' master plans, and national highway or intercity tollway projects do not emerge only through a combination of city planners, administrators, and subnational, national, and international abstract designing of space. They are seeded with the interests of local land-owners, real property dealers, and politicians. Yet without completely seizing space, attempts to render space empty and homogenous has considerable effects. City master plans enable the demolition of working-class neighbourhoods, the plans of intercity expressways enable land acquisition, and draft-plans of highways generate speculative markets.

Lefebvre has been criticised for forwarding the binary logic he seeks to destabilise (Mitchell 2002: 79). Timothy Mitchell notes that laws of private property divide 'the world into law on one side and land on the other, abstraction versus material reality,' and that the world is resolved into two separate and opposed dimensions, 'thing versus idea, reality versus abstraction, space versus its meaning' (2002: 78). Mitchell's observations about colonialism producing a social space that built into its very edifice the denial of difference by redistributing arbitrariness are important to us.

Yet Lefebvre presages such analysis of space, and his triad destabilises binary logic. The charge that Lefebvre relies on binary logic arises through our erroneous reading of his spatial triad. As noted in the thesis's introductory remarks, it is we who

take elements of the triad – representations of space, spatial practices, and representational space – as concepts for distinct dimensions. Lefebvre’s method of exposition was to first provisionally define these elements, and then to develop them throughout his work.

The next chapter shows how the abstract space produced in and through capitalism in India works precisely through the ‘fuzziness’ of property regimes. We shall see that roads (and land acquisition for its construction) is only apparently conceptualised in the abstract. Road-building depends on, and expresses from the beginning, concrete, multi-scalar social relations.

CHAPTER 4 BUT IT MAY BE ‘ALL ABOUT WATER’ AND LAND: ON ROADS, LAND, AND IRRIGATION

Two thousand years ago, Saint Thiruvalluvar, in one of his couplets “on the greatness of a Kingdom” wrote thus: [...] “Waters from rains and springs, a mountain near, and waters thence; These make a land, with fortress’ sure defence.” Which means: The constituents of a kingdom are the two waters (from above and below), well situated hills and indestructible fort. These writ petitions [on a proposed highway construction across tanks in Tamil Nadu’s Trichy district] are all about waters.

—*Selvakumar vs Union of India, 2010, Madras High Court*

When a man buys a mat he rolls it up and takes it away; similarly unless the purchaser has rolled up my land and taken it away how can he be said to have purchased them?

—A Chotanagpur adivasi (1921) responding to eviction (Li 2014b: 589)

The realisation that social space is in ‘perpetual movement’ leads us to appreciate that it is ‘the totality of social relations’ which is the moving power of social space (Ahuja 2009: 30). It enables anthropology to observe how contradictory social groups produce social space at any given moment. The previous chapter identified contradictory impulses in the infrastructure sector. How do these contradictions work in and through the units typically studied by ethnographers? Do roads only generate new conflicts and new spatial arrangements, or do they also reconstitute existing social relations? How do different individuals, families, generations, castes, genders, and classes respond to road projects? Are the concerns of an *ayacutdar*,¹ who knows that a road cutting across a tank affects irrigation and cultivation, the same as those of landless families seeking means for subsistence outside the village? Also, do people simply respond to infrastructure policies? This chapter shall reveal that the local does not only absorb infrastructures as diktats imposed by the global, national, or regional. It also attends to the dialectics between social space and social

¹ From *ayacut*, the command area of an irrigation source; *ayacutdar* are cultivators whose fields fall in this area.

relations, by asking whether spatial practices such as infrastructure-building simply unfold or also reconstitute existing dominance-subordination relations.

In chapter 3, large-scale producers, corporations, bureaucrats, and international and national agencies appeared as main actors in infrastructure projects. An impulse for road building can also come from regionally or locally dominant groups and subordinate groups. While dominant groups have greater success in lobbying for new roads or realignments, by transforming existing relations, roads also enable new socially mobile groups to further their ascendance.

I start from southern Tamil Nadu, examining interconnections between villages and cities, and caste groups and village roads. In this section, I also examine roads in other locations during moments of conflict. The second section examines how roads reassemble land and affect property markets. It takes up a tollway project between Bangalore and Mysore in Karnataka state and the connection between the 2008 NH7 upgradation and land transfers and property disputes in Malaiur. We see the road not only as an infrastructure for agricultural and industrial production but also for the production and consumption of space itself. I then consider how roads act on tanks. Finally, I examine roadworks undertaken through a recent (nationwide) employment guarantee scheme. This demonstrates policies ensuring a steady supply of labour for the reconstitution of India's rural areas.

Roads and Caste Relations

The previous chapter identified that transport infrastructure creates and follows path dependencies in the geographies of production and reproduction. A number of modern roads were even named after the commodities they were built to circulate (sugarcane roads, cotton roads, salt roads etc.). Historical research reveals that petitions by sugarcane associations and cotton merchants for roads in this region have had greater chance of materialising than the desires of a labour force for roads and public transport. Where direct public works were not sanctioned, powerful associations of commodity producers and merchants even raised money through subscriptions and contributed to road construction and maintenance.

These ventures yielded benefits and made such groups more powerful. In the nineteenth century, expanding commercial cotton production in Madras Presidency's black soil southern districts enhanced venues of social mobility for lower-caste groups (Ludden 1986: 159-62). One such group consists of Shanar, or Nadar, subcastes 'traditionally' engaged in toddy-tapping but including powerful merchant families by mid-nineteenth century. Nadar are currently perceived by other regional groups as a caste of extremely rich merchants. Yet class-differentiation exists within this group along individual, familial, and subcaste lines, illustrating that social mobility is seldom extensive within castes.

Across the region, some dominant families, controlling land as per older social and spatial practices, were unable to translate existing networks of dominance and rule into dominance within an abstract space emerging through colonialism. Other dominant families, and some newly mobile families and groups, could utilise the transformations of this period for their benefit.

Transport infrastructures played an important role in these reconstitutions of caste relations. We could superimpose the staggered mobility of Nadar subcastes onto a map of transport routes of the period to correlate uneven caste mobility with an emergent social space dictating and responding to changes in agricultural production and new circulatory infrastructures (Hardgrave 1969: 104-6). In cotton market towns and processing centres such as Virudhunagar, Kamudhi, Aruppukottai, and Sivakasi, Nadar merchants became more powerful with the advent of quicker, cheaper transportation (ibid; Ludden 1986: 193-6). By the close of the nineteenth century, 'caste clashes' between Nadar and other social groups marked these places (Hardgrave ibid; Frykenberg 1981). These included Maravar and Kallar subcastes, some of which had experienced a decline in dominance (Ludden ibid).

Not all these changes in social relations and spatial practices emerged from new infrastructure; to suggest so would be to replicate the spatial fetishism in infrastructure policies. Circulatory infrastructure is but one element that keeps space in motion. Other elements include spatial practices and the networks and relations between people, places, production, territoriality, and kinship, gender and caste relations.

And a space in movement re-networks the relations between people, places, commodities, and objects, and transforms notions of territoriality, and production and reproduction relations. Railways and roads built by cotton traders and the colonial state transformed, strengthened, or produced fresh path dependencies to the transformations of social relations. Modern transport infrastructure affected Kallarnatu territoriality, relations between Kallar lineages, and relations between the subcaste and other social groups. There was no single, overarching author (including infrastructure) of these transformations.

In 1841, Nadar merchants in Thirumangalam, Madurai, raised sufficient finances through subscriptions to start reconstructing a north-westerly road of about 18 miles between Thirumangalam (in south Madurai) to Sholavandan (one of Madurai's old agrarian settlements). The colonial government then took up this effort. The effort of merchants actually 'induced the [District] Collector to make preliminary efforts towards the construction of a road' from Tiruchuli, a taluk in present-day Virudhunagar district, to Thirumangalam.² In 1856, the Thirumangalam–Sholavandan road, which would allow traffic between the south's market centre and Dindigul to bypass Madurai, was still under construction.³

The Thirumangalam–Sholavandan road that merchants sought to build fed into what was then Madurai district's 'chief road,' which connected Madras to Kollam (or Quilon), an old port city in present-day Kerala. At the Thirumangalam end, this merchants' road joined the route witnessing the maximum of Madurai's mid-

² 'Summary of News – Madura,' *Utayātārakai/ Morning Star* (Supplement) 01 July 1841, 13: 132. American Mission Press: Jaffna. Interestingly, this report's appearance in *Morning Star*, Jaffna's oldest news magazine, reveals another kind of circulation and the emergence of a print culture in the Tamil region. Here we see interconnections between transport and communication. A widening net of transport infrastructure, produced mainly for the circulation of commodities (and for older concerns such as surveillance and control), was appropriated for the circulation of periodicals, newspapers, printed caste histories and *talapurāṇam* (place-histories). These travelled along with commodities such as cotton, sugarcane, and rice, and created complicated nodes and intersections for the circulation of ideas and the production of new identities, and novel caste- territory interactions in the colonial Tamil region. Interestingly, the Jaffna periodical report and source is also cited in the current Wiki entry for Sholavandan. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sholavandan>, accessed 31.08.2015.

³ Report from Collector of Madura to Chief Engineer, Madura, 13.05.1856, No. 460. *Selections from the records of the Madras Government, Volume 47. Report on the district roads, for 1855–56*. Madras: Hindu Press.

nineteenth-century road traffic. On the other end, Sholavandan lay on a branch of another major route connecting Dindigul with Madurai and Ramnad.⁴

The route between Thirumangalam and Sholavandan was a minor feeder road in the mid-nineteenth century. Today, however, the road connecting these two important commercial centres of Madurai extends upwards to present-day Dindigul district and has the status of a state highway, SH73. Now labelled in district records as the Thirumangalam–Pallapatti road, it services pilgrimages such as those to a Mariamman temple in Sholavandan, industries such as cotton mills, and Sholavandan’s agricultural belt, in addition to three trauma care centres appropriate to traffic flow.⁵

The nineteenth century merchants’ road is now a state highway traversing the Kallarnatu portion currently administered under Madurai’s Thirumangalam taluk. Kallarnatu was transformed by new road networks, administrative structures, and changes in production relations. Some old centres of this *nāṭu* slowly transformed into ‘interior’ or peripheral villages as a social space emerging under colonialism gave new meanings to, and redirected the relationality of, caste, kinship, and territoriality.

This is precisely the area where Kallarnatu’s *rajdhani* (capital) – the three hamlets of Mela Urappanur, Keela Urappanur, and (Ooranda) Urappanur – are located. Urappanur’s status as *rajdhani* denotes a centrality deriving from links between Kallarnatu and Madurai’s Nayaka polity. That is, another centre (the seat of the Nayaka overlord) constituted Urappanur’s status as the older *nāṭu* centre (*rajdhani* of Kallarnatu). Up to a point, these older social spaces were still visible. Urappanur’s status as *rajdhani* is visible in the 1910s, when district administrators began to work towards the imposition of CTA on PIRAMALAI KALLAR.

In this decade, before colonial authorities notified the entire subcaste as a criminal tribe, they notified four Kallarnatu villages. This included Mela Urappanur, which continued to go by the epithet of Kallarnatu’s *rajdhani*. The term *rajdhani* figures in notes prepared by colonial administrators, who surveyed landholdings,

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ ‘Information relating to road: important features like tourism, pilgrimage, industries, agriculture activities.’ n.d., accessed 14.07.2010.

irrigation facilities, and agricultural practices in these villages prior to their notification.⁶

The term also surfaces in petitions challenging the notification. Consider the 1915 petition filed by Madurai-based lawyer George Joseph (participant in the district's trade union politics and anti-CTA agitations, and briefly sympathetic to, and active in, the Congress). Joseph petitioned on behalf of Urappanur Kallar, challenging the compulsory registration of all adult Kallar villagers.⁷ The petition stresses Urappanur's status as *rajdhani* (as also the fact that Urappanur Kallar cultivators regularly paid taxes). *Rajdhani* echoed a juridical term colonial officials were familiar with. Translated as a territory's capital, it evokes special status and an appeal for exception.

Urappanur villages tried to fold the *nāṭu* back into new territorialities and administrative practices. They attempted to suture different territorialities – indeed, different social spaces. But while *nāṭu* as a way of reckoning territorial control was giving way to the pressures of a social space reconstituted by colonialism, it did not disappear. It continued in this reconstituted space, even as it came to be expressed differently during this transition. Some older *nāṭu* centres became the places from which representation to new political structures flowed. Urappanur seemed to have achieved this transition.

In the 1950s, soon after Dumont had left Kallarnatu to write the monograph in which the *nāṭu* appears as a fixed territory, the Urappanur villages were a hub of Kallar political representation. In the 1952 Madras state assembly elections, Indian National Congress contestant from Keela Urappanur, Thinakaraswami Thevar, became Sedapatti constituency representative. Kallarnatu's *rajdhani* was attempting to continue as one.

⁶ Incidentally, some of these notes and government orders (G.O.s) circulate among the subcaste today. In their significance and status, and in the mode of their exchange and display, these documents are not unlike the sacral objects redistributed in temple festivals. It is to this scattered archive as it appeared during public meetings and personal interactions that I pay attention to. I thank Sundara Vanthiyathevan for sharing the documents relevant to this section.

⁷ G.O. No. 2956, Judicial, 02.12.1915, Tamil Nadu State Archives. Partially exchanged and closely guarded by those who have copies of it, the circulation of this document illustrates the circulation of archival material in Madurai and the pulling back of the archive into collective memory through local newspaper articles, caste histories, magazines, newsletters, and public speeches.

That past glory does not always match present status is as true of *ūr* and *nāṭu* as it is of individuals and families. In my fieldwork period, one of the key Kallar politicians was from Perungamanallur. This AIADMK leader was a former state minister, and the sitting MLA of Sedapatti constituency. Peripheral to the old *nāṭu*, Perungamanallur turned into an important hub of Kallar politics in the 1990s, when an annual CTA-related commemoration took off in this village (chapter 5). Contrarily, Urappanur villages have become more peripheral to Kallarnatu. This is particularly so within a representational space constituted by a jumble of affect, memories, and emotions. Most Kallar individuals dismissed Urappanur's importance, saying, it might once have been a big place, but who cares for all that now?

Villages that were peripheral in the *nāṭu* could well become new centres of dominance and power. One such village is Perungamanallur. Another is Malaiur. Malaiur's growing importance in this shadowy or spectral Kallarnatu territory has little to do with its location in the *nāṭu* and more to do with its Euclidian proximity to Madurai city.

This combine of new territorialities, circulatory infrastructure, and spatial practices have also affected intra-Kallar disputes over honour. One such dispute was the ongoing conflict over which of Kallarnatu's eight *nāṭu* is the *mutal nāṭu*. The contention involves the social recognition of *mutal nāṭu* or, some Kallar men translated it, a fight over 'which is the "first country?"' The main dispute is between Tidiyan *nāṭu* and Valandur *nāṭu*. The current dispute hinges on the order in which *nāṭu* representatives receive honours during temple festivals. Both *nāṭu* have their own legends and reasons to claim primacy.

Cuntaravantiyattēvan has recently suggested that Tidiyan was the *mutal nāṭu* when Kallarnatu was an 'independent' territory whereas Valandur became the *mutal nāṭu* under Nayaka rule (2011: 144). Contending explanations and justifications existed, claims expressed through not only histories and idioms of kinship and kingship but also new infrastructures and positions in abstract Euclidian space.

In October 2007, some Kallar residents of Chokkatevanpatti village, part of Valandur *nāṭu*, insisted that their *nāṭu* was the one with true primacy. How did they convey Valandur's primacy? Pointing to the NH49 near their village, they said, 'What

is the *doubt*? Can we not know from seeing this road itself? That Valandur is *mutal nāṭu*? Through which the main road goes? Look at Tidiyan. It is there. *Somewhere*. People like you will not even know where it is. Somewhere interior. Even the road to Tidiyan is not good. How can *it* say that it is *mutal nāṭu*?

Here we see new peripheries and centres in intra-Kallar relations emerging through spatial practices such as the building of major roads and highways. Other infrastructures have transformed relations within the subcaste. One was canal irrigation, partially introduced in Kallarnatu through a branch supplying Periyar Vaigai water to some villages in the mid-twentieth-century. Another spatial practice that changed intra-subcaste relations is the ribbon development along highways cutting across Kallarnatu. Modifications in the built environment, the emergence of new schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, and commercial centres, have also repositioned Kallar lineages and villages. I now turn to other caste conflicts related to roads. We shall again see that roads provide a significant axis to the reconstitution and reassembling of caste relations.

Some of the most spectacular or revealing moments of caste violence or agitation in the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century were about roads and access to roads.⁸ Some scholars (Omvedt 2003: 138-9) show that access to roads was crucial to the Vaikom agitation, a key twentieth-century event in Indian politics. Although nationalist historiography has translated and reduced the event into a temple entry movement, it emerged from Dalit agitations for accessing roads near, and leading to, the temple. Noting that religion was a means to contest caste relations, Omvedt suggests that as religion became public, contestations over public space took place through religion.

We may need to caution ourselves against transducing such efforts back into an emergent abstract space, as though it is uncontaminated by religion, caste, or kinship. This is a misinterpretation; religion continues to provide important moments, practices, and idioms in which caste relations are contested, negotiated,

⁸ See Frykenberg 1981 for a riot over a road in Tirunelveli district; Viswanath 2014, esp. 227-37, for petitions and actions regarding access to buses in North Arcot and to streets during religious festivals in Malabar; and Omvedt 2003 for the Vaikom agitation.

or strengthened. The transduction also fallaciously severs religion, religious identities, rituals, and temples from land relations, resource access, dispensation of panchayat funds, and the redistribution of power. Additionally, just as caste was cast away into the social (newly constituted as a category through colonial rule; Viswanath 2014), Dalit groups turned towards the social, transducing land relations, access to public space, and water allocation into the idioms and matrices that 'religion' provides, even as they evoked a new framework of rights (Mosse 2003).

Not all road access or public space disputes have taken place under the rubric of religion. Repeated contestations over access to public space have ensured that the availability of access roads to Dalit neighbourhoods, the ability of Dalits to access available roads, and Dalit groups' petitions to construct new roads constitute efforts to rework caste relations. Additionally, government spending on infrastructure has a budget allocation for the SC/ ST sub-plan. This is in line with the general policy that a portion of all plan outlays be allocated to programmes specifically targeting Dalits and adivasis. In 2006–07, this took the shape of the Adi Dravida Connectivity Scheme in Tamil Nadu's rural infrastructure policy. As per the scheme, 1800 kilometres of bituminous roads were to connect two hundred Scheduled Caste habitations. Ethnographic research may reveal complex negotiations between administrators and local social groups (not only Dalit but other caste groups) when each of these roads is planned and constructed, but it is already clear that policies themselves offer new rallying points and new resources to compete over.

Now that roads themselves exude powers of enchantment, and the public nature of public space contestations have manifested in a recognition of caste relations' link to access of resources, road access disputes can simply be termed as that – as road access disputes. Most contemporary reports and compilations of caste violence reveal roads, buses, and other public transportation vehicles as highly contested spaces. But the road's enchantment works both ways. Its consideration as a universal or a public good makes it a ruse to reinforce existing power relations. One such instance is a well-known caste atrocity from the previous decade.

On 29 September 2006, four members of a Dalit family were murdered in Khairlanji village in Maharashtra's Bhandara district. A group of dominant caste men

and women from Khairlanji subjected Surekha Bhotmange, her daughter, and two sons to vicious and brutal acts of torture. The women were subjected by a number of dominant caste men to sexual assaults. The two sons were also brutally assaulted and their genitalia were mutilated. The aggressors killed all four individuals and dumped their bodies some kilometres away in a canal.

It would be awhile before this incident became a rallying point for Dalit groups, although the region is shaped by decades of militant Dalit movement (Teltumbde 2008). Massive state repression was unleashed on those protesting against the massacre. A court ruling stated that the killings could not be termed a 'caste atrocity' because it was related to a land dispute. The legal framing of caste atrocity in itself renders routine expressions of caste relations as extraordinary events (Rao 2010). Khairlanji clarifies that extraordinariness would be legally recognised only if caste was divorced from 'ordinary' matters such as land, water, housing, and roads.

The Bhotmange family held around five and a half acres of land.⁹ This land was situated near Khairlanji's main canal but the family had difficulty accessing irrigation (Teltumbde 2008: 93). That is, the Bhotmanges' relation to social space upturned their land's location relative to irrigation infrastructure. At the core of Khairlanji is the tension between this family's upward mobility and the socio-spatial relations expressed in ownership and control over resources (land, water, housing, electricity, roads). In South Asia, resources such as land and water are also constitutive of caste and gender relations.

In much of rural India, village officials seldom function as disinterested administrators. Revenue officials and panchayat staff usually collude with dominant families. In effect, these embodiments of the everyday state are fixers and brokers. Legislations that seemingly aimed to end village hereditary offices and replace part-time village officers with full-time village administrative officers did not radically change the bureaucratic field's manifestation in rural India; they generated new

⁹ The literature on Khairlanji provides varying details. I rely on the PUCL et al (2007) report for figures.

patron-client relations, and introduced more elements to an already baroque administration.¹⁰

Predictably, Khairlanji's officials were serving the interests of certain dominant caste families. They failed to register all five and a half acres in Bhaiyalal Bhotmange's name. Their persistent refusal rendered the family's control over land precarious. The Bhotmanges' control weakened further when owners of surrounding plots updated their strategies to usurp the land. In 2002, these dominant caste owners began to rally for an approach road to their fields, which would have to pass through the Bhotmanges' plot. The family was coerced into parting with half an acre for a ten-foot approach road (PUCL et al 2007: 7).

This was an outcome of many rounds of negotiations, petitions, and threats. It had the formal substance of surveys and land registers and the real sanction of informal caste panchayats. The access road had served as a pretext for land-grab by dominant castes. Thus, a road, having the sanction of a representation of space that pitches infrastructure as a universal good, is transduced into production relations, control over land, and the reproduction of unequal caste and gender relations.

There many such extraordinary and routine instances where locally dominant individuals or groups used road building as a pretext for land-grab or encroachment. Even standard economic studies (Asher and Novosad 2014, van de Walle 2009, Ghani et al 2014) recognise that road construction, especially at the level of feeder roads and village roads, is more likely to express local political networks than any actual, urgent infrastructural need. Expressions of *social* relations become technical issues, clubbed in statistical and technical terminology as 'endogeneity problems.'

Similar moves occur at the level of highway construction. In 2006, when a national highway upgradation combined with a new bypass road construction in Trichy, a local politician sought to realign the proposed road and thus legitimise his earlier encroachment on a tank. Attending to negotiations over projects shows that

¹⁰ Building on administrative reforms undertaken by the DMK government in the mid-1970s, the MG Ramachandran-headed AIADMK government enacted *The Tamil Nadu Abolition of Posts of Part-time Village Officers Act, 1981*. The NT Rama Rao-headed Andhra Pradesh government introduced a similar legislation in 1985.

the road that actually materialises can differ from the one conceived. Conflicts have resulted in highly visible protests and litigation that highlight roads as concrete abstraction. Disputes disclose roads to be as much about land, water, and rights as they are about circulation.

Roads, Land, and Property Disputes

Roads not only keep commodities in circulation, they also repeatedly throw into sharp relief questions relating to land. Circulatory infrastructures intercalate the multi-scalar production of social space by reassembling land. Infrastructure-building brings land back to our attention from its hazy existence in the trinity, as Marx would have it, of land–capital–labour. Let me extend the previous discussion by considering infrastructure’s effects on real estate markets.

When a newly conceptualised road takes policy precedence over measures to upgrade existing roads, we may safely presume that there are large-scale real estate concerns in the new road project. New projects successfully integrate pressures from a number of powerful actors – big infrastructure firms, real estate speculators, cement and asphalt industries, politicians, and large land-owners.

The BMIC, Bangalore Mysore Infrastructure Corridor, project is one of the most well-known disclosures of road projects as real estate scams. In 1995, the Karnataka government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a consortium of three companies, sanctioning it to construct a 111 km tollway connecting Bangalore and Mysore. The consortium later turned into Nandi Infrastructure Corridor Enterprises Ltd or NICE, giving the project its local name as the ‘*nice road*.’

Conceived under the BOOT (build own operate transfer) model, BMIC incorporated major real estate activities. The investment, at 1997 prices, was Rs 1600 crore raised privately and was to be cross-subsidised through township proposals included in project conceptualisation (Ranganathan 2006: 2697). Project representations evoked the idea of facilitating regional development. Bangalore and Mysore were already Karnataka’s most important production and commercial centres. Government and infrastructure company aggressively pushed the intended tollway as a means to bring the cities closer, to further annihilate space with time.

At the time, two state highways (SH17 and SH86) and rail routes served Bangalore–Mysore traffic flow. To place this in a space-as-relative framework, the cities were at a distance of about 145 km along one of these routes. Proposals for comprehensive double-lining of existing rail route and for upgrading existing highways contended with the BMIC project but were temporarily shelved or overridden.

Compared to BMIC, these alternatives needed much less capital and land. Yet conceived from the start as a real estate dream, BMIC managed to supersede other proposals. Land acquisition for BMIC was initially set at a whopping 20000 acres. Only 7000 acres was earmarked for the tollway; the remaining 13000 was for developing townships along the route (Ranganathan *ibid*). The project has witnessed protracted conflicts. For instance, a retired chief engineer filed a writ petition challenging NICE’s Framework of Agreement that the government approved in 1997. He argued that BMIC was actually ‘a real estate project masquerading as a road project’ (*ibid*: 2699).¹¹

The thrust to introduce a new road reframed regional infrastructure development. The government kept SH17 and SH86 out of the purview of a World Bank funded project to upgrade Karnataka’s highway network. It stated that the two highways were too narrow and that they passed through too many settlements. The government thus appeared to be against dispossessing residents of their land. In reality, it used the eminent domain principle to acquire much more land for BMIC, and did so under the pretext that the two highways had become narrower and more dangerous because of unchecked encroachment. It even incorporated ribbon development, one of the characteristic effects of highways, to dismiss the financially viable proposals for upgradation. The government additionally claimed that, being incapable of servicing increased traffic flows, the highways were ‘stunting the growth

¹¹ After lower courts dismissed the petition, it was heard at the Supreme Court of India where it was ultimately dismissed in 1999 (Ranganathan 2006: 2698). Among the major reasons courts cited during dismissal was the petitioner’s expertise, although he possessed relevant experience and expertise. Interestingly, both petitioner and road authorities utilised the same calculations and frameworks, but the petitioner’s application of abstract calculations and notions of space was to no avail. The courts’ interpretation of the BOOT model suggested that the absence of direct government award of money to contractors renders public accountability an unjustifiable ground for challenging the project. These juridical interpretations made light of the state’s eminent domain tool (*ibid*).

of the region.’ These arguments allowed BMIC to emerge as *the* catalyst for regional development.

Such statements conceal the links between global finance capital seeking spatial fixes through mega-infrastructure projects and the states facilitating these interests. Yet examining conflicts allow for a reappraisal of infrastructure projects. Once multiple objectives become visible, we perceive not only transport infrastructure’s circulation effects, ‘the generation of repetitive socio-spatial practices’ (Ahuja 2009: 17) but also its realty effects, the generation of new socio-spatial practices through new townships, residential colonies, and altered property markets.

BMIC illustrates the capacity of large corporations and international companies to influence highway planners, urban and rural development authorities, and state and district administrations. It also highlights the reordering and rescaling of socio-spatial practices. Emphasising this set of actors and actions allows for an easy comprehension of the ‘politics of scale’ – we readily see that scales are not fixed and that human action reconfigures spatial scales (Brenner 2001: 604). But all social groups partake in this politics of scale (chapter 6). And scale is but one aspect to the production of space (Brenner 2001: 597). Our analysis must therefore account for how ‘all social groups contribute in varying proportions (according to their social resources) and in conflicting ways (affected though not mechanically determined by their interests) to the social space of their time’ (Ahuja 2009: 30).

The Khairlanji violence underlines social groups’ dissimilar and conflicting contributions to contemporary social space. The politics of scale mutates patterns of dominance and alliances between social groups. And caste and gender relations are fully socio-spatial (see Introduction). Dominance–subordination relations are operationalised through and influence scale, territoriality, situatedness, mobility, and networks. That is, social relations engage with ‘different geographical properties’ of different ‘dimensions of capitalist spatiality (Brenner *ibid*). The net of socio-spatial relations at each historical moment influences the forms, extent, and patterns of dominance.

Even dominant groups have different abilities to rescale and reorder their dominance. Locally dominant individuals and groups do not always possess the capacity to influence decisions on where and how highways touch or converge at their localities. Even so, locally dominant groups benefit from infrastructure projects simply by virtue of controlling land or by exercising their dominance over others in possession of land. Let me return to Malaiur and underscore how infrastructure-building affects all these aspects of socio-spatial relations.

While infrastructure-building hinges on state acquisition of land, by spawning other land transactions, it also opens up urban and rural land markets. In Malaiur, rapid transfers of land during and after the NH7 construction fostered existing patterns of dominance but allowed women born in Malaiur's land-owning families to make property claims.

Successful moneylenders, local politicians and big-men, and contractors began to dabble in real estate. The four sons of Vellaiya Thevar, one of Malaiur's dominant families began to place many of its resources (economic resources and social relations) in the hurricane that hovered over rural Madurai. The move was well calculated; through its political connections to ruling government, this family achieved a windfall by investing in rural land. Its exponential rise was not easily replicable. The one other family to derive nearly the same benefits was that of Sivanandi Thevar; since this dominant family was linked to the main opposition party, it could not convert its long-standing connections to the local bureaucracy and politicians to the fullest.

Translations of local dominance depend on the compositions of state assembly, local political representation, and bureaucracies at the time of road-building or other land acquisition rounds. Those with strong ties to a ruling party have greater scope to effect such translations. When a ruling political party announces an array of projects to acquire land for Special Economic Zones (SEZ), this translates into major profits for its constituencies and representatives. Locally dominant individuals then engage in and thereby escalate speculative activities by purchasing land near

each of the zones and road projects.¹² Two of the SEZ proposals announced around my research period were in Kallar dominated villages Vadapalanji and Kinnimangalam. Malaiur villagers closely followed speculative activity in both villages. A handful sought to participate in the speculation bubble, while others (affiliated to AIADMK, the main opposition party) participated in some farmers' agitations against land acquisition for these SEZs.

Those who opposed the land acquisition for SEZs admitted that when land acquisition for NH7 was announced, there was little collective protest from Malaiur land-owners. Malaiur's dominant families (Vellaiya Thevar and Sivanandi Thevar's) were keen to enter the speculative market that was bound to follow the acquisition and highway construction. Some individual Kallar farmers, such as Perumal Thevar and Krishnan, contested the land acquisition. As speculation pushed land prices dramatically upwards, other villagers filed petitions challenging the inadequate compensation.

The scattered nature of landholdings may be another reason for the lack of collective protest against land acquisition. My surveys suggested that very few families held land over two acres. (Given the speculation that followed highway-building, I have reasons to doubt these figures). These 'substantial' landowners held fields across Malaiur and neighbouring villages. Landowners such as Rasendran hoped that the speculation bubble would soon engulf Malaiur. Rasendran was one of many Malaiur villagers who had worked in textile mills in the area, only to lose their jobs when these mills shut down. These villagers waited to sell land and obtain (what to marginal farmers appeared as) ridiculously large amounts of cash. As the bubble descended, people like Rasendran became flush with cash flows that they could not have obtained through cultivation, mill wages, or even through small-scale usury. Yet others in the village had to give up their land – not directly to real estate companies but to local usurers doubling up as real estate agents or land procurers for bigger land dealers.

¹² The Special Economic Zones Act's Act followed the extraordinary thrust on highway building across India. Within ten years of its implementation, Tamil Nadu approved 54 projects, of which 50 are notified SEZs (<http://www.sezindia.nic.in/writereaddata/pdf/StatewiseDistribution-SEZ.pdf>, accessed 29.06.2015).

As speculation increased, and the market price of Malaiur's agricultural lands near the highway and some interior roads shot up, old debts and mortgages were recalled. Property disputes increased dramatically. People such as Gouthaman constantly lamented that the 'four-lane' had destroyed the entire village [*ūraiye/nāṭṭaiyē keṭuttatu inta road tāṇ*]. Gouthaman, the youngest of Kallar three brothers, did not have adequate resources with which to influence the informal panchayats settling his family's land disputes.

Those who held valuable land but were disinterested in parting with it were pressurised by local brokers and family members working in tandem. Kannan, a Kallar resident of neighbouring Tenur – also transformed by NH7 – had one son and three daughters who routinely harangued him to divide the land, so that they could directly engage with brokers. These hawkish local brokers encouraged Kannan's children. They thought that, left to himself, Kannan would never part with land. In some families, children waited for fathers to sell land and claimed money later. When Perumal Thevar finally assembled the money he obtained through compensation from government and sale to land dealers (amounting to 35 lakhs), his daughters and sons came around to demand full pre-mortem shares.

The highway also 'opened up the country' for women, who normally conceded to local property inheritance rules which ensured that 'immovable' property or land only passed down the male line of descent. Rasendran had seven sisters. All seven of them, married and staying in nearby villages or in Madurai city, claimed shares in the money he obtained from selling land. He was so affected by their sheer audacity that he even fumed in my presence once, cursing that it would have better had his mother killed these 'female donkeys' right away, at their birth. Property disputes, during heated conversations, had the effect of lifting an otherwise universal curfew among the Kallar community on talking about female infanticide to outsiders (such as anthropologists and reporters).

But women had begun to threaten their fathers and brothers with litigation. Whether or not they would actually approach the court or use it to leverage informal deals, the threat was rather common. Women's property claims hinged on land entering the real estate market. Real estate generated valuable deals, turning

ancestral property into something women held worth fighting over with their fathers, mothers, and brothers. More importantly, the emergence of property market in Malaiur enabled them to sell the land successfully claimed to a broker. Women did not have to worry about how to foster dominance from a distance, as would be the case normally if the land were used for cultivation. For a woman born in Malaiur, the field could truly become one's own – and for a very short duration, at that – only when it turned into a plot of land in the speculative market.

Many gender-related property disputes initially mobilised 'tradition.' Sisters would seek their brother's daughters as brides for their sons (and vice versa), evoking preferential marriage customs favouring the *murai peṇṇ* (or *cutantira peṇṇ*). Such efforts could involve many rounds of informal panchayats and negotiations before the girl (or boy) was freed and allowed to marry someone else. The point is, preferential marriage became one route to reach the land. The hypermodern highway thus appeared to birth the Dravidian kinship 'system.' Yet everyone knew that the insistence on following *murai* was about persistent claims to land, and not the perpetuation of Dravidian alliance and kin ties themselves. Of course, these conflicts gave sufficient grounds to reimagine older marriage patterns and preferences purely in idioms of care and affection, as though those had had nothing to do with production and reproduction relations.

When *murai* turned ineffective tactic – which it did in Rasendran's case, for he successfully arranged his daughter's marriage with a man of his choice rather than with one of his sisters' sons – property disputes emerged from the sidelines to occupy centre stage. Rasendran's failure to respect *murai* led to additional years of informal panchayat over land (rather than alliance). It culminated in a settlement with all his sisters and his own daughters, who were also by then married.

Thus, kinship, customs, and law were all weapons in many challenges and conflicts between the landed men of Malaiur and their daughters or sisters. Women's success varied. In mid-2008, a group of women born in Malaiur but living elsewhere after marriage were visiting for a goat sacrifice at the Karuppu temple. Karuppayi, an older kinswoman from Malaiur, questioned these women. 'Why are you all fighting so much for land and property? Don't you have enough comforts already?' Karuppayi

had addressed one of the visitors, Chandra, whose husband was a middle-level officer in the Collectorate. Chandra's response traced the heightening conflicts between siblings back to the highway. 'Those days,' she said, 'we did not bother. That land had no value. Now, it goes [*pōkutu*] for 80000, and 100000 and 125000 rupees. Why should we [daughters] alone remain sitting quietly?' The road's incursion and land value (in price terms) had papered over, according to the rest of the dialogue between Chandra and Karuppaiyi, the need (or pretence) for cordial relations between brothers and sisters.

Addressing Chandra (for she was the most vocal), I asked how women could safeguard land, after success in claiming it. Would not the many rounds of bitter words and negotiations result in women losing their strongest links to the place in which the land was situated? Santhi, another visitor, while admitting that those kinds of troubles often crop up, pointed to Chandra and said, 'But, for her, why will that problem come? Troublemakers, don't they know whose land it is, what [the land-owner's] *takuti* (capability, authority, competency) is?'

Santhi's explanation was an astute one. Even if a middle-level bureaucrat's wife severs her ties with her brothers, she has other means by which to safeguard property. In any case, I might have asked the wrong question. These disputes were often about rights in the money obtained through sale, not about inheriting land per se. Women's inheritance and subsequent control over land as real estate runs into similar problems as their inheritance of cultivated land. In both cases, real control rests on proximity to land and to kin, and the ability to forge that control either through their own presence or through dependable local kin such as fathers and brothers where the land was located. Many women preferred a share in sale money over inheriting land.

Land itself was not, technically, 'going' anywhere, but this is the verb [*pōkutu*] Tamil speakers often use when talking about prices. They appear radically different from the Chotanagpur adivasi who challenged that land could not be sold because it could not be taken away – if land is not a mat that you can roll up and take away once you buy it, it cannot be a commodity (Li 2014b).

Yet immobile plots of land can well seem to be *going somewhere* when a highway begins to go near them. Their locations in Euclidian geometry remain static, but their value in money terms is transformed as they come to be differently located in relational spaces. Although abstract, relative, and absolute notions of space and property regimes come together to change the assignation of value to land as real property, the material characteristics of land prevents its total annexation as a commodity. Rather, its annexation as a commodity depends on how it is reassembled (Li 2014b).

Land may not be a mat that you can roll and take away, but speculative interest turns a plot's value into a flying carpet. Road-building is one of the means by which to mount wings of speculation onto land. Following Li (ibid), we may say that roads network land in new ways. Following Lefebvre (1991) and Harvey (2005), we may say roads situate land differently in relational spaces.

Roads and Tanks

Alongside big infrastructure projects such as the Golden Quadrilateral and the North–South and East–West corridors, a number of upgradation projects for other national and state highways were sanctioned. Single lane highways were converted into two lanes; two lanes into four lanes; four lanes into six lanes. New bypasses were built on outer edges of expanding cities. Expressways were built to bring cities closer to each other.

These projects could generate more distance between adjacent locations. Major roads split village territories into two, and heavy traffic altered movement across adjoining neighbourhoods and villages. Highway upgradation can cause routes and pathways to disappear. One highway can modify other roads and pathways, the infrastructural network, *and* the tracks and pathways created over time through human and non-human action (the movement of animals, bicycles, and motorcycles).

The new NH7 alignment transformed the paths by which Malaiur's Kallar population earlier reached lands they held in neighbouring *kirāmam*. It changed both *ūr* and *kirāmam*. Consider the Karuppu temple priests' lineage festivals. During their annual festivals, these Velar ('potter' caste) priests, their families, and lineage

members would carry sacred trunks containing ancestral belongings and follow a fixed procession route to reach the Karuppu temple. Highway construction transformed the procession route. The road also affected processions of other ritual specialists and the temple's coparceners. If processions map and sustain territorial control in Tamil *ūr* (Mines 2005), infrastructural modifications not only change territoriality, they also transform other aspects of spatiality. NH7 altered the *ūr–kirāmam* co-constitution that generated Malaiur. Revisions to Malaiur's procession routes signalled fresh outflows of *kirāmam* into *ūr*, and new interjections between absolute and abstract space.

Each new road has the potential to alter spatial practices and remake location, locality, territory, and place. The previous section explored how road-building reassembles land and imparts new meanings and value to land. This section continues to explore how transport infrastructure act upon objects, but shifts the focus away from land and real estate to irrigation structures. While roads advance infrastructure for commodity production, they also have adverse effects on infrastructures important for agricultural production. Roads may be important for 'taking agriculture to the market' (World Bank 2008), but they occasionally hinder agriculture.

Roads and tanks can supplement or conflict each other. Many Malaiur Kallar took the Willingdon road as an index of their bravery and qualities. Describing how they – their fathers or grandfathers – built this road in the early-twentieth century, they attributed all agency to themselves. According to these narratives, it was Malaiur villagers, not the colonial state, who had decided the road alignment (chapter 3).

It was only when we were not talking about the road or CTA that a non-human agency to decisions on this road alignment became visible. Conversations about the tanks along the Willingdon road suggested that road alignment had materialised not so much through colonial state power or Kallar subterfuge as from these tanks themselves. During these conversations, villagers spoke as though the road had simply followed the bunds of tanks on the three-kilometre stretch. Arumugam once mentioned four tanks on whose bunds the road had been laid out. On this occasion,

he oriented the tanks vis-à-vis the Karuppu temple (tanks to the temple's north and to its south), not the road itself. But he also ascribed some kind of agency to the tanks. They had had an influence over the road.

I wanted to know whether the tanks influenced decisions on how the road was to be built. Later, Arumugam would name some of the tanks (Tenur *kammāy*, Kurathikulam *kammāy*, Thanakkankulam *kammāy*, Tuvariman *kammāy*) filled up during the NH7 construction. But on that occasion, I simply gestured towards the highway under construction.

Arumugam thought road alignments were earlier derived from a respect for tanks. 'Those days, they built the road like that only. On tank bunds. Not like nowadays. With machines bigger than hills. Machines that can break hills in one week.' (A local Tamil newspaper had carried photographs of a small hill near Malaiur; this hill had to make way for the NH7). But I thought the Willingdon road alignment highlighted the 'joint venture' nature of colonialism. The CTA implementation had depended on much more than state coercion.

One of the measures following CTA had been to institute 'Kallar panchayats' in villages. Malaiur Kallar either referred to their village Kallar panchayat as '*karuṅkāli*' police, with all the hate that befalls informants, or more respectfully as '*cūrimārkaḷ vīṭu*,' the house of the 'jurymen.' These villagers acknowledged that Kallar panchayat members were junior partners in CTA implementation. I thus wondered, even though the Willingdon road was laid out before Malaiur's notification, might the road's materialisation have involved negotiations with these tanks' *ayacutdars*, who belonged to not only Malaiur but also neighbouring villages?¹³

The very possibility of negotiations reflects different policies concerning CTA imposition. Unlike 'nomadic tribes' criminalised by the Act who played an important

¹³ We were both guessing. Archival research is one route for triangulation. I have been unable to conduct the kind of extensive research this requires. I am equally wary of utilising the archival research I was able to undertake as a straightforward supplement to ethnographic research, and of offering scattered archival data in the garb of an analytical preference for fragments and a non-sequential approach to history (Ahuja 2009). In what follows, therefore, I leave the two contending examinations (of the Willingdon road and the tanks) as guesses.

role in circulation of goods (Radhakrishna 2001), Kallar subcastes were integrated into agricultural production through a series of expansionist polities from the Vijayanagara empire onwards and which had turned these peripheral regions into new agrarian territories (e.g. Stein 1980, Ludden 1986). The colonial administration did recast the Kallar as a caste of *kāvalkārar* – *positions* which colonial technologies of rule translated as *professions* of (as also a *pastime* or *passion* for) blackmail, robbery, and extortion. Yet it was through agriculture that administrators and missionaries sought to ‘reform’ this subcaste (A. Pandian 2009). In Malaiur, colonial administrators set up cooperatives and offered credit assistance to sink wells, arguing that increased productivity of land would decrease Kallar ‘proclivity’ to theft. Tanks would have to be respected to forge alliances with *ayacutdars* and to encourage agricultural production.

Arumugam’s explanation is also a reminder that the early-twentieth century road is a different entity from the early-twenty-first century road. Roads may be instruments with which to ‘master’ nature. Yet, the extent to which a road masters or respects a tank partly depends on the tools for such mastery at each moment, and on locational specificities. (Another factor would be contestations between social groups). Tanks – themselves the result of previous human attempts to master and transform ‘nature’ in these rain-fed surroundings – offered almost ‘readymade’ solutions for road builders. (The bund of Malaiur’s main tank was coated with a bituminous surface recently and only after land use patterns south of the village changed substantially. The new surface was needed for vehicular movement on a track that earlier had only been touched by human and animal feet, and the occasional bicycles). Thus, as Arumugam pointed out, in the early-twentieth century, rural road construction involved the use of tracks offered by other built structures such as tanks.

This would have also minimised expenditure. Capital allocation for public works in colonial India was burdened by the exigencies of rule and colonialism’s effects on capitalist development (Ahuja 2009). In the nineteenth century, Britain’s main export of surplus capital was another colony – present-day USA. Public works projects in colonial India were weighed down by considerations of how quickly capital

invested would yield results in the form of quicker extraction and circulation of raw materials and unfinished products (Ahuja 2009).

Now, road-building projects rely on far more powerful tools, offer important venues to soak up capital, and aid in the production of space as a commodity. In other words, when India's recent infrastructure projects offer scope for engineering massive spatial fixes and reassembling land for real property markets, and the integration of global capital is such that the sheer territorial area required to soak up surplus capital can literally extend to space, a highway (even a village road) need not respect a tank.

Malaiur Kallar villagers were emphatic that the old road changed little of the tanks' composition, function, and flow patterns. They held that the one thing that *was* modified was sluice positions – since the road was built by raising the height of the bund, tanks were deepened, and sluices moved further down.

Incidentally, the men who spoke about the Willingdon road and the tanks were owner/tenant-cultivators. They had their own wells or rented well water from neighbours. Malaiur was one of many Kallarnatu villages that had had little success in pressurising the state to upgrade the Periyar canal irrigation network. The inability to procure canal water, Malaiur's increasing reliability on well irrigation, and a shift to horticulture merged with changes in land use due to urbanisation and NH7 construction – the combined effect seemed to discourage these villagers from associating roads and tanks. Elsewhere, cultivators, whether dependent on system tanks – supplied with water from canals, reservoirs, dams, and rivers – or non-system, rain-fed tanks have repeatedly connected road building and irrigation.

A last point before I turn to examining one such instance in Tamil Nadu's Trichy district. In a telephonic conversation with Arumugam in 2015, I returned to exploring these connections. Now more aware of the conflicting agency of highways and tanks, I wanted to follow up our earlier conversations. My main sources were judgements (and newspaper reports) on conflicts in Tamil Nadu's Trichy, Sivagangai, Tirunelveli, and Tindivanam districts. I had also looked at conflicts in Mela Urappanur, Keela Urappanur, and Urappanur – where allocation of tank resources such as water was the subject of a series of petitions made to the colonial government in the 1920s-

40s, while conflicts on fishing rights had culminated in the death of a number of Kallar villagers. By now, I was also aware of similar conflicts in Madurai's Chellampatti union villages.¹⁴

Arumugam ended our telephonic conversation by complicating the analysis I offer below. 'There, in the areas you are talking about,' he said, 'they are big, big cultivators [*periya-periya vivacāyika!*]. They have the comforts for court cases. Also, the necessity. Here [in Malaiur], if someone has just two, three acres, he is a large farmer.' What he was, in effect, directing me to comprehend was that the ability of individuals and groups to *participate* in participatory democracy depended on the resources they already possessed. (Yet it not only those with something substantial and materially visible to lose but also those with little to lose who have opposed some of the largest infrastructure projects in India). With this caution in mind, I now turn to Trichy.

A highly perceptible account of transport infrastructure's cascading effects on irrigation infrastructure is available in court rulings on conflicts between cultivators in Trichy's Manikandam taluk and NHAI over the upgradation of national highway NH67. The NH67 is a 550 kilometres long national highway from Nagapattinam, a coastal town in Tamil Nadu, to Gundlupet, Karnataka.¹⁵ Let me provide a detailed outline of this conflict.¹⁶

I provide a detailed account for two reasons. One, contending conceptualisations and perceptions of irrigation and circulation, and different frameworks of causality emerge through details. This is useful to my analysis towards the end of this section. Two, legal discourse would have us believe that it is on the

¹⁴ A 1983 judgement on disputes over water distribution and sharing in Mela Urappanur and surrounding villages passingly refers to an earlier tank versus road conflict. *Sunda Thevar and Ors. vs The Collector of Madurai and Anr.*, (Madras High Court 1983), available at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/882071/>. For a recent road vs tank dispute between two Kallar individuals in Chellampatti, see *S.Rajuveerana Thevar vs Panbaalan*, (Madras High Court 2013), available at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/91499723/>.

¹⁵ The highway length is from a 2012 NHAI document (http://www.nhai.org/doc/23june12/nh_nh%20wise.pdf, accessed 27.08.2015).

¹⁶ Details are from *Tamil Nadu Agriculturists vs The Union of India*, (Madras High Court 2009), available at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/466836/>; *Selvakumar vs Union of India*, (Madras High Court 2010), available at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1719182/>; and *Punganoor Eri Pasana Vivasayigal vs The National Highways Authority*, (Madras High Court 2012), available at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/63149289/>.

basis of tediously discussed details – in this instance, details concerned matters such as how best to abstract a tank or a road through technical terms and measurements, and whether or not and when existing procedures were followed – that judgements are arrived at.

Under NHDP's Phase III, the Central Government approved a proposal to widen the Trichy–Karur bypass road, part of NH67. Trichy is important to road networks as a nodal district and as a location at which heavy-traffic highways intersect. NHAI decided to widen the Trichy–Karur bypass road in 2006. NHAI's Project Director (Karur) initiated the task, and state and central governments approved the bypass. Authorities initially planned to align the road across the western portions of Punganoor and Kallikudi tanks, two canal-serviced system tanks in Manikandam taluk, with a combined *ayacut* of 2500 acres across several villages.¹⁷ When the District Revenue Officer (DRO) was to initiate land acquisition for the bypass, Kallikudi tank *ayacutdars* objected that this alignment would impede cultivation.

The DRO informed the Collector about these objections, who then requested the Project Director, NHAI, to author a realignment. The Project Director expressed his inability since NHAI had already approved the alignment. Nevertheless, the sketch of a possible realignment circulated among the authorities. This sketch shifted the road further east from the initial alignment. The realigned road was to be laid through the tanks' eastern portions. The Collector forwarded this option to the state government, which in turn forwarded it to NHAI. Meantime, the agitating agriculturalists, district administrators, and NHAI officials met for deliberations, and agreed to a new alignment that reduced the road length across the tanks.

Punganoor tank *ayacutdars* had not objected to the initial alignment but objected to the new one. Meanwhile, without waiting for NHAI approval, the DRO issued a notification to acquire land for laying the road as per the new proposal. Agriculturists depending on both tanks objected to the second notification.

¹⁷ In the petitions, names and figures of these tanks keep changing. For example, the Kothamangalam tank is referred to as the Pirattiyur tank, and some rulings refer to three (instead of two) affected tanks with a total registered *ayacut* of 2500 hectares.

Cultivators challenged the DRO's summary rejection of their objections and filed writ petitions in the Madras High Court. In December 2009, the Court jointly heard two petitions, one filed by a representative of the Tamil Nadu Agriculturists Association and the other by a cultivator from Kallikudi village.

The District Collector and the DRO deposed that their offices had nothing to do with the final decision on road alignments and stated that it was the Project Director, NHAI, who had finalised the proposal. But NHAI countered that the realignment proposal had emerged only because some agriculturalists objected to the initial alignment. It clarified its readiness to consider either alignment, as long as the 'District Administration gives protection from the agitation of the villagers for the early completion of the project.'

The new alignment reduced the road length in Kallikudi tank from 550 to 150 metres and in Punganoor from 1350 to 1000 metres. Public Works Department (PWD) officials deposed that this alignment would affect only five per cent volume of tank water, and that the deepening of tanks would compensate the volume reduction. They further claimed that only 15 acres would be affected and that water flow would not be obstructed. Cultivators had cause to worry over the shifting representation of tanks – even PWD officials represented tanks purely in terms of volume and extent. These experts were misrepresenting tanks.

Punganoor *ayacutdars* also accused a local MLA (of the ruling party) of pushing the realignment because he wanted to bring the road closer to a college managed by his trust. The court alludes to this charge, only to dismiss it as 'politics.' It sought expert opinion on the alignment's effect on the tanks. It directed NHAI to form a committee of experts and asked Trichy's administrators to coordinate with this expert committee. The committee was to conduct field surveys, meet concerned farmers, and to explore alternative alignments avoiding, or minimising damage to, the tanks. The judge invalidated the DRO's order and stayed the project until the expert committee submitted its final report to NHAI, and NHAI approved a new alignment.

NHAI was quick to set up a three-member expert committee. It had already stated that time was of essence and that the project had to be completed by July

2010. Farmer groups took issue with the expertise of committee members – a civil engineer, an environmental engineer, and the founder of a local NGO – and moved the court to include tank irrigation and agriculture experts in the committee. One petitioner hoped the court would direct Chennai-based Centre for Water Resources (CWR) to send experts to the field and submit a report on the proposed alignments' effect on the tanks.¹⁸ The court ordered the NHA expert committee to consider CWR opinion before placing its report. One judge admonished the petitioners for wasting time and obstructing the nationally important matter of highways, and said the court would no longer entertain petitions regarding the experts.

In April 2010, the NHA expert committee made a field visit and received objections from villagers and a large contingent of farmers led by a former AIADMK minister.¹⁹ It suggested three alternate alignments and forwarded its report to CWR, Chennai. CWR conducted its own assessments and prepared another report that recommended three options. It favoured complete avoidance of the tanks or aligning the highway along tank boundaries instead of cutting across them. The third option – to be exercised only if avoiding tanks was impossible – was to minimise damage by constructing the highway over the tanks, on the condition that hydraulic and hydrological assessments guaranteed that the overhead road would obstruct neither tanks' inflow nor outflow.

Both reports were forwarded to the court for the next round of hearings. Although the court was no expert to decide the alignment, the experts, particularly CWR experts, had prepared the grounds for valuing the tanks over the road. It is at

¹⁸ W.P. No. 21205 of 2009, and W.P. (MD). No. 5388 of 2010, both quoted in *Selvakumar vs Union of India*, (Madras High Court 2010). Hearing the first petition, in February 2010, the High Court ordered that the NHA expert committee consider the opinion of the Director, CWR before submitting its final report. Another petitioner requested the court to direct NHA to constitute a committee with expertise in the 'Field of Irrigation, Field of Road laying, Field of Agriculture, and the Field of Intra Disciplinary nature embodying the above said three subjects.' The court order on this petition came in April 2010, *after* the NHA expert committee's field visit.

¹⁹ 'Expert Committee makes spot review of Tiruchi-Karur Bypass Road,' UNI release (accessed at <http://news.webindia123.com/news/articles/India/20100403/1477845.html>). The committee accepted written objections at its office for two additional days. As regards the presence of the former AIADMK minister, recall that Tamil Nadu then had a DMK-led government, and that, in this specific case, the road realignment had been undertaken at the behest of a DMK minister who wished to cover up his earlier encroachment on one of the tanks.

the start of the common order on the case that the judge quotes Thiruvalluvar on the importance of water to kingship.

The court stated that NHAI consider the caution given in the CWR report, which stressed that the Trichy case was but a sample of the vast numbers of tanks that have disappeared due to road constructions. NHAI was free to choose any of the recommendations, but could only ask district authorities to proceed with land acquisitions after obtaining clearances from various departments. While the process dragged on outside the court, the ruling itself offers many issues relevant to our discussion. I concentrate on the representation of space in the language of experts and litigation.

For infrastructure companies, highway authorities, and other bureaucrats – including some from PWD – the tank on which a road is built and the road that is built on or across a tank are 'causally closed' (Putnam in Hirsch 2005). A number of officials in recent roads versus tank litigations have claimed that the road in question would have no adverse effect on other entities in a given environment. In the Trichy petitions, NHAI suggested that a thousand metres on the eastern portion of a tank or a little less on the opposite side – it made little difference to highway authorities or infrastructure companies which alignment to follow. (But costs *do* matter, and there are significant cost differences between building over a tank and cutting across a tank).

For those relying on the tank for agricultural production, alignment decisions could be decisive. The Trichy tanks were system tanks. New (transport) infrastructure destroys older (irrigation) infrastructures, even canal networks engineered by modern governments. Such destruction clears previously fixed capital from the ground and creates new venues for spatially fixing capital.

It also shows the paramount concern with turning space into a commodity, with engineering a colonisation of all land. If a road disrupts a tank *qua* tank, it strengthens real estate and construction sector interests. It is by effecting an abstract notion of space that dominant social groups and their representatives dismantle the concrete. All these instances go against Hegel's illustration of the difference between the abstract universal and the concrete universal. It is not the saleswoman in the

market who fails to grasp a crime or a criminal in concrete terms (in Stanek 2008: 63-4). It may be the officials, the bureaucracy, and businesses who cannot to see beyond the crime.

The causal closing of roads is an overarching theme in conflicts over road-building, despite modern bureaucratic attempts to regulate a specialising impulse through procedures to suture (even if only briefly) what is administered separately. Procedurally, road building involves a brief joining of disjointed or individually administered realms. Revenue officials are supposed to survey the lands required for a particular road alignment, hear objections raised by affected groups, and pass on reports to district collectors. PWD officials are supposed to look into the effects of the road on water bodies administered by their department.²⁰ The Forest Department is to submit reports on the road's effects on forests. For a project exceeding the cost cap, clearance has to be obtained from the Ministry of Environment, which is to assess the extent to which the project would affect ecology. But in the end, the project tears out of these hazy reunions and temporary sutures to re-emerge as a road project.

Despite the spread of procedure across various ministries and departments, road-building projects rest on the assumption that a road is just a 'ribbon on land.' More to the point, within the representation of space forwarded by these projects, land acquisition officers treat one stretch of land just the same as another stretch with the same dimensions. By seeking to settle the conflict with recourse to metric measurement, engineers and highways officials restore our trust in numbers. This, in turn, advances a certain conception of politics and the political.

While officials replace the actual tank with an abstract idea of the tank (to paraphrase Scott 1998), *ayacutdars* bring back the concrete tank, with its inflow and drainage patterns, its upstream and downstream connections, and sluice positions, and so on. The question is how the court takes cognisance of *ayacutdars'* objections, and conceptualises tanks. The concrete tank comes to matter only through a series of mediations in which experts play a significant role. It is expert opinion, not

²⁰ Madras Presidency was one of the first to bifurcate the PWD; it established a highways department in 1946.

ayacutdars' understanding and representation of the concrete tank, which matters. The Trichy *ayacutdars* found a supporting voice in CWR experts but many are not as lucky.

These were systems tanks. Where a road affects a non-system tank (or rain-fed tank), NHA officials and the bureaucracy utilise recent histories of rain-fed irrigation to their favour. From 1993, district officials in Tindivanam, northern Tamil Nadu, periodically attempted to convert five acres of a non-system tank into a bus terminus.²¹ They rejected proposed alternatives for the terminus, and argued that converting a non-system tank rather than a system tank was more efficient when land was 'scarce.' In effect, the official argument went something like this – if previous governmental neglect reduced tanks' importance to irrigation, it was more efficient for current governments to use tanks for non-irrigation purposes.

Meanwhile, urbanisation and agricultural practices and policies (increasing costs of input, and transformations in land use and infrastructures) spur some cultivators towards working or investing in peri-urban property markets. Recall this pattern in Malaiur, where some residents turned into real estate agents, brokers, and procurers, drawing from their own social and economic positions to enter this sector. Vellaiya Thevar and Sivanandi Thevar's families were closely linked to the DMK and AIADMK. Members of both families had recently held or were then holding key positions in local administrative bodies. These positions enabled the families to incorporate themselves into the baroque realty market.

Local big-men are the link between big land dealers and landholders. Local brokers and big-men not only have the muscle but also the powers of persuasion to ensure necessary land transactions. They can convert kinship ties and relatedness into promises and assurances. They can also recall old loans and use indebtedness to pull through land transfers. Vellaiya Thevar's eldest son, Boopati, promised Rasendran better prices for land near NH7 in return for a small plot near the much-frequented Karuppu temple. Such big-men persuaded marginal cultivators by citing many reasons to give up cultivation. Their persuasive litany included Tenur's defunct

²¹ *S Venkatesan vs Government of Tamil Nadu*, (Madras High Court 2009). Available at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1430809/>.

agricultural co-operative; increasing input prices; fewer functioning wells (estimated to have decreased to 35) and increasing rents for well irrigation (by January 2015, Malaiur well-owners charged Rs 25 per hour); and the disappearance of tanks due to highway construction and encroachment by building societies and realtors. If property dealers and investors derive advantage from the fuzziness of land titles, claims, and control (Li 2014b), local social relations are key to instrumentalising this fuzziness.

Rural Roads and Criss-crossing Policies: NREGS Roadworks

In 2005, the UPA government enacted a law guaranteeing a minimum of hundred days' employment to each rural household seeking a job.²² The *Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme* (NREGS) instituted through this act came in the wake of prolonged and systemic agrarian crises, below subsistence agricultural wages, and a spate of farmer suicides.²³

Rather than rehearse the themes of corruption, improper implementation, and inadequate participation, I focus on NREGS' effects on rural spaces. I engage specifically with transformations in rights, entitlements, and opportunities; labour markets; and built environments. I begin by examining NREGS guidelines and policy convergences that have affected the nature of roads and roadworks undertaken through this scheme, and then move to NREGS works in Malaiur.

NREGS was envisioned as a workfare scheme that could generate assets in rural India. Besides mitigating rural crisis through employment, NREGS has guaranteed a steady supply of labour for 'asset-creation' in rural India and later on, a steady market for construction materials (cement, concrete) – all of which reconfigure rural spaces. NREGS operational guidelines covered the categorisation of 'productive works' and 'permissible works,' the kinds of works that could be

²² Congress' 2004 general election manifesto promised a national employment guarantee act immediately (<http://www.congresssandesh.com/manifesto-2004/7.html>, accessed July 2009). There was significant pressure to hold the Congress true to this promise. UPA's Common Minimum Programme promised to legislate the act immediately (<http://pmindia.nic.in/cmp.pdf>, accessed July 2009). Many political formations that supported (or were part of) Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) hailed the NREGS.

²³ At end-twentieth-century, India's annual total rural employment growth rate was 0.58 per cent whereas annual rural population growth rate was about 1.7 per cent (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2004: 52).

sanctioned, and on labour–material ratio.²⁴ The 2008 operational guidelines stipulated a 60:40 wage–material ratio and disallowed contractors and machinery (Government of India 2008: 3). It also recommended maintaining this ratio at gram panchayat, block, and district levels.²⁵

The 60:40 wage–material ratio posed some issues for rural connectivity works. Under the 2005 guidelines, NREGS works for rural connectivity through all-weather access roads were least prioritised. Firstly, this was PMGSY's sole agenda. Secondly, the stipulated labour–material ratio poses difficulties for road construction. Labour costs in road construction are significantly low in India. Quality road construction requires high material to labour ratios. This mirrors a worldwide trend in workfare schemes – while labour comprises only 40-50 per cent of road construction costs, it could absorb 70-80 per cent of costs in other works (O'Keefe 2005: 4).

As NREGS stabilised, the government constituted a task force to seek convergences between this scheme and others. This task force identified the National Rural Roads Development Agency, Ministry of Rural Development, as one of the important 'partners' to NREGS, and discussed convergence between the two. Guidelines recommended that roadworks undertaken through NREGS not be the same as those taken up under PMGSY. The convergence enabled the former to supplement the latter.²⁶

One downstream effect of the NREGS–PMGSY dovetailing is more roadworks under NREGS. There has also been an upstream push for NREGS roadworks from

²⁴ State governments could expand on the permissible works. For state governments' prioritisation of works, see G.O. Ms. No. 10. Rural Development (CGS 1) Department, 1.2.2006. District administrations had to prepare a five-year perspective plan and a list of planned works incorporating village development plans. Each district's perspective plan had to be consistent with the prioritisation of works. At the village level, the panchayat was to determine priority of works.

²⁵ Also, the amended 2013 guidelines specified that the ratio be maintained at relevant levels at which works were undertaken (Government of India 2013: 59).

²⁶ PMGSY only allowed for one road (between unconnected habitations to market/'growth centre') while NREGS allowed multiple routes for connectivity. PMGSY's main concern is village-to-market roads while NREGS allows internal village roads construction. See 'Joint convergence guidelines: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) (Ministry of Rural Development) and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) (Ministry of Rural Development)' n.d. http://nrega.nic.in/circular/Guide_NREGA_PMGSY.pdf accessed 20.08.2015.

panchayat, block, and district levels.²⁷ Already in 2004, commentators drew from data on earlier employment guarantee schemes to predict roadworks' popularity (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2004: 55). In some places, roadworks were the most popular scheme. In Odisha's drought-prone Nuapada district, road projects dominated NREGS works, avowedly preferred over water conservation and drought protection works due to easy calculability of wages (Centre for Science and Development 2008: 25).

Since NREGS wage is task rate, and wages are high in road construction, workers themselves could favour roadworks (ibid: 34). Impetus for roadworks also came from other constituencies. While PMGSY deprioritised smaller (in terms of population) unconnected habitations (c.f. Asher and Novosad 2014), NREGS allowed these habitations to undertake road construction under PMGSY standards, disregarding its own guidelines on labour–material ratio since this would lead to poor-quality roads in constant need of repair and maintenance.

Powerful social groups living in small habitations but with strong links to district and block administration could lobby for quicker construction of good quality, all-weather roads. Roads, once constructed, are up for appropriation by other rural groups but they buttress dominant groups' interests, allowing for easier, cheaper access to markets for agricultural produce, and increasing value of land reassembled in property markets.

Upstream and downstream pressures also influenced the definition of roads, and decisions on materials and mechanisms for road building. Initial NREGS stipulations for labour–material ratio and the kinds of material had unintentional effects on road construction. NREGS initially prohibited the use of cement concrete interlocking tiles (or boxes) for internal village road construction, and favoured local materials. Considering the transportation costs of bulky road construction materials,

²⁷ For Himachal Pradesh's 2013 decision to raise NREGS rural roads/ paths' expenditure cap from 20 to 30 per due to demand 'from various PRI [panchayat raj institution] representative(s),' see 'Clarification regarding construction of rural roads/ paths under MGNREGA,' issued by Principal Secretary (RD) to Government of Himachal Pradesh on 14.03.2013. No. SMS-1/2012-13-RDD-Vol-I-Government of Himachal Pradesh, Department of Rural Development. For NREGS roadworks in a West Bengal district, see *Report prepared by Gfk-Mode Pvt Ltd for NREGA Cell, North 24 Parganas, NREGA in road construction in enhancing connectivity, 2010.*

this seemed a good cost-cutting measure. But *kuccha* roads constructed with local material deteriorated rapidly and required continuous funds for repair (Centre for Science and Development 2008: 24).

In itself, this may not have been a major issue. After all, connectivity in villages replicates the unevenness and orientations of infrastructure networks. Consider the typical caste and lineage geographies of *ūr*; the *kirāmam*'s manifestation in village built environment as panchayat offices, *anganwadis*, schools, overhead water tanks, and bus stops; and village roads together. 'Main' hamlets, where the *kirāmam*'s important buildings are normally located, and where the *ūr*'s powerful sections usually reside, are serviced by better roads than the rest of the village. But NREGS also recommended that preference be given to roadworks connecting SC/ST hamlets to the main village. Such varied stipulations an implementation jumble but enables less dominant sections to pressurise administrations to sanction better quality roads to their residential areas.

NREGS roadworks also create a steady market for industries such as the cement and concrete manufacturing industries. These are key industries with considerable influence on government policies. Take the Indian cement industry. It was the second largest market in India and accounted for about eight per cent of total global cement production. In 2001-10, it had a phenomenal compounded growth rate of eight per cent, thanks primarily to a housing boom. Infrastructure was the second largest facilitator of growing demand for cement.²⁸ In 2011-13, cement consumption was sluggish. The industry's average growth rate fell to about four per cent – mainly due to the housing sector's slowdown but also due to what industry analysts termed 'regulatory delays' in infrastructure projects.

As supply exceeded demand, cement's bulk, and freight-intensive characteristics, rising transportation costs and increasing commodity price further deterred consumption. But increased government expenditure on infrastructure (the

²⁸ 'Cement Sector Analysis Report,' Equitymaster Agora Research Private Limited, 17.11.2014. Available at <https://www.equitymaster.com/research-it/sector-info/cement/Cement-Sector-Analysis-Report.asp>. Cement demand in India comes from the housing sector (67 per cent), followed by infrastructure (13 per cent), commercial construction (11 per cent) and industrial construction (9 per cent).

NDA government's key priority, along with rural housing) spikes cement demand. Government spending on capillary roads, and village streets and lanes, also provides a more dispersed market for cement.

State governments had already requested the centre to allow cement concrete roads and the use of cement concrete interlocking tiles for village internal roads. In 2011 and 2012 (years of sluggish demand), the Ministry of Rural Development responded. It modified the preference for local materials and stone and brick *kharanja* (mixes without cement or concrete) to allow cement and concrete usage, and increased the permitted width of village internal roads to three metres.²⁹ Thus, a number of actors, institutions, and multi-scalar considerations influenced policy decisions on prioritisation of roadworks, and the materials and width of village roads.

In Malaiur, though, roadworks were hardly prioritised. Since August 2008, when NREGS works began to be implemented, and January 2015, most of Malaiur's NREGS works have been irrigation-related. This is indicative of Madurai's preference for NREGS irrigation works and perhaps characteristic of a district with precarious conditions of irrigation and comparatively developed transport infrastructure. Notwithstanding the focus on repairing and maintaining traditional water bodies, I now move onto Malaiur's tryst with NREGS as this reveals the scheme's effects on social relations and built environment.

At the planning stage, policy makers and others had predicted that NREGS would affect the rural labour market. Some argued for fixing NREGS wages just below agricultural wages, while others welcomed any potential wage increase in diverse sectors.³⁰ Later, some policy circles blamed NREGS for increasing agricultural wages

²⁹ From circulars No. J-11060/1/2011-MGNREGA-I, dated 18.10.2011, and subsequent amendments issues on 06.01.2012, and 24.04.2012. Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Rural Development (MGNREGA Division). See http://nrega.nic.in/circular/amendpara_Operational_Guidelines.pdf, accessed 20.10.2015.

³⁰ The World Bank Delhi office suggested setting NREGS wage 'slightly *below* the prevailing market wage rate for unskilled (agricultural) labor' (O'Keefe 2005: 2) to reduce costs to government. The recommendation was projected as ultimately pro-poor. The argument was this – if wage rates were above market wages, the scheme would be coveted by too many people, leading to a rationing of employment and lower-levels of coverage of the poor (ibid: 3). But costs have been insubstantial. At Rs 8000 crore during 2007–08, NREGS accounted only for about 1.5 per cent of total central government spending (Ghosh 2008).

(Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2011). At times, small and medium cultivators I met in Madurai also blamed NREGS for making agriculture unviable. Most cultivators in India complain of labour shortage, and list non-farm opportunities drawing labour away from agriculture. Cultivators simply added NREGS to this list. Perhaps small landowners and cultivators feel the pinch most because their control over labour far exceeds their capacity to influence agrarian policies.

In August–September 2008, Malaiur panchayat provided employment to a little over hundred workers for repairing a culvert. Most job seekers were landless labourers. NREGS wages at the time was Rs 80 per day, and the only group that saw a wage increase was Malaiur's women agricultural labourers. The majority were women, across age groups and castes. The few men who worked on this site were too old to find regular agrarian work, and nearly all of them were Chakkiliyar men.

Over time, there was a change in Malaiur's NREGS workforce composition. Some women from landowning families began seeking work. Landless and poor families initially resented this, gossiping about women hiding their thick gold chains at home before they met officials to apply for employment. Landowning women, however, argued that NREGS work was no work at all – they wanted to be paid like other villagers simply for sitting at worksites – and said they had as much right as anyone else to employment since they were 'wasting' time in agricultural lean seasons. Irrespective of their position in local agrarian relations, what villagers emphasised most of all was that under NREGS, they did not work for or under anyone. Since there was no concrete, identifiable local employer, NREGS work did not lead to any demeaning of workers, unlike with agricultural labour, where toiling in someone else's fields is a humiliating experience and loss of status.

But experientially (if not in terms of wages), if implemented properly, NREGS worksites are not dissimilar to the fields villagers sought escape from – the same toiling under a harsh sun, similarly labour-intensive tasks, and similar (or worsening) workdays. In contrast to the general policy marshalling of urgency and efficiency, villagers desired *slow* and *improper* NREGS implementation.

Normally, workers' presence at the worksite was more important than their working on projects. Worksite supervisors were happy with this arrangement but

burdened with the knowledge that social audits could raise questions over the discharge of their official responsibilities. If all grama sabha constituents were keen on improper implementation, these questions were less likely to arise. Yet truculent members and non-local actors were potential troublemakers. My own presence – as I realised retrospectively – pressurised officials to supervise efficiently. After days of not objecting to work-shirking villagers who sat for hours on tank beds, often clocking time passively and leaving before the workday ended, officials would insist on fully extending the ‘manday.’ Pressurised officials could subject villagers to heavy-duty sarcasm, like factory- and field-supervisors. In May 2010, ‘Kammay Chandran’ (nicknamed thus because he had supervised many NREGS works on ‘renovation of traditional water bodies’) objected to villagers leaving the Pechikudi tank-site earlier than stipulated. He yelled that they wanted ‘*campalam* not *vēlai* [wages not work],’ and that they ‘came, waving hands, for *campalam*,’ but asked to ‘lift a *maṇvetṭi* [spade, hoe], [their] hands would not understand [*viḷaṅkātu*].’

Malaiur NREGS worksites led to other changes and were an arena of differing interpretations. Residents were willing to forgo a small cut in wages – corruption was no big deal. The real tensions lay in the regularity of wage payment and the availability of work. Whether or not planners intended to target rural unemployment during agricultural lean seasons, once NREGS was introduced, landless labourers began to demand work during moments when the demand for agrarian labour peaked. In January 2009, Kallar, Pallar, and Konar landless women who had found NREGS work the previous year, said *ūr* cultivators had suspended NREGS for a few weeks so that they would be forced to participate in paddy transplantation.

NREGS also changed the daily rhythms, especially for women workers. Having to spend the entire day from ten in the morning to about three or four in the afternoon meant a dramatic change in the mix of domestic and social production that rules women’s working day. Women would often rush from fields at about one pm and head home to eat and cook for the evening meal. But with NREGS, workers began carrying food to worksites; and the families of women NREGS workers began adapting to a different regime and rhythm to cooking.

We see the changes NREGS affected in social relations in Malaiur. NREGS also directly transforms rural built environments, creating new structures and changing existing 'assets' such as tanks, wells, bunds, small dams, concrete roads, and roadside plantations. Subordinate social groups do not normally have the capacity to ensure that gram panchayats follow models of participatory democracy in the planning, sanction, implementation, and maintenance of assets generated through NREGS. These are the very groups that also do not control these resources. NREGS not only functions as an 'indirect way of subsidising capital' (Guérin et al 2015: 11), it also creates assets that could maximise benefits to already dominant rural groups.

It is not as though NREGS simply replicated existing social relations, be they global and regional fault lines or local creases of friction. A road built under NREGS, or PMGSY, could facilitate cheaper and quicker transportation to villagers, who could then be better equipped to make the literal journey to labour markets in the outposts of towns and cities and smaller commercial centres in peri-urban areas. BY 2010, agrarian wages had increased slightly in Malaiur. Villagers did not trace this back to NREGS. But transport infrastructure seemed to have played an important role. For weeks during paddy season, cultivators from other parts of Madurai (from villages on the Periyar Main Canal network) had sent mini-vans daily to pick up and drop Malaiur villagers to work on their fields. Afraid that this new circulatory rhythm would combine with demand for NREGS work, Malaiur cultivators had raised agrarian wages. Roads and mini-vans briefly liberated villagers from work in the village, but the bargain ultimately kept landless residents from circulating within Madurai for agricultural work. And villagers' participation in non-agrarian labour markets depends on extensive kin, caste, and even village networks. Yet a combination of better road connectivity and cheap public transport offers important infrastructural ground for both subsistence and social mobility.

Better rural roads bring the country closer to the city and the urban into the country. Roads, even poor quality ones, coax urban middle-classes into buying plots in peri-urban realty developments and in villages where land transforms from field to plot and released into property markets. We thus return to the argument that road

projects are not just about efficient commodity and labour circulation but also about the repacking of land, the consumption of space itself.

Conclusion

The previous chapter delved into the conceptualisation of roads and representations of space in infrastructure policies, media reports, and industry analyses. It contrasted conceived space with spatial practices achieving spatial fixes through infrastructure development. This chapter explored road construction and roads as they emerge in lived and perceived space. Here, we saw how different framings of roads and road construction – as universal good, as abstraction and technical matter, as a matter of utmost urgency to India’s development – unfold in practice.

We saw built structures affecting social relations. We also saw built structures affecting each other, independently of human intervention. As the judge hearing one of the Trichy petitions remarked, roads can be ‘all about water.’ This judge began the court order with a couplet from *Tirukkural*, a collection normally dated to the sixth century and attributed to renowned literary persona, Tiruvalluvar. It is as though the judge needed the Tamil canon and Tiruvalluvar’s backing to destabilise the causal closing of roads and tanks, and provide temporary relief to *ayacutdars*.

We saw that road design and alignment depend not only on topography or ‘physical space’ but also on social space and social relations, on the capacities of, and types of conflict between, different social groups. We witnessed social groups’ different abilities and resources in executing, stalling, or manipulating road projects. In Khairlanji, an access road offered a ruse for land grab and strengthening caste dominance. BMIC illustrated road projects commingling circulation and realty considerations. The Trichy petitions highlighted contentions between two different infrastructures. Coursing through roads’ effects on tanks, we saw state- and non-state actors prioritising circulation over agricultural production to reassemble land and encourage rural real property markets. In Malaiur, already near the city in abstract space, the new highway made village land more accessible for a speculative property market. By considering cement, labour, soil, capital, design, policy, and implementation, we connected rural employment schemes, rural connectivity, and the reordering of rural space.

The recent global 'land-grab' relied on repackaging land through new statistical techniques and other acts of persuasion (Li 2014b) and on material transformations of social space in rural areas across the world. Rural infrastructure projects are a key but unnoticed component of such transformations; they enable a rescaling of rural property markets and the generation of constantly renewed colonialization of space. Perhaps, rural roads do not so much as bring agrarian produce closer to markets as bring the market closer to agricultural land.

When agricultural land comes closer to spot markets, they come closer still to virtual markets in land. And as speculative investment in farmland increases across the world, land is incorporated into property markets for non-agricultural purposes. International investment in farmland realigns production, housing, and leisure sites. New built environments, infrastructures, and spatial practices rework social relations.

Viewed together, the chapter's illustrations also reveal the spatiality of dominance. Large infrastructure corporations, global investors in farmland, and real estate companies exert dominance across scales and vast territories. Caste dominance appears in a different light when correlated with social space. In this refreshed conception, each caste appears as a social group with specific scalar influence and territorial limits. We see caste relations in interaction with capital flows, spatial fixes, property markets, and circulatory infrastructures. We simultaneously see globally dominant actors and entities (construction and infrastructure companies, investors, and capital) relying on local social relations. The account inevitably incorporates many aspects of spatiality and sociality.

Part III examines similar dialectics between social and spatial relations but takes this up through other built structures. Its chapters examine memorials in the light of how they represent *and* transform social relations. With these chapters, we return to the minutiae of local caste relations and consider these social relations through the intercalation of spatial scales.

PART III HOW IS A MEMORIAL VISIBLE?

Recent research on memory, monuments, and commemoration and defacement (e.g. Taussig 1999) has revisited Robert Musil's (2006) observations on the muteness of memorials. Musil argued that the modern monument, although built for us to see, repels our sight. Given its inbuilt 'gaze repellent' essence, the monument only really comes to our notice through an external event.

Memorial construction, destruction, commemoration, and defacement have been integral to many critical events; they are part of how we remember these events. Thinking of the Paris Commune might lead us to think of the Basilica of Sacre-Coeur – its planning and construction on a site important to the Commune, its near destruction by Parisian republicans, and its later-date completion (Harvey 2002). We may connect Soviet disintegration to the toppling of Lenin's statues (Taussig 1999). Holocaust memorials and structures commemorating the American Civil War and the two World Wars aim to link historical events to built forms.

Anthropological examinations of memorials reveal the separation of built environments from natural environments, objects from subjects, things from humans, and the material from the social to be fictive. They also help us gauge the importance of representational spaces to the production of social space. The following two chapters highlight connections between material and social worlds by focusing on two contrasting moments – the moment of commemoration, and the moment of desecration – that reveal the power of memorials. Chapter 5's ethnographic core is the commemoration of Kallar individuals killed during a police firing in 1920 and the memorial built in the Kallarnatu village where the incident took place. Chapter 6 takes up Malaiur Kallar responding to a statue desecration that occurred in Madurai city in April 2008, and analyses state and community responses to repeated statue desecrations and related caste violence in Tamil Nadu.

Chapter 5 reveals a social group's struggle to bring its chosen memorial to the state's attention and suggests that this memorial transforms the social and the political, the tangible and the intangible. Chapter 6 continues to highlight built structures' transformative effects on space and social relations, but adds to this argument by analysing the state's responses and the representations of space it authors to deal with conflicting social relations. I suggest that these responses are strategies to externalise politics and attempts to cage social conflicts in the world of objects.¹

Yet such faith in the world of objects guarantees little ballast against conflict. Objects fail this project. Once introduced, objects begin to exude certain effects, not simply prohibit human action, or simplify existing social relations. The transformation of human and 'natural' worlds through objects and built environments exist across space, time, and scales. Built environments have not rendered ecologies obsolete because ecologies are always already social – older settlements, dams, canals, and pathways shape whatever we perceive to be our present natural environment.

Likewise, representations of space through which different actors seek to control the production of space – say, the rules through which states seek to govern built environments – cannot fully seize and transform whatever we currently perceive 'human nature' to be. Built environments are part of human nature, constitutive of subjectivity. Chapters 5 and 6 shall also show that memorial structures, and commemoration and desecration generate representational spaces, lived spaces riddled with internal inconsistencies (Lefebvre 1991: 41) but enabling individuals and groups to consciously generate feelings, emotions, and affect just as likely to challenge as to uphold intended outcomes. Finally, I attempt to go beyond standard anthropological equations between space and representational space by placing these 'alongside ... representations of space which coexist, concord or interfere with [representational spaces]' (ibid) and spatial practices.

¹ The idea that objects help overcome conflicts between human subjects exists across realms. In such representational frameworks, six-lane highways become routes out of underdevelopment/ uneven development (part II), metal statues help contain unruly publics (chapter 6), and gamma knife units stand in for cancer treatment and care.

CHAPTER 5 COMMEMORATION

How does the enmeshing of things and humans contribute to the production of social space? Does the built environment simply reflect social relations? Does it heighten or help resolve conflicts over resources, over representations of the past, and over social space itself? How do emotions and power attach to memorials? Do memorials simply express or emanate emotions? I here approach these questions by analysing a memorial as it becomes visible through commemoration.

Discussions on memorials in Tamil Nadu often focus on statues of political leaders. This is because statues of some political leaders double up as caste icons and are highly susceptible to vandalism and desecration, themes I explore in the next chapter. For long, however, the region's landscapes teemed with hero stones for slain warriors and other structures commemorating ancestors, folk heroes, and victims of violence. I begin this chapter by looking at a memorial built in the early-1990s in Perungamanallur village, Madurai, and the annual commemoration of the 'Perungamanallur martyrs,' killed in a police firing in 1920 when they refused to be fingerprinted and registered under the CTA. This incident has taken on the characteristics of a 'chosen trauma' (Gorringe 2005: 135) in Kallar social memory.¹

I then look at left political parties' attempts to author counter-commemorations, asking whether these parties' public events accomplish their stated aim – to shift the martyrs' commemorations away from being pretexts for caste mobilisation and celebration of Kallar valour and towards becoming a celebration of anti-imperialism.

When I finally examine Malaiur villagers' responses to these commemorations and counter-commemorations, I heed to Philip Rothberg's critique of the 'model of competitive memory,' which 'takes the scarcity of civic space...as the

¹ Hugo Gorringe borrows the term 'chosen trauma' from psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar to analyse commemorations of the 'Melavalavu massacre.' In 1997, dominant caste members killed a group of Dalit men, including the elected panchayat president of Melavalalu village in east Madurai. Gorringe suggests that the commemorated event is a 'chosen trauma' for Dalit communities and 'encapsulates their grievances and demands' (2005: 135).

basis for its understanding of public memory' (2009: 309). This concluding section juxtaposes landscapes of competitive memory with Malaiur and Perungamanallur's location in abstract space. This expositional move allows us to capture elements of the Lefebvrian triad in their interaction.

Memorials both externalise memory and help internalise it. They offer to memory projects both a distancing and a connecting stance. I glimpsed this twinned effect in early December 2007, when I visited Perungamanallur. I recall, in particular, my interactions with some Kallar men in a tea-and-snack stall that evening. The highlight of our interaction was not so much what these residents said about the 1920 police firing as the sources they cited to one another during recall. As the men remembered speeches they had heard at previous commemorations, and recalled recently published material, their narratives connected memory, memorials, and memorialisation. It was as though memorial, commemoration, and document rehabilitate memories of the event. It was as though the memorial has begun to engender memories, as though memory is now an expression of the memorial. I was to perceive such links repeatedly during the rest of my fieldwork.

[Martyrs, Memorials, and Commemoration in a Madurai village](#)

Contemporary Kallar social memory accords pre-eminence to CTA implementation by plaiting narratives of routine colonial repression with those of specific incidents from that period. One of the strands most highlighted therein is the police brutality unleashed in April 1920 in Perungamanallur, a Kallar-dominated village in western Madurai. By then, the state had notified the entire caste under the CTA and stepped up its drive to fingerprint and register all adult Kallar men in the area. As district authorities initiated the registration process in Perungamanallur and nearby villages, Kallar elders from these villages assembled at the start of April 1920 to decide their course of action. This assembly decided to oppose fingerprinting and registration and called for Kallar men from surrounding villages to gather in Perungamanallur before the authorities arrived. The men also armed themselves with local weapons such as spears, billhooks, and sickles.

Early morning on 3rd April, a police contingent that had started from the station at Thirumangalam, the nearest taluk headquarters, reached the village. The

assembled Kallar put their oral communication networks to use, informing their kin in nearby villages of police movement. After a brief period of panic and hastily conducted negotiations, the police opened fire at the assembled men at 8:30 am. They fired 89 rounds of ball and 17 rounds of buckshot (Arnold 1986: 122) and left at least 16 people dead, including a woman killed while she was providing water to the injured men. The policemen returned to their station with sixty-three prisoners.

The incident is currently termed as a *paṭukolai*, a massacre, and thought to be a turning point in Kallar experience of the CTA. We shall later see its simultaneous reading as a chosen trauma of the community, a nationalist agitation, and an anti-imperialist struggle. On 3 April each year, the men and woman killed are commemorated as the 'Perungamanallur Martyrs.'

I often heard Kallar individuals say that the martyrs' resistance finally convinced colonial officials that deploying brute force against a battle-ready caste was futile. They also highlighted that Kallar petitioners, lawyers such as Madurai-based George Joseph, and political leaders had raised the issue of police brutality and agitated against the CTA at district and Presidency level fora in the months following the shooting. My Kallar interlocutors, and caste and political party representatives took these initiatives – not to mention the martyrs' valour – to have had a decisive impact, causing the state to abandon its punitive focus in tackling the 'Kallar problem.'² Thus, the contemporary memory project draws a direct correlation between the incident and the emergence of Kallar Reclamation.

Such narratives allude to the 1920 killings not only as a turning point in relations between colonial state and Piramalai Kallar but also as reshaping community action and offering new venues for mobilisation. It is perhaps apt that a Kallar caste association planned and commissioned the memorial commemorating this event.

The Memorial

In the early-1990s, retired tahsildar and 'community elder' Muthu Karuppu Thevar and others formed the *Tamiḷ Mānila Piṛamalai Kaḷḷar Uṟaviṇmuṟai*, the Tamil Nadu

² See 'Namma Madurai - Massacre in a village.' *The Hindu*, 3.4.2011.

Piramalai Kallar Association (henceforth, *Uravinmurai*). The association initiated a commemorative process that morphed into a spectacular local event. Common opinion, during my 2007-08 fieldwork, was that Perungamanallur villagers themselves had forgotten the event. *Uravinmurai* sought to challenge the collective amnesia and immediately erected a memorial at Perungamanallur as homage to those killed in the firing. In 1992, the speaker of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly unveiled the memorial. Let me describe this *ninaivu cinnam*, symbol of memory (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Memorial Pillar, Perungamanallur, 2007

By 2007, the Perungamanallur panchayat had constructed compound walls around the memorial. The site is adjacent to a tarred-road. The main structure, visible long before we enter the compound, is a long, black column. A stone lamp set on the ground faces the column. Close-by, mounted on a cement block, is a donation box – an iron safe, with its sponsor’s name and scenic depictions painted on the sides. On one side of the plinth on which the black column rests is a granite slab. Serving as a plaque, it lists, in Tamil, names of sixteen ‘Piramalai Kallar martyrs [*tiyākika!*]’ and informs us that they ‘lost their lives in the shootout at Perungamanallur on 3.4.1920, while opposing the Criminal Tribes Act.’ A white-metal

sculpture of a hand-held, flaming torch caps the pillar. It is as though the structure is designed to pierce the sky.

This structure becomes the focal point of the yearly commemorations. When I first glimpsed it, I thought the monument would be impossible to miss even on ordinary days. Its form scrapes at the senses, seeking to uncover the hidden history of the 1920 event. Villagers at the site stated that rather than installing the monument at the 'battle-site,' the *Uravinmurai* chose a prominent location in the *ūr*. One middle-aged Kallar man added that this decision flouted the practice of honouring warriors by installing hero stones (*vīrakkal* or *naṭukkal*) at or near the spot where they were slain in battle.³ The logic of visibility appears to have overridden older commemorative practices.

Given the rural surroundings, the monument's scale awed me during my first visit. It is to visitors, perhaps, that the logic of visualisation most appeals. When Kallar residents called my attention to the monument, they were perhaps only doing what they were accustomed to by then during interactions with journalists, researchers, and politicians who visited Perungamanallur mainly to write or speak about the 1920 incident. Since I did not live in Perungamanallur, I can say little about its residents' routine relationship with the monument.

When we live long enough in a place, we become so blind to its monuments that it would take something extraordinary – commemoration, say, or desecration – for us to notice them again (Musil 2006). Commemorations and desecrations are affective and political acts. We may understand them as expressions of anger, pride, or sorrow. However, they may well redress the absence of whatever emotions we think of as important to life, identity, and conflict. How may we correlate the overfamiliarity with, and an everyday disregard to, monuments with the periodic ritual attention they garner?

³ For a brief description of the range and transformations in south Indian hero stone iconography and ritual worship, see Vanamamalai 1975. Hero stone installation and worship illustrate regional deification practices focussing on 'divinities of blood and power' linked to social, political, and demographic histories (Bayly 1989: 27-40).

If we ignored monuments we lived near (or went past daily), we would seldom plan, or feel the urge, to desecrate them. Does this mean a monument in itself is meaningless and that rituals are the main meaning-providers? Alternatively, can rituals re-inscribe meanings only because a monument is already a vehicle of meaning? To think that commemorations attribute meanings suggests that monuments are already meaningful. Yet underlying this mode of inquiry is an unchallenged belief that we primarily engage with architecture at a visual plane.

The trouble, perhaps, with Musil's observations on the invisibility of monuments is his sight-centric approach. Even the most visually oriented monuments appeal to more than the gaze. Even if we stop seeing monuments in our vicinity, our senses may comprehend them non-visually. Put another way, to ignore architecture is to have grasped it. Familiar monuments may not seize our senses (or all of them, anyway) but only because our bodies retain a grasp of them. We may not see an overfamiliar monument because in our familiarity, our bodies have adapted to it. This is a sensuous accommodation, and extends beyond our relationship with specific monuments.

My initial experience of the Perungamanallur monument did not remain confined to my site perception. The monument brought back memories of other places and memories of my body's experience of other sites. It enforced a sensual connection between my current experience and some of my previous perceptions and experiences of architectural forms. It reminded me, most vividly, of war memorial pillars. The continuous struggle of such structures against gravity lends an architectural expression to victory albeit in a restrained manner, not a baroque one. The starkness, the sheer verticality of the Perungamanallur memorial aptly evoked both the horrific (often inexpressible and unutterable) and human resistance to the horrific. I also thought its form corresponded to the task of depicting Kallar struggles against colonial rule. Just as the memorial generated these responses, Perungamanallur residents at the site pointed to a smaller structure within the compound, a mural painted on a rectangular cement block (Figure 2).

As these Kallar men led me towards the mural, they began to describe the mural. Some of them began to compare it with the pillar. One middle-aged Kallar

resident described the mural as ‘innocent.’ Senthil, the Usilampatti-based lawyer who had accompanied me to Perungamanallur that day, distinguished between the association’s monument and the *ūr makka!*’s mural. Senthil spoke of the pillar as though it were affected by some degree of officialesque. It was as though the memorial pillar – although birthed by a caste association rather than the state – has a degree of officialdom attached to it. He sought to reinforce this reading by describing the mural as a *simple painting*, the result of villagers recalling the event in an intensely emotional moment.



Figure 2 Mural at Perungamanallur Memorial Site, 2007

The mural comprised of six frames, each depicting a key moment in the 1920 event. The first scene evokes the announcement of Kallar villagers’ compulsory registration under CTA. The scene depicts a white man announcing something from a platform in an open area. At the frame’s top-left corner is a drumbeater, whose presence signals the announcement’s importance. The frame’s right half is dominated by four male villagers in a queue and an armed policeman whose rifle has a bayonet attached to

it. In the other scenes, there are more policemen, all of them armed with rifles and attached bayonets.

The second frame depicts the act of registration. At the centre is a table with a sheaf of papers on it. A villager's fingerprints are being imprinted, his body bent towards the table, and one hand pinned down by a policeman's booted leg. Another policeman kicks this villager and pokes him with a bayonet. There is a third policeman in the scene; he appears to have no other function than to menace. A group of male villagers watch the proceedings.

In these two scenes, the Kallar men's deportment is one of awe. This contrasts with the policemen's violent and menacing bearings. In the third scene, there are only two villagers. One is bent over the table. The second villager stretches forward and holds the first. The policeman who was bringing his foot down has now stepped away from the table. With one raised arm, he appears to be issuing an order. The other two policemen have raised their rifles.

The fourth frame captures the moment of rebellion. A large group of Kallar men appear on the scene, armed with sticks, spears and billhooks. The police spray bullets into them. Some villagers have collapsed onto the ground. Bullets dashing out from police rifles target other villagers. The subsequent frame concentrates on police violence. The dead men are lined up on the ground like corpses. Villagers who remain standing face more bullets. Two policemen pick up a listless human form, as though intending to dispose of it.

In the last frame, a woman kneels among the fatally injured and dead villagers. She offers water to one of the dying men. There are three policemen, a series of dashes emanating from their rifles. Two policemen shoot at the men, while one stands near the central female figure. She is Mayakkal, the woman who is shot while offering water to the dying men; Mayakkal, whose name is the last to appear on the list of martyrs inscribed in the memorial pillar. This is Mayakkal, who is specifically mentioned by most speakers during events commemorating the Perungamanallur martyrs.

The Annual Commemoration

For nearly two decades, the Perungamanallur massacre has been commemorated on the 3rd of April. The commemoration now falls under the aegis of the *Perungamanallur Tiyākikaḷ Niṇaivu Potunala Caṅkam*, Society for the Welfare and Commemoration of the Perungamanallur Martyrs (henceforth, *Caṅkam*). When disagreements and factions threatened the memorial-sponsoring *Uṟaviṇmuṟai*, some of its key members formed this new association. The shift in nomenclature alludes to a shift from broad-based caste associations to special-purpose forums, and perhaps also, signals the growing numbers of Kallar caste associations, factionalism, and specialised lobbying – signs, in turn, of Kallar mobility.

The *Caṅkam* influences the commemoration but this event spills over, affecting other political formations. It is rather obvious that the association works like a lobby, an interface between political parties and Kallar social groups. What is more effervescent is the mood generated by the commemoration, the intangible work of the ritual – performed once a year but influencing the everyday.

In 2008, a series of public meetings, debates, and an academic conference constituted or contributed to the complex of commemorative events. Newspapers, notices, and hoardings erected by the *Caṅkam* and other caste associations and political parties heralded the 3rd April commemoration in Perungamanallur. Key public places – busy traffic junctions, main bus termini, bus stands, and other points along the state highway that cuts across Kallarnatu – conveyed the spatialization of caste identity and remade the region's as a predominantly Kallar territory. Let me recall those busy days and busy places, where the abundance or 'aggregate excess' (Mines 2005: 157) of public notices produced a representational space of Kallar dominance, pride, and honour, and temporarily mended the fissures within subcaste, caste, and supracaste formations.

Visualisation and Commemorative Action

In the days leading up to the event, the Usilampatti bus terminus' surroundings were chockfull of hoardings erected by the *Caṅkam*, Congress, All India Forward Bloc, DMK, AIADMK, and other political parties. Political parties have for long put roadsides to

similar use – so much so that they are charged with inculcating a ‘cut-culture’ in Tamil Nadu.⁴

Roadside hoardings were the principal visual means by which the 3rd April 2008 commemoration and its mood were conveyed to the public. They reproduced the ‘highway as buyway’ (Gudis 2004). On this occasion, the highways-turned-buyways trafficked not in commodities but in emotions, affect, and subjectivities that networked social groups and political formations.⁵ Some hoardings invited the public while some simply declared an association’s participation or promised a politician’s presence in the 3rd April commemoration at Perungamanallur. The net effect rendered the commemoration as a key public event. For competing caste associations, political parties, and individual politicians, the commemoration served as a portal into the networks linking caste interests and political representation. If the commemoration was an opportunity for these groups and individuals to renew or fashion themselves as resourceful representatives of Piramalai Kallar interests, the hoardings announced the same to a wider public.

Across the hoardings is a stock set of signs. A recurring image is that of twentieth-century political leader Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar, Mukkulathor icon, important figure in the anti-CTA agitations, and AIFB’s (All India Forward Bloc) most prominent south Indian leader. Also frequently present is well-known nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose, who, after resigning as Indian National Congress President in 1939, led the AIFB formation – first as a faction within the Congress and subsequently as a separate party. Despite Bose’s national significance, it is no

⁴ Caste associations, temple associations, kin groups, and individuals also use roadsides to advertise events. Their dealings with the bureaucracy differ. In 2011, Dalit groups erected a billboard in honour of Thirumavalavan, head of the Vitutalai Ciruttaikal (VCK or Liberation Panthers, a political party with significant base among Dalit Paraiyar in northern Tamil Nadu), who was passing by their Madurai village. Local dominant caste members immediately took down the billboard. Their assertion – as though Dalit signs and symbols could not intrude into the *ūr* – is just one aspect of the contrast I wish to highlight. The other is the state support to this backlash. The local Highways Department informed Dalits that they did not have permission to erect the VCK flag – this, despite the presence of many other flags in the vicinity (Gorringe 2012).

⁵ In the early-twentieth century, American industry recognised roadsides’ potential as advertising sites – ‘pictures, forms, and words... turn[ed] even the remotest highway with a billboard into a location of market relations’ (Gudis 2004:3). Catherine Gudis’s perception of highway advertisements’ effects on human experiences is insightful, although her argument that this phenomena showcases capitalism’s decentralising tendency is untenable. (We have already noted capitalism’s contradictory tendencies between centralisation and decentralisation, and territorialization and deterritorialization).

exaggeration to say that his popular significance in southern Tamil Nadu emerges through his association with Muthuramalinga Thevar. Bose's image thus finds its way into hoardings other than those of AIFB and its splinter groups.

Many hoardings include depictions of Maravar, Kallar, and Agamudaiyar figures from other historical periods. One such image is that of Puli Thevar, eighteenth-century Maravar chief of a *pāḷaiyam* (literally, fortified camp) in present-day Tirunelveli district. Puli Thevar, who fought against the English East India Company-supported Nawab of Arcot, is now accorded the status of one of India's first freedom fighters. Other widely represented eighteenth-century figures are the Marutu Pantiyar brothers (from present-day Sivagangai district), participants in the 'poligar wars' between the Company and its protectorates or allies on the one hand, and 'rebel' *pāḷaiyakkārar* and regional overlords on the other (Dirks 1987: 19-25). Hoardings and posters are also chockful of metonyms of royal power. Lions, tigers, thrones, and chariots make frequent appearances. Together, icons and symbols evoke a shared warrior past and caste pride and honour. Such visual fields frequently emerge in other Mukkulathor-dominated southern districts (e.g. Mosse 2012: 233), perhaps because they affectively link the somewhat disparate subgroups of this supracaste.

This constellation of signs also enables a seamless narrative of caste dominance, masculinity, warrior identities, and Hindu nationalism stretching across three centuries. Although there is a regional highlight on southern Tamil Nadu, connections are made to nationally recognised figures such as Bose. This striving towards the supra-local and supra-regional scales is also made through representations of Vivekananda, nineteenth-century Hindu 'revivalist,' propagator of a distinctly muscular Hinduism, and a key Hindutva symbol today. While most hoardings are marked by a representational glut, the overload is most evident in the hoardings of new, or less established, formations.

Take the billboard (Figure 3) of the *Tēvar Tēciya Pēravai*, denoted here as *Tēvar Tēciya Maṅṅam*, erected outside the Usilampatti bus terminus. This outfit – the 'Thevar Nationalist Forum' – displays its political lineages through images of well-

recognised Mukkulathor figures and nationalist leaders. The single largest element in this collage, however, is the image of its founder-president, K.C. Thirumaran.⁶



Figure 3 Tēvar Tēciya Maṅṅam's billboard on Perungamanallur Martyrs' Commemoration, Usilampatti, Madurai, 2008

In the characteristic pose of Tamil men embodying the feudalism-machismo complex, Thirumaran is here twirling his moustache. A miniature-sized representation of the Perungamanallur memorial is at the centre. The swirl of Thirumaran's moustache coalesces with the textual image above the pillar's image. The Tamil text *Kaḷḷarnāṭṭu Peruṅkāmanallūr vīralipāṭṭu tiṅam* denotes 3rd April as

⁶ Thirumaran later founded the TIFB (*Tēṅ India Forward Bloc*). The party's name (*tēṅ* is Tamil for south) suggests its aspiration to replace the ever-fissuring AIFB. Its highly ambitious founder has organised Vinayaka idol immersions in Vaigai, mimicking the tactics of other recently formed, RSS-backed, Tamil organisations (Mosse 2012: 203). Thirumaran's recent actions are not confined to obvious Hindutva religious tactics. In 2012, some Mukkulathor youth participants in the 30th October Thevar anniversary celebrations at Pasumpon succumbed to burns after a petrol bomb was hurled at their vehicle. Thirumaran joined the *Tēvar Camutāya Kūṭṭamaippu*, Thevar Community Federation's, call for a bandh and roadblock, which threatened to quickly spin into another bout of caste-violence in southern Tamil Nadu. The point is TIFB's 2008 billboard foreshadows many of these tactics.

a day to worship the warriors of Kallarnatu's Perungamanallur. Indicating an upstart's ambition, the text also suggests that the Forum is the commemoration's main orchestrator.

A delicate red tinges the entire billboard, as if to signal the blood that has been shed. The brute connection between the red background and the bloodiness of colonialism, however, is upstaged by the twirl of that Thevar moustache. The Usilampatti bus terminus is re-inscribed as Kallar territory. Kallarnatu is registered as warrior land, home to a proud and defiant caste, the sometime subaltern but incessantly sovereign Kallar group.

This billboard is only a sample of the innumerable hoardings and posters that announce the commemoration and convey the ambience to be expected. This visualisation generates a representational space of caste dominance and territorial control. Usilampatti's bus terminus and busy junction and other prominent places and roadside locations in Kallarnatu closely resemble the 'centres of density' that are produced in and through Tamil temple festivals and ritual seasons (Mines 2005: 157). The repetitive images and icons also visually indicate the rescaling of caste identities – captured alternatively as Piramalai Kallar identity and Mukkulathor identity.

Commemoration as Politico-Religious Ritual

When I visit Perungamanallur after four months, it is for the commemoration. Reaching Perungamanallur mid-afternoon on 3rd April 2008, I immediately see that the memorial site has become electric. There are arrangements for public speeches – chairs for the speakers and a sound system placed near the pillar, and a temporary shelter overflowing with people. The crowd spills over to the road outside. Perungamanallur's streets are packed with vehicles and people; posters and hoardings temporarily colonise roadsides and building walls; party flags materialise in the bus stop, street corners, temples, and memorial site; and party colours and icons surface on t-shirts and *vēṣṭi* (lower-body cloth worn by men). Coconut sheaves are wrapped around some of the bamboo posts supporting the temporary shelter inside the compound. Together, ritual and monument come across as a yearning for monumental space, the 'metaphorical and quasi-metaphysical underpinning of a society' (Lefebvre 1991: 225). The commemoration reveals itself as a politico-

religious event. This is both typical of regional politics (Bate 2011) and suggestive of a hybrid space where most public events replicate religious idioms and practices. The modes by which homage and *mariyātai* is accorded to the martyrs demonstrate these social relations.

A bare-chested man in a white *vēṣṭi*, a saffron towel tied across his waist, stands by the pillar. The round metal tray in his hand holds a lit lamp and other sacred substances. He performs *āratī*, moving the tray in a circular motion. His sartorial style and actions resembles that of a village temple priest. The *āratī* is both realisation of climax and enactment of synecdoche in Hindu worship – this one action stands in for the gamut of rituals constituting worship (Fuller 2004: 68).

The man's reddened eyes mark him as part priest and part god-dancer, a suitable channel between the martyrs and those who pay homage. Villagers and visitors perform necessary gestures. They cup their palms over the lit lamp, take the palms upwards to hold over their eyes, and advance their forehead for this martyrs' priest to rub *vipūti*, sacred ash, on. This clipped homage suits the extent of the crowd. The 'priest' spends no more than a few seconds on each individual, doling out *vipūti* in a speed that matches the nippy manner in which individuals honour the martyrs. Some people push a few currency notes while others drop coins into the donations box. (I ask how the funds generated in the process are spent but no one seems to know and the main organisers are too busy).

In all, the commemoration resembles ancestral worship rituals in the region. At regular intervals, the man performing the *āratī* sets down the metal tray by the memorial plinth. People help themselves to the sacred substances on it. Here too, the commemoration reveals a grammar borrowed from small village shrines and the qualified informality surrounding these sites of worship. Where, depending on your caste, gender, and age, you may occasionally bend the rules on whether or not you can touch certain objects, just you may occasionally also conduct some rituals of worship in the priest's absence.

Both visual and aural fields generate the memorial site as a place of Kallar pride and valour. From the microphone, we hear announcements of different political leaders' visits. The sheer presence of these leaders is a mark of respect – not

just for the martyrs, but metonymically, for the entire caste. At times, followers strive to turn even their leaders' absence into a mark of respect.

All through those hours, the microphone announces the impending visit of actor-turned politician M Karthik, recently appointed as AIFB's state secretary. (The following year, he was to leave AIFB and start another party). We wait, as though we await a messiah. A slew of the same announcement (Karthik is coming...Karthik is coming...Karthik is coming...) probably impels some audience members to irreverence. I hear one man's tart comments. As he remarks, 'What, even the Mukkulathor lion's avatar has no time,' he gestures towards the large AIFB hoarding near the site.

I had not paid attention to this billboard while entering the venue. (There are far too many hoardings for my passing glance to absorb each one). I perceive the layout: Muthuramalinga Thevar, the image of lion by his feet; Karthik and another AIFB state leader; Subhas Bose; Marutu brothers; AIFB leader, late P.K. Mookaiah Thevar; and mirror images of the AIFB flag, a striped yellow tiger pouncing from a red background. I perceive the modifications. While the leaping tiger in the AIFB party flag is a stylised image, this hoarding contains the photographic representation of a 'real' leaping tiger. Even the crossed hammer and sickle – that most recognisable of communist iconography –perfunctorily placed above the tiger in the AIFB flag, has been dropped from the flag icon in this billboard.

This, after all, is Thevar territory. As the illuminating joke, when AIFB party-men from West Bengal address Tamil audiences, interpreters automatically translate every utterance of the term 'comrades' as '*Tēvamār*,' Thevar folk. And the billboard designates Karthik as 'avatar of the Mukkulathor lion, Pasumpon [Muthuramalinga] Thevar.' It is this proclamation that the audience member mocks. One of his friends sardonically replies that the politician has 'become a big-man.' Yet are not big-men and those aspiring to be big-men precisely those who turn up late? A convincing messiah is one that you forever wait for. (Karthik was certainly a convincing one; he had not arrived when I left Perungamanallur late evening).

As multiple actors turn the memorial site into a centre of density, representatives of caste associations and political parties vie to translate these

temporary characteristics of the site into permanent qualities of their person. That is, they convert ‘this density...into a scale of social value, of reputation, or “relative bigness”’ (Mosse 2012: 138). The 2008 event did not display too overt or severe a competition between big-men – political party representatives, neophyte politicians, and caste leaders take turns to place large wreaths and colossal rose-garlands at the foot of the memorial. This probably indicates the organisers’ competent handling of the pressure from each speaker or representative to be favoured over his rivals. Helpfully, important representatives themselves arrive in staccato fashion, as though to ensure that their visit does not clash with their rivals’ visits. When visits threaten to overlap, organisers deftly decide the sequence in which individuals are to provide *mariyātai* to the martyrs.

The commemoration reworks the segmentary polities of precolonial south India, wherein a leader not only recognises a social group but also honours its delegated authority simply by gracing its rituals and events. It reveals the south Indian big-man as a little king, an updated embodiment of the politico-religious centres and peripheries that framed the old regime. The big-men’s speeches wed Kallar history to nationalist history and recreate a moral community that is both particular and universal in its appeal. If the commemoration is an ‘arena of local cultural competition,’ it certainly ‘produced deep status divisions and a vision of moral community’ of both nation and community (Gilmartin in Price 2005: 41), a point I return to while analysing some counter-commemorations. First, the structures of feeling that produce moral communities.

Commemoration and Affect

If the commemoration resembles ancestral worship rituals, who, then, are the martyrs’ descendants – their families; those eligible to draw the Freedom Fighters Pension, as dependents or descendants of martyrs; all Kallar residents of Perungamanallur; all Piramalai Kallar? How is the coparcenary of martyrdom defined? Do representatives delimit it differently? From specific individuals, to specific families and a specific village, all the way to Piramalai Kallar, all Kallar subcastes, or the Mukkulathor supracaste – the community articulating a shared past and a set of demands had to be revealed in each case. That is, the community for

which the Perungamanallur massacre became a 'chosen trauma' was not a given one. Depending on who the speaker was, the social group was 'discovered' afresh through specific utterances. The referent group shifted, depending on whether the speaker declared the unified past of Mukkulathor, Kallar, or Piramalai Kallar and which *camūkam* s/he articulated the demand for.

Yet the organisers' ultimate success was in claiming the martyrs for the entire community. I listen to the speakers and cannot help reimagining the sixteen martyrs as the caste's founder members. They seem as important as lineage and *nāṭu* ancestors are to personhood, castes, and identities. Commemoration summons the sixteen as witnesses of trauma generated by CTA for the entire community.

For the killings to turn into a critical event in Kallar social history and memory, the incident must generate states of shared, heightened emotions. It is vital that emotions materialise. These materialised, performed, emotions generate shared emotions. The performances also lend authenticity to the emotions.

Reflecting on the street quarrels and bickering, the conflicts and violence, constituting the theatre of everyday life in Kallar villages, Dumont recognised the link between performance and emotion (1986: 310-11). Yet the theatre of a quarrel, the performance of being fiercer, sadder, or angrier than one actually is is a kind of self-imitation. One of the speakers, a retired Kallar police officer, begins to cry on stage. As he speaks of the sixteen martyrs' sacrifices, his words cue his tears. For some audience members, it is a little awkward to see tears rolling down masculine Kallar cheeks, to hear the fissured Police voice and the snags in the oratory. Yet others praise this, explaining the state of the speaker as contemporary testimony of a past trauma. The police officer's tears and rasping speech are depositions in themselves; they are visible proof of the emotional scarring caused by colonial repression. A range of emotions latches onto speaker and audience, villagers and visitors alike.

It will be a full three weeks before I realise the pointlessness of interpreting and dismissing these emotional displays as theatrics. This I shall grasp better when I witness another spectacular event unfolding towards end-April (see chapter 6). During the commemoration, the constant harking between surface and depth is revealed by signs of not only trauma, repression, and subalternity (of Kallar as

colonial subject) but of caste dominance. And Mayakkal, the woman who was killed in 1920, provides another venue for the generation of affect.

There are few women around, and most of them are elderly women. (We stick out in the audience – I, and another woman research student). Throughout the event, political leaders and ‘community elders’ troop by, pay tributes, make charged speeches, and leave. Some read out the martyrs’ names. Nearly every speech mentions Mayakkal, the sole woman martyr. Was this simply commemoration after Beijing? Was the singling out of Mayakkal for universal mention the outcome of decades of institutionalised ‘gender and development’ initiatives?

The stress laid on remembering Mayakkal is not simply a local manifestation of globally dominant framing of gender relations. At its root is recent Kallar history. Mayakkal exorcises the post-1980s stereotyping of Piramalai Kallar as anti-woman, since journalists reported female infanticide as a community specific practice. Let us juxtapose this stereotype with the sixth scene in the mural at the site. The image of a policeman killing Mayakkal while she provides water to dying men helps solder the valour of the contemporary community with that of Sangam poetry’s warriors. Brave Mayakkal brushes away the idea that all Tamil women were in dire need of similar social reforms, the idea that all Tamil women needed to be schooled out of the private realm, and given the option of defiance and divorce and daily duels with masculine dominance. Kallar woman Mayakkal is simply born with such qualities. And what she is born with is reinforced by Kallar *kalācāram*, her caste’s ‘culture.’ This is how Mayakkal is remembered on another occasion, by N. Sethuraman, president of the All India Mūvēntira Muṇṇaṇi Kaḷakam, and member of another Mukkulathor subcaste. The politician and principal owner of the chain of Meenakshi Mission Hospitals and restaurants stated that only a Kallar woman is capable of such sacrifice and valour.

The 2008 commemoration was a success. The organisers had managed to calibrate the visits of a number of political leaders. Not a single politician crossed another’s path. No one was embarrassed; none seemed slighted by prominence given to others; not one leader’s retinue clashed with another’s. The audio system filled gaps between speeches with *Tēvar pāṭal*, paeans to Muthuramalinga Thevar

that grace most Kallar rituals. The heavy rose garlands, the tearful police officer, the bowing bodies suggest the honouring of valour. The visual and aural fields, overflowing with Kallar and Mukkulathor symbols, temporarily fixed the memorial in representational space, with all the attendant contradictory emotions and impulses.

In the Perungamanallur commemoration, monumental space shored up Kallar subjectivity and caste and gender relations through a 'play of substitutions in which the religious and political realms symbolically (and ceremonially) exchange attributes' (Lefebvre 1991: 225). Of course, it is impossible to separate politics and religion, just as it is inadequate to regard religion as lending a crumbling form, a hangover from precolonial polities, to contemporary politics. This would be clear to anyone familiar with south India. Of equal interest are events that seem to exorcise religion, the bombastic, the supernatural, and the otherworldly from the social and the political. Two other events commemorating the Perungamanallur martyrs offer some insight into this.

The Counter-Commemoration

Both the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) participated in the commemoration of the martyrs. In fact, these parties, CPI(M) in particular, have been just as instrumental as the *Uravin̄murai* and other Kallar associations in bringing the Perungamanallur incident to the public sphere. Party affiliated writers and researchers write in the public domain about the event. Party representatives participate in the annual commemorations at Perungamanallur. Members speak in public meetings and gatherings focussing on the incident.

Given their election-centric focus, these communist parties have structured their internal organisation to mimic electoral constituencies. Mirroring this is the conceptual grammar revealed in their meetings. Most references are to the village as *kirāmam* rather than *ūr*, to society (*camūkam*) rather than caste (*cāti*), to all residents of an area (*pakuti makka!*) rather than ethnicities (*iṅam* or *iṅakku!u*). If this is a game of substitution – where somewhat disreputable terms are replaced by analogous ones – then less vigilant speakers keep giving the game away.

But this is more than a game of substitution. Some of the utterances are metonymical. We know exactly which social group speakers refer to when they speak of a 'region's inhabitants,' and which particular caste they have in mind when they use terms like 'society' or 'people.' These utterances also denote the incessant substitution of 'caste' with 'society,' reveal the 'culturalization of caste' (Natrajan 2012), and the turning of caste into the social.

If there is such a thing as non-verbal metonymy, it is evident at the Perungamanallur memorial site where the metonymic association of a distinctly Kallar space with public space is expressed through the built environment. Within the compound is an office of Perungamanallur *kirāmam's camutāya kūṭam* (community assembly hall), constructed with panchayat funds. The presence of a memorial for Piramalai Kallar martyrs in a compound dubbed a community hall underscores macrocosmic synecdoche, a 'whole' used to refer to one of its parts. The unspecified community – in the name of which block development funds were allocated and utilised – actually denotes Perungamanallur's Piramalai Kallar. The process echoes with the collapsing of *ūr* and *kirāmam* in the January 2008 tourist Pongal in Malaiur. It also resonates with the messages broadcast by the Karumathur *kirāma* panchayat, when it welcomed 'everyone' in March 2008 to *nāṭu*-centric festivals at Kallarnatu's renowned Moonusami temples. The communist parties' representatives, then, simply restate a regional blueprint for linking caste, community, and political representation.

For the Perungamanallur memorial to achieve a fix between the caste as cultural community and the political representation of its interests, the commemorative ritual and its cognate events – public debates, and public meeting – has to be well attended by political parties' representatives. We have seen that the 3rd April 2008 event was crafted through (and enabled) a contest between different politicians and their retinues.

Two kinds of CPI and CPI(M) representatives attend such commemorative events. Firstly, serving- or ex-members of elected assemblies and high-level office-bearers. Secondly, locally or regionally recognised public faces. It is important that the constituencies addressed through public events consider these party

representatives as suitable representatives of Kallar interests. The moderator of a public debate called by the *Caṅkam* on the eve of the 2008 commemoration is the CPI State Secretary, who is a Piramalai Kallar. At a CPI(M) public meeting commemorating the martyrs a week later, speakers include members of its Madurai rural committee and the state assembly representative of Madurai East constituency. Apologies are tendered for the absence of the Member of Parliament (who is from another Kallar subcaste dominant in east Madurai). Speakers also include office-bearers and members of the party's block committees from Usilampatti, Chellampatti, and Thirumangalam – modern administrative territories overlapping with the older *nāṭu*.

How do these formations maintain the fiction that the moral community they recreate through their commemorative practices is over and above the immediate social group they are addressing? Most caste associations and Kallar orators, writers, and academics today channelize their discursive efforts towards obtaining official, national recognition of Perungamanallur as south India's Jallianwala Bagh, and of the martyrs as freedom fighters.

This was the thrust of presentations in the conference held at Madurai Kamaraj University at end-March 2008. This was also a thread in the speeches made at Perungamanallur on 3rd April 2008. On 2nd April, the *Caṅkam* had organised a public debate in Usilampatti that culminated with similar demands. Alighting at Usilampatti bus terminus that evening, I found myself in that highway-buyway, staring at a huge flex-board advertising the event. Dominating this hoarding are photographic reproductions of Tha. Pandian, CPI State Secretary, and of Muthu Karuppu Thevar, *Caṅkam* representative.

The images depict both men in white shirt and *vēṣṭi*. Over Tha. Pandian's shoulder is a bright red towel, indicative, perhaps, of his political affiliation. In somewhat large fonts, he is announced as the debate's moderator and son of the soil (*maṇṇiṅ maintaṅ*). I walk about a furlong through Usilampatti's busy centre and reach the venue. The *Caṅkam* has erected a temporary shelter for those attending its event. The debate on whether the Perungamanallur martyrs had fought for national liberation or for a community's (*camutāyam*) liberation.

I ponder over the possibility of such a debate when public events have already shrouded the incident with the heavy cloth of nationalism. I cannot help recalling the memorial inscription that denotes those killed in 1920 as Piramalai Kallar martyrs, and mentions that they died resisting the CTA. Commissioned but sixteen years ago by the *Uṛaviṇmurai*, predecessor of this debate's organiser, there are no words in that inscription to signify nationalism or the freedom struggle. By 2008, however, few could deliver a public speech on Perungamanallur without linking it specifically to the nationalist movement.

At the debate's preliminaries, Muthu Karuppu Thevar is felicitated, and lauded for being the first person to think of a memorial in Perungamanallur. A Kallar man born in Perungamanallur recalls all the visits by political leaders spewing weighty words and mighty speeches. But not one of them, he tells us, ever thought of constructing a memorial. For such a thought to materialise, and then for that memorial to be constructed, the community had to await the debut of its elder, Muthu Karuppu Thevar. As the speaker uses the construction of the memorial to signal an individual's immense devotion to his community, he simulates the significance of symbols to politics. Although it is locally dominant, the caste seems to have only recently learnt the 'use of symbolic means,' much like the Uttar Pradesh Dalit groups Nicolas Jaoul (2006) writes about. And for the symbolic value of the martyrs' memorial to be realised, martyrdom has to be reinterpreted. This seems to be the point of the evening's debate.

The two individuals who have to argue that the Perungamanallur martyrdom is purely a community's battle do not have their heart in it. They just about allow themselves to sketch the incident's back-story. They do this, concentrating (if at all we can see the intent of two mangled presentations) on what they think are the reasons for CTA imposition on Piramalai Kallar. Resounding a main trend in contemporary social memory, they argue that Piramalai Kallar are the real reason for this legislation. In capsule-form, both these speakers disclose the Kallar subjectivity produced through this social memory: that strict passion for independence; that constant rebellion against taxations and tributes; that menacing quality with which the community defended their territory from invaders, kings, and colonial officials.

That is the gist of most booklets, speeches, newspaper articles on Perungamanallur. Take the case of a recent publication, an edited volume (Jeyaraj and Maheswari 2003) that synthesises the Perungamanallur martyrdom as incontestable nationalism. Even the book's cover squeezes out as much nationalism as a cover design can – a representation of the memorial is superimposed on a map of India, its base positioned somewhere near Madurai, its torch blazing somewhere near New Delhi. The anxious, mimetic, demand by a Tamil social group that the nation recognises Perungamanallur as the south Indian Jallianwala Bagh.

When he enters these waters, his cue of a red shawl weighing down gently upon his shoulder, moderator Tha. Pandian has to steer the ship of his address tightly. How does anyone hold on to their propaganda line while making as many changes in the deep sea of rhetoric as they may have to? This is no easy task, even for the most sincere. Not when the rhetoric is waves upon waves of Kallar sovereignty, Kallar valour, and Kallar's nationalist spirit. Not when caste pride and nationalist spirit are crest and trough. Will the CPI State Secretary call upon a bit of anti-imperialist wind for help?

Tha. Pandian latches onto one declaration – the sordid fact that India lost out to a bunch of traders, the English East India Company, not even to a foreign power's military. I have heard this view repeated in other public meetings in the region. It gels with the widespread rhetoric of colonialism as a shameful matter, of being subject to colonial rule as a lack of will, a great psychic failing. But here, in Kallarnatu, what is even more shameful, is defeat at the hands of a traders' gang, not even a worthy military force. This fits well with the warrior culture espoused by social groups with distinctly martial pasts.

But Tha. Pandian was present at the behest of a caste association. An even more enriching illustration of the inefficacy of merely changing words and introducing new elements to an existing universe of signs so as to change caste relations is an event organised by one of these communist parties. The CPI(M), busy on 3 April that year in Coimbatore district where its party Congress was being held, made a comeback a few days later. It announced a public meeting to commemorate the Perungamanallur martyrs. The party's USP was to delineate the martyrs as

‘warriors who warred against the Criminal Tribes Act and imperialism.’ The meeting was held under a roadside canopy erected near the Usilampatti bus terminus.

At this event, one of the first speakers is a member of CPI(M)’s Usilampatti unit. His speech slithers between nameable and unnameable, welfare category and social identity, universal and particular – backward classes, people, community, society, race, jati, and Piramalai Kallar. He rehearses one of the most common denominators of CTA-related memory, Kallar daily experience of this measure. I think of other public speakers who have deplored government school textbooks for carrying little information about the CTA, the repression it facilitated, and the struggles against it.

But here is social memory, grasping what an event-centric history fails to. Identical to a number of other narrations and production of these memories, the CPI(M) speaker’s very first mention is that of the restriction on mobility and, close on its heel, the implication of restricted mobility on sociality and on the routine discharge of kinship obligations. He speaks of adult Kallar men confined nightly to their homes or the nearest police stations. He mentions their inability to travel freely and participate in rituals and festivals of their kin. By twinning mobility and sociality, such narrations recreate the late colonial period as a moment of aggregate repression.

For long, I was surprised that this reconstructed past had little room for the labour question. Was it that any attention to the transformation of labour under the repressive Act could inadvertently throw light on contemporary social realities, as these are expressed through labour relations, particularly between Piramalai Kallar themselves? Was it that it is easier to remember an unbroken history of valour than it is to excavate specific regimes of labour exploitation under the Act? Was it that it is easier to make claims as an oppressed community still suffering from historical deprivations?⁷ Was it that languages of caste and community outweigh languages of class?

⁷ This absence of labour-related memories might indicate community specific impacts of CTA. Unlike other notified communities that provided compulsory labour in factory-sites, mica mines, or textile mills (Radhakrishna 2001, Kamat 1998), Kallar Reclamation included the setting up of agricultural

Another speaker states that the ‘Fingerprint Act’ was the Piramalai Kallar’s ‘Visa Act.’ If individuals from CTA-notified communities had to go from one *ūr* to another, he adds, they could only go if they had a visa. Just like... Nowadays, if you have to go from India to Sri Lanka, Pakistan, China, or Russia or America, you need a visa. There is something called a ‘visa law.’ You need a visa, a passport. That same law for the Piramalai Kallar was the CTA. It was the Piramalai Kallar’s Visa Act.

This CPI(M) member drew parallels between colonial restrictions on mobility and contemporary restrictions on international labour mobility. The analogy worked because he did not challenge international restrictions on human mobility, thus rendering intra-national restrictions ridiculous, unnatural, and repressive. CTA restrictions appear all the more repressive because they restricted Kallar movement within their own territory. The analogy only naturalised state space and enfranchised the present community – by aiming for national recognition of Piramalai Kallar as a community of freedom fighters, as a people neglected by the state even though they were instrumental in its creation – through complete integration to new territorialities.

Social memory’s re-creation of the community’s total repression becomes apropos to identifying the particular event as a chosen trauma. This enables the community to make tangible claims. It allows for event-specific demands – e.g. freedom fighters’ pensions. It also feeds into community-wide demands – e.g., better affirmative actions for Denotified Communities (DNT), communities first notified under the CTA, and then denotified in 1948 by an act of the Government of India.

credit societies, new irrigation infrastructures, and some agricultural settlements. Anthropologist Anand Pandian’s (2009) Piramalai Kallar respondents recalled coping with the CTA not only by toiling and labouring but also by embodying and cultivating savagery and civility. Kallar speakers at the January 2008 tourist Pongal announced themselves as a community of warriors *and* cultivators. With the popular Tamil adage, ‘*Mātu kaṭṭi pōr aṭittāl mālātu cennel enru yāṅai kaṭṭi pōr aṭitta uḷavar kūṭṭam,*’ one Malaiur resident staked claims to belonging to a cultivators’ community whose paddy harvests were so great that they had to use elephants instead of cows. The unintended irony, coming as it did from the resident of a peripheral village that had long depended on rainfall, is only one feature worth noting about such proclamations. The point is, public statements on a community’s past are context-specific – CTA-related commemorations articulate the Kallar as a warrior group; agrarian festivals and rural tourism events articulate the Kallar as a peasant group. Perhaps the labour practices engendered by CTA can be skimmed over because Kallar individuals can readily and creatively annex Tamil notions of agrarian civility to recreate themselves, when necessary, as peasants.

Who are the Real *Caṅṭiyar* (Real Toughs)? Two Villages in the Race for Memorials

When Kallar associations, representatives, pamphleteers, and researchers participate in the 'zero-sum struggle over scarce resources' (Rothberg 2009: 3), they compete against an unspecified other or a specified Dalit other. Understanding the 'relationship between different social groups' histories of victimization' is difficult because Kallar and Dalit memorialisation can equally partake in a 'competition of victims' (ibid: 2). Throughout, this thesis has hinted at this competitive memory and memorialisation. (Recall Kallar self-representations such as 'we are more heroic than any other caste,' 'we are unlike others who complied with the British,' and 'we are ones who mounted a continuous resistance to external rule'). Earlier in this chapter, we saw other claims – the Perungamanallur massacre has as much national significance as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre; other massacres have been in the limelight and are in the history textbooks, but not this one – illustrating such outward competitive memory. This section focuses on competitive impulses within the subcaste.

Kallar social memory, unsurprisingly, mimics the social reality of fissures along lineages, sub-lineages, even families and individuals. Given the pressure on all Kallar to perform *cāti kuṇam*, social memory mirrors the existing fissures, factions, and competition within the subcaste.

In January 2008, a Tamil newspaper article generated great anger in Malaiur. The article had mentioned the results of a jallikattu – the bull baiting competition in the Tamil Tai month (mid-January to mid-February) – that had taken place years earlier. Reporting that competition, the journalist had wrongly attributed victory to a baiter from a neighbouring village over a notoriously untameable Malaiur bull. Malaiur men became livid. 'How could [the journalist] write this? How could they print that our bull was tamed by another *ūr*? What will [everyone] think [about us]?'

I was new to Malaiur and recognised but few of those flying off their handles after reading or hearing of this article. What did I then perceive in the middle of the festive season? When it seemed as though the *kirāmam* was busy with the tourist pongal and the *ūr* prepared itself for the harvest ritual, amidst heated lineage and

sub-lineage divisions (*vakaiyarā* and *kūṭṭam*) congregations? During preparations for the village's bull-running spectacle? When older Kallar men tried to discipline younger adult males to allow the common 'temple' bull to run the stipulated distance unchallenged, and cautioned young adults to be choosy about whom to throw turmeric water on (which is the ritually sanctioned moment of flirtation during the Tai Pongal)?

Amidst all this, some men had found the time to read that article and become so angry, and fuel each other's anger, and talk about bashing the journalist, or targeting the magazine's office, or teaching a lesson to the residents of that losers' village for lying to the journalist. The men were more worried about Malaiur's and their ancestors' portrayal because of the timing of that article – coming in the midst of the controversy over jallikattu, they thought, the article was sure to be read widely.

The court had called for a ban on the sport, on the grounds of prevention of cruelty towards animals. Many individuals I met those days thought the ban an affront to nothing less than Tamil culture; another government move to belittle 'Tamil culture's true upholders' – castes such as Kallar whose warrior past was tested and prepared and wrought in such situations. One of the fronts defending jallikattu was the Madurai-based Tamilagar Veera Vilayattu Peravai – forum to defend the Tamils' heroic sports. And it is as a sport that schools men in agility and fearlessness that jallikattu is celebrated.

I might not have noted all this, but a Madurai based tourist suggested I read this as proof of anger's theatricality. Sure enough, the anger subsided quickly. But it is worth noting that a long-dead bull can be commemorated through folksongs, stories, and monuments for expressing that *ūr's* and its residents' *kuṇam*. On Malaiur's main approach road, a Kallar *ottai viṭu* had installed a memorial commemorating a 'heroic' bull.

Later, Kallar residents often mentioned the numerous hero stones in Malaiur as a documentation of their special qualities, of their being more courageous than all the other caste-folks put together. In May 2008, some Malaiur and Tenur Kallar men explained that their caste's menacing and 'rough' quality (*miraṭṭu*) was useful and

important as a livelihood skill. They added that the innumerable hero stones in Kallarnatu testified to their courage and prowess (*vīram*). All Kallarnatu villages were replete with such commemorative proof, they said, and then claimed that Malaiur displayed this proof the most.

Intra-Kallar competitive memory manifested as disputes over which of the Kallar territorial units, villages, lineages, or individuals deserve special status as *caṅṭiyar*, colloquial Tamil for a toughie, a mafia man, general overlord, or a strutting big-man. A Kallar man is thought to be born a toughie. He is then thought to navigate life by enacting insolence, instilling fear in others (animals and people), and embodying machismo. But can every Kallar man stake claims to be *caṅṭiyar*?

For over a month after the Perungamanallur commemoration, I was the audience of stories of bravery, sacrifice, and Malaiur's centrality in the Kallar resistance to the British. Whenever I attended a commemoration of the Perungamanallur Martyrs, some Malaiur Kallar residents would ask me for details of the public event. I did not know anyone from Malaiur who attended these events in 2008 but some residents had do so previously.

On 5 April 2008, daily wage women workers in Ammasi and Karuppayi's fields hailed me as I was walking nearby and asked where I had disappeared for two days. When Ammasi heard that I had been to Perungamanallur, he began questioning me.

Ammasi: What did they say, Dhivya? Did [they] speak about Jallianwala Bagh?

Dhivya: Yes.

A: Did [they] say how the fight started?

D: That too. Then... Yes, [they] have released a book now, right? After all that research in the University, *ūr* people and researchers say identical things.

A (dismissive): They do not know.

D (agreeing): They do not know.

A: Have forgotten... Those who live there do not know anything.

D: Then, everyone spoke of the eight *nāṭu*, and the twenty-four *upakirāmam*.

A: Yes. Yes. Only that, they will speak about. Other [matters], [they] do not [even] know to say. [They] keep speaking about *nāṭu, upakirāmam*.

[Ammasi has repeatedly said that his sons know not even a fraction of what he knows about their caste and its history. He thinks this is a generic condition of Kallar youth. If he otherwise laments this loss of knowledge, why is he now dismissive about the importance of Kallarnatu's structure? This perhaps hints at the difference between informally expressed anxiety over forgetting, and the formally expressed social memory. Public memorialisation is, or ought to be, more than an opportunity for salvaging dying folk traditions and knowledge].

Focussing on the bed of greens I am working on, I casually mention my telephonic conversation with a CPI(M) member we both know. Ammasi casually asks me what he had said. I inform him, and proceed to talk about party representatives I had heard over the last two days. I then talk about the public debate in Usilampatti. Ammasi looks up from the soil bed, turns, and asks about the debate.

Ammas: About this?

Dhivya: Yes, on what had happened at Perungamanallur – was it a community thingummy or a nationalist battle? [Pause]. I do not understand why they are doing this for the past eight years.

A: This is the handiwork of the communist chaps. Who entered the fray to expand their party. That, only if they include the Kallar will the party swell up. But those fellows [Kallar], they cannot be bound to anything (*kaṭṭuppaṭa māṭṭārka!*)... At least this, Dhivya...By [their very] nature (*iyal*)...

Ammas then explains his point by turning to local arrangements for the grant of fishing rights in tanks. (The illustration becomes digression, but here it is).

Ammas: Only after flinging the white [towel] (*veḷḷai vīcu*) can fish be caught. Near Thirumangalam, there are two *ūr*, Keela Urappanur and Mela Urappanur. There, the authority (*ātikkam*) [was] Thinakaraswami Thevar. When he flings the white [towel], only then can there be any fishing.

Recall that these two villages, Kallarnatu's 'rajdhani,' and Keela Urappanur's Thinakarawami Thevar, an Indian National Congress man who had served as a representative to the state legislative assembly decades ago (chapter 4). I knew something of fishing rights in the region and could recollect that the distribution of fishing shares have also been 'expressions of rank' (Mosse 2003: 170). I am unfamiliar, however, with the term *veḷḷai vīcutal*.

When I tell Ammasi this, he mimics the action, taking an imaginary towel from over his shoulder and flinging it. I know that action. Anyone living in Tamil Nadu or familiar with Tamil cinema (especially with its nativity films) would understand this gesture; it surfaces frequently during quarrels and challenges between Tamil men. A man who challenges another with this action signals that his contender is worthless, as easy to get rid of as a speck of dust or an irritating fly. This is a gesture signalling power and dominance. Ammasi's use refreshes my understanding; I now take the gesture to signify largesse, a peculiarly feudal largesse. For a big-man to stand by a tank and fling his white towel to flag off the fishing is to authorise others to fish.

Ammasi talks as he performs the gesture.

A: Take the towel, like this, and throw, like that, only then, can [anyone] go down into the tank. Like, before chariots are drawn – only after [the person with the authority] flings the towel, can [people] draw the chariot. Those [people], they have that kind of *mariyātai*. Mela Urappanur people say, 'Cannot do all that. We will catch fish without [waiting for] *veḷḷai vīcutal*.' That Keela Urappanur man, [Thinakarawami Thevar] is the one who flings. Mela Urappanur says, '[we] cannot accept that.' A great dispute (*takarāru*) ensues. Men, women, all go. Mela Urappanur, Keela Urappanur lock hands. It is nothing. They say, '[Let us] go, we will fish without waiting for *veḷḷai vīcutal*.' Thinakarawami Thevar says, 'only after *veḷḷai vīcutal* can there be any fishing.' All, men, women enter the tank, saying '[we] will not be bound... will not be restricted by anything.' In the *shooting* that happens, all at once, five people die.'

I ask if he knows when this occurred. He says, just now, after the Perungamanallur '*shooting*.' I ask if it is in the white man's time. He says, no, afterwards, after independence. In the period Ammasi probably denotes, this tank benefited from good drainage (Dumont 1986: 97). Resources (such as water and fish)

were perhaps ample; and conflicts over resources were probably intense. I have learnt of a crucial moment when earlier modes of distributing resources were contested; also that this was one conflict where Kallar individuals contested the honour, rank, and shares of chieftains or big-men from their own caste.

Ammasi: So, in this *cāti* (caste), can you see what [people] have died for? Women too have died. The Perungamanallur deaths are no big deal. That is why [Perungamanallur villagers] have forgotten. It is no great matter. One day, there was a fight (*caṅṅai*). It ended. Some ten people died. Why talk about it forever, joblessly? That is his [the Perungamanallur man's] outlook.

Ammasi appears to take this as the reason for Perungamanallur Kallar's inability to recall the incident in all its details. In this view, the forgetting has little to do with the shelf-life of 'communicative memory,' which, at about three generations, requires supplanting with 'cultural memory' (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995). For Ammasi, the forgetting is because violent death is so integral to Kallar life. Police killings and death by bullets is not extremely shocking. According to Ammasi, and some others I earlier interacted with, there is one main character in this play to recover the Perungamanallur firing from collective amnesia and bring it to public notice.

Dhivya: So now, CPI(M) chaps are taking this up?

Ammasi: They [CPI(M) workers] keep saying, 'something, somehow, [the Perungamanallur people] died. [They] did this, did that.' But those fellows [Perungamanallur Kallar] couldn't care less. This is what [communists] called '*tiyākam*' (sacrifice, martyrdom). '[At Perungamanallur, they] resisted the white man, did this, did that.' That is...The occupation (*tolil*) itself is to oppose (*etirkkiratu*) someone or the other, the occupation of the Kallar houses/ castes. This is what is important, Dhivya. Know this. This is what happened in our *ūr* too. For you, this seems like a big deal. 'They died!' What else will happen? Now, if [someone] hits you, won't you hit harder? About this, they are all saying, 'They resisted...they resisted.' So now, we too say, 'Yes, yes...We resisted.'

Ammasi says all this in a spirit of jest, and I respond with laughter. I now say, 'We have to keep changing ourselves according to the times, shouldn't we?'

Ammasi: Not at all a big event, that Perungamanallur shooting. In our village, what he [unnamed Malaiur man] did to oppose, to oppose the *British*, was that, [he] set fire.

Dhivya: Where?

A: In Malaiur.

D: Who on?

A: [On] *British*. There was a policeman, who brought the (registration of) fingerprints. [The men] refuse, saying we will not [register] fingerprints, and set fire. Now, is that great, or is it great to die in a shooting?

I stay silent. The group of daily wage labourers is a varied one. It is an all-woman group; one of them is Pechi, a Chakkiliyar woman. I hear Pechi's voice; she is the one responding to Ammasi's unanswered question.

Pechi: This is what is great.

Ammasi (turning towards Pechi): Do you understand?

Pechi: I can understand.

Ammasi: This Dhivya does not. That is, [white man] comes to our *ūr*, to ask people to keep fingerprints. In all of India, the first *ūr* to register fingerprints is Malaiur... That side [near Usilampatti and Perungamanallur], for those guys, it is only in 1919. So, when [white men] come for fingerprints, [Malaiur Kallar] say, we will not keep (our prints). [White man] hits him. [The villager who was hit] is Bosan Kaluvan. He is watching, watching, then he gets kerosene, pours it over that sleeping [policeman], sets him on fire. He dies.

Pechi now has a query for Ammasi, which she poses after addressing him with his caste's honorific title.

Pechi: *Tēvarē*, earlier, was there a *station* in our *ūr*?

Ammasi: Oh, yes!

The significance of Pechi's question only becomes clear when Arumugam finally stops. Pechi herself did not know – just as she did not know for sure, except from snatches of conversations she had overheard earlier, of the munsif [muṇcip] court the colonial state had built in Malaiur to contain its Kallar population – that she has assisted Ammasi, provided him a prompt in the day's theatre of competition between Malaiur and Perungamanallur. How is he going to proceed with this tale of two villages, two *ūr*, as contemporary Kallar memory would have it, of utmost significance to Kallar experience of colonial repression? The one, where CTA was implemented early on? Or the other, where an organised attempt to oppose the compulsory registration of Kallar men under the Act? Which would emerge the winner?

Ammasi had already made that clear. He addresses me again.

A: There was a station here, Dhivya. In Perungamanallur, there was no station. There were no stations in any other Kallarnatu [village]. There were no *courts*. In Malaiur, there was a *court, police station, bank...* ahmmm... this... ahmmm... weaving work... Loom.

Two or three of the women explain this to me, in unison. 'Weaving yarn... Cloth, cloth, making cloth, Dhivya.' This unit had operated in Allikodi's parents' house (chapter 3).

Ammasi goes on, asking me if I knew why the white man installed all this, these buildings for surveillance and policing, these small workshops, in his village.

A: 'Let this robber reform,' [white man] thought. Gave loans from bank for agriculture. 'No need to repay, [just] farm.' What did [Malaiur Kallan] do? Went on farming and went on stealing. "Ok. If agriculture is difficult for you, then spin this yarn and give it here,' [white man] said, and set up a loom. 'That too is not possible,' [Malaiur Kallan] said. Carried on with robbery. 'How to subdue (*aṭakku*) him?' [white man] thought. Tried to shut him in the police station. Could not be restrained.

Ammasi says since the Madurai court was so far off, the officers decided to build a court in Malaiur.

A: So what [the white man] did was, he kept a court right here, kept a jail right here. *Jail, court, station*, kept all this. But... couldn't be restrained. Only then did they catch

[villagers] and take them to Tirupparankunram. Brought in [CTA]. And ignoring an *ūr* that made so many sacrifices... 'In *Perungamanallur*, some day, [some people] died,' and... Now, they run around, thumping their chests, saying, 'We are the true *caṇṭiyar*.' Dhivya, do you understand what I am saying?

Dhivya: Yes, I understand.

A: Was a station in Perungamanallur?

D: No.

A: Was there a court? A jail? So, who is the *caṇṭiyar*?

Hmmm. I do notice – this is all evidence of Malaiur being a tough. It is not just about martyrdom and sacrifice. Ammasi is half-joking. (I shall realise later, when he and other Kallar residents present Malaiur as Perungamanallur's competitor, that the jesting tone is a pretext).

Dhivya (in splits): You, no doubt.

Ammasi: Yes. But it has taken you this long to say this.

Pechi remind us that she had said so a long while ago, had she not.

Ammasi has not given up. Like a lawyer building his case, he moves on to the incident, the preparedness of the Kallar, the police firing, and the deaths.

A: There [in Perungamanallur], taking all useless things... [Police] is going to shoot. Knowing this, that they are going to shoot, how should you go? One woman picked up a winnow and went! To shield herself from bullets. See that wisdom. That is how [they] died there, Dhivya. Went with country made fireworks; 'if [the police] throws, we will also throw.' Did not even know what a rifle was.

I tell him how, months ago, some people had prodded me to turn Perungamanallur into my primary field-site. He says Perungamanallur villagers truly do not know anything, and asks if those who wanted me to base myself there were Perungamanallur residents. I said no, they were not. Ammasi thinks this is immaterial – every man from Usilampatti claims Perungamanallur as his own *ūr*, that whatever has happened, they claim, 'this is our *ūr*.' I convey something of my fatigue, after listening to several speeches and being in different public events where everyone

was talking of Jallianwala Bagh. Two days, too many speeches to pay attention to, and I had to stay home an entire day. This prompts Ammasi to say that they must learn to speak well, but that they do not know what to say. He then says, 'That Jeyaraj has written a book [Jeyaraj and Maheswari 2003]. Everyone reads it, comes, says the same thing. If you keep on grinding already-ground flour, of what use is that?'

Malaiur was replete with hero stones; villagers often said there are hero stones and memorials for every act of bravery or sacrifice. Here, the lack of a CTA-related memorial was becoming a concern. Some of Malaiur's influential Kallar men began exhibiting a competitive spirit vis-à-vis Perungamanallur. They recalled many occasions when the *ūr* almost constructed a monument. They spoke of innumerable archival references to 'Malaiur Kallan,' saying their ancestors figured in massacres and riots in Sivakasi, Dindigul, and everywhere else. Yet no monument. Every time, they said – in the time of the 'Muslim invasion' (the brief period in the fourteenth century when Madurai was captured by an army of the Delhi Sultanates), in the Nayaka period, in the white man's period – it was the Malaiur Kallar. Yet no monument.

Whenever the absence of a memorial or Perungamanallur figured in our conversations, these men stressed that Kallar opposition to rulers emerged from Malaiur. They sought to substantiate this claim, for instance, by saying that only Malaiur, the *ūr* that held *kāval*, watching rights, in many of Madurai's streets and its palace, in Ramanathapuram and other distant places, was close enough to the city to be of any threat to rulers.

In the months prior to the April commemoration, as far as I remember, Perungamanallur was nowhere close to being the main competitor. Malaiur Kallar usually set their village against Kallar-dominated villages such as Tidiyan, Valandur, Urappanur, Dharmattupatti, villages that had held ritual and political significance in Kallarnatu. They dismissed these villages as trickster *ūrs* that had cheated the brave but innocent Malaiur of the centrality due to it. The pre-April months seemed to express a different temporality, marked by the January Tai Pongal and the *māci paccai* festivals (in March) at the Moonusami temples. Malaiur Kallar then forwarded abstract conceptions of space to justify their *ūr's* claim to *mutalmai* in temple

festivals. The village that could not claim centrality in the older *nāṭu* benefitted from the emergence of abstract space. To recapitulate, Malaiur utilised the economic benefits some of its Kallar residents obtained via spatial practices engendering and engendered by abstract space, to modify its location in Kallarnatu.

After 3rd April, although Malaiur Kallar continued to differentiate themselves from villages such as Tidiyan (*mutal nāṭu*, the unit with precedence over the other seven *nāṭu* of Kallarnatu), Perungamanallur became an important rival. The same representations of space – of being the Kallar village closest to the city centre – were now carried over to conversations about the lack of a memorial and the lack of public attention on Malaiur.

Some residents claimed that the memorial was erected in Perungamanallur only because Malaiur was not united. They spoke of CPI(M) tiring of Malaiur infighting over the names that would be inscribed in the memorial and then redirecting its gaze towards Perungamanallur. Katraja spoke of a Germany-based Tamil man who had intended to construct a memorial in their *ūr* – he had read so many white man’s documents replete with mentions of Malaiur Kallar that he could not think of any village more deserving of a memorial.

But in Malaiur, there is no unity, Katraja lamented. When the man from Germany tried to construct a memorial pillar, with the names of some villagers initially registered under CTA, many had resisted it. Why? Although one’s grandfather’s, and great-grandfather’s name (and Kallar men at the time had the same three or four names – Bosen, Kaluven...) would be inscribed, one’s own name would not.

There is absolutely no passion for the *ūr* (*ūr uṇarvu*), Katraja continued.

Earlier, we saw the shifting moral community evoked through the Perungamanallur martyrs’ commemoration. Those who could stake claims to be the martyrs’ descendants kept varying. In Malaiur, the coparcenary of valour was so limited in scope, so fractious, so divided a house, that any materialisation of that subjectivity in the form of a memorial seemed impossible. In 2008, the battle

between Malaiur valour and Perungamanallur martyrdom seemed decisively against Malaiur.

In 2014, however, Kallar residents organised a commemoration of CTA implementation in Malaiur. At the event, a memorial was unveiled, and a Piramalai Kallar Conference (*mānāṭu*) was organised by some politically active Malaiur Kallar residents and some non-Malaiur Kallar. The conference venue was near the village bus stand, by the main approach road that nominally separates *kirāmam* from *ūr*, or the panchayat office and the *balwadi* (where village children are provided government stipulated daily doses of ‘nutrition’) from the Vinakayar temple on the other side. Usilampatti-based lawyer Senthil said it had been a big event, attended by many people. Ammasi, one of the main organisers, said that despite the posters and publicity, the turnout was smaller than expected. He hoped that the event would realise its potential for organising his community.

In January 2015, some men spoke of individuals like the former Malaiur panchayat president, who had recently joined the BJP. ‘What else to do? There is going to be no other party in Tamil Nadu soon.’ They thought the ex-president was thinking of the time when DMK head Karunanidhi dies – leaving behind him a faction-ridden party that would immediately splinter – and AIADMK head Jayalalitha ‘goes’ (no crude word like death for her; these men were AIADMK supporters), without appointing any successors. These men thought the BJP would use the impending gap in regional politics, and that a few in Malaiur were strategizing in this light.

But the 2014 caste conference was planned alongside the memorial’s unveiling. The commemoration and conference had served up a moment when the new memorial brokered between culture and politics, between caste as a cultural entity (Natrajan 2012) – *cāti* as *camūkam* and *camutāyam* – and political representation. I asked the organisers whether they hoped for effects similar to those of the Perungamanallur commemoration. Let’s wait...let’s see (*pārppōm, pārppōm*), they said.

One of the organisers was Katraja, who, eight years earlier, had bemoaned the lack of *ūr uṇarvu*, passion and love for the *ūr* of Malaiur. By January 2015, it had somehow surfaced. Intra-village conflicts seemed contained enough for Malaiur’s

Five Thevar Lineages to install a memorial. What form did they decide upon, for the materialisation of *ūr uṇarvu*?

A cement lion crouches on a disc atop rectangular pillars rising from a cement plinth (Figure 4). A Tamil inscription provides the date of the pillar's unveiling. The inscription on another side of the plinth tells us that Malaiur's Five Thevar Lineages



Figure 4 Malaiur Memorial Pillar, Muthuramalinga Thevar statue in background, January 2015 (edited to preserve anonymity).

installed this structure in memory of their ancestors. It also extols Malaiur's sacred soil for nurturing *vīram*, courage, and commemorates the sovereign *ūr* for humbling white rulers by extracting 'quarter *āṇā*' as watching fees (from a policeman of the colonial state). The plaque on a third plinth face tells us the memorial commemorates the white rulers' implementation of the 'Fingerprint Act' on Malaiur Piramalai Kallar residents. Some details of the government order, G.O., through which the colonial bureaucracy commuted this decision, are included in this inscription.

If the Perungamanallur memorial commemorates sacrifice or martyrdom, the Malaiur memorial commemorates valour. The Malaiur memorial symbolises a hybrid

of colonial archive and social memory, blending G.O. details with the localised reference of CTA as the Fingerprint Act.

Next to this structure is a bronze statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar. The juxtaposition of the statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar, '*teṅ pāṇṭi ciṅkam*,' southern Pantiya lion, (after the Madurai Pantiya rulers, a common reference point for many southern Tamil castes), and the CTA memorial seemed a great touch. The near contiguous placement of pillar and statue portends events where the two memorials might come alive. It had the potential to activate commemoration and desecration – acts that render memorials hyper-visible.

CHAPTER 6 DESECRATION

Let us now reverse the gaze.

Chapter 5 analysed memorials revealed in commemorative moments. What would happen to our analysis if we looked away at the previous photograph, blurred the commemorative pillar, and brought the statue to the fore (Figure 5)? This chapter takes up memorials, statues in particular, as they become visible through acts of desecration.



Figure 5 Bronze Thevar statue, Malaiur, January 2015.

The first section closely tracks the responses of a group of Malaiur villagers to the desecration of their icon Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar's statue in April 2008. This section highlights the interplay between 'irrational' affect and the nearly 'rational' streamlining of that affect; people's responses to the state's responses to

desecrations; the ability of things to become more alive, more human than human beings; and the effects of new technologies like mobile phones on rumours, riots, and mobilisation.

The following section takes up bureaucratic responses to the 'statue wars' in Tamil Nadu. It analyses the state's effort to externalise politics into objects, and to favour materials that might produce objects robust enough to absorb conflict itself. It focuses on the state government's idea that if only statues were made in bronze, it would be a lot easier to manage caste conflicts. Tracking the consequences of this faith in objects, we shall see that the bronzing of statues has had an unintended effect – it made vandalism difficult, but made desecrations all the more viable. We shall see that the new material suits the 'culturalization of caste,' processes through which caste elites turn *cāti* into *camūkam*, or *jati* into *samaj* (Natrajan 2012: 89-91). All caste iconic statues, irrespective of material, allow for a new sense of belonging that turns away from considerations of 'blood' and ancestry proper towards broader cultural communities (*ibid*). All statues allow territorially embeddedness dominance to incorporate geographically extended belonging. Yet bronze statues invite desecration more than vandalism. They thus fit better with the politics of honour, disrespect, and dignity through which extensive notions of *iṇam* (ethnic category), *camūkam*, and metonymic *camutāyam* (society) rescale caste relations.

By tacking these processes to the political field where social groups seek to pitch dignity as a keyword, I examine different conceptions of subjects and objects. For it is in such a field that the concept of dignity, which captures what it means to be human and what is inhuman, begins to embrace the thing, the statue. The third section gauges the criss-crossing of subjects and objects by examining how contending social groups jump scales through statues. I explore legal material on statue related conflicts from other locations in Tamil Nadu – not only because this highlights regional patterns to such rescaling actions but also because anthropological analysis needs to take seriously the abstraction that legal discourse hinges upon. The concluding section returns to Malaiur. I take in recent developments, linking a new bronze Thevar statue in Malaiur to the transfer of

existing caste conflicts onto the built environment, and the built environment's generation of new conflicts.

Narratives, social memory, and commemorative practices (chapters 2, 5) convey a contemporary reality where the evocation of martial pasts helps reproduce subjects forever on the brink of violence. Such aggressive dispositions aid a range of activities from usury to speculation in real property markets, lending themselves to contemporary Kallar dominance. But place-specific histories and an uneven spatial fabric – partially produced through the re-assembling of land and location (chapter 4) – have contributed to uneven Kallar dominance within Kallarnatu. We may recall that narratives and everyday conversations– for instance, that Kallar residents of long-urbanised localities and of villages transformed by canal irrigation caricature their caste members in 'interior' or 'notorious' villages as less reformed, and that predominantly Kallar neighbourhoods in Madurai city are considered notorious localities (part I) – hint at intra-caste contestation.

Let us briefly tackle these issues at the level of supracastes. Non-Kallar individuals usually grasped the Mukkulathor supracaste as an undifferentiated social group, bracketing all its constituent groups as 'Thevar people' or 'Thevar caste.' Likewise, representatives of different political formations often highlighted a generic Mukkulathor identity. Yet Piramalai Kallar men and woman switched between grouping themselves along with and differentiating themselves from other Mukkulathor castes. Despite resignifying their notification under CTA as an outcome of specific subcaste (or, as in the case of Malaiur, even village) sovereignty, Piramalai Kallar individuals could occasionally attribute greater fierceness and savagery to other Mukkulathor castes. I became aware of this, perhaps for the first time in February 2008, when a group of Malaiur Kallar women told me that people in Ramanathapuram, Virudhunagar, and Tirunelveli, are fiercer. I was to hear these views repeated later, when other Malaiur Kallar projected these southern Tamil Nadu districts as '*vettu kuthu*' places, where Mukkulathor castes were forever ready to slash and stab everyone.

Existing literature on Mukkulathor-Dalit violence appears to validate the Malaiur Kallar's image of other Mukkulathor castes. Mukkulathor castes are

perceived as one of the main producers of southern Tamil Nadu as ‘backward, less civic and given to sickles and primordial violence’ (Krishnan 2008: 150). This, as Rajan Krishnan writes, ‘may make sense in the popular “logic” of imagination, [but] critical thought should hasten to warn of the dangers of stereotyping and the limitations of representative practices [in media such as Tamil] cinema’ (ibid).

Despite clubbing all of southern Tamil Nadu as a violence-prone region, academic scholarship, and reports by government, non-governmental organisations, and media has concentrated on atrocities against Dalits in Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli, and Virudhunagar (e.g. Jeyaranjan and Anandhi 1999). Yet Madurai’s Piramalai Kallar have also been associated with violence against Dalits. Among the places marked by caste riots are Piramalai Kallar dominated Bodi and Kandamanur (Ganeshram 1989, Manikumar 1997).

It is unclear how we may interpret geographical variations in Mukkulathor–Dalit conflict. Does the lower level of atrocities against Dalits in Madurai’s Kallarnatu reveal differences in dominance within the supracaste, wherein Piramalai Kallar are less aggressive? Or does it reveal weaker Dalit politicisation in Kallarnatu, as compared to other southern Tamil Nadu micro-regions? We may rephrase part of the interpretative problem to meet a query over dominance and demographic patterns. Let us recall the peculiar sociological denotation of rural settlements with one large dominant caste and many smaller service castes as ‘single-caste’ settlements, and settlements with more than one dominant caste as ‘multi-caste’ settlements, with more than one dominant caste. Statistical differences in reported incidents of Mukkulathor–Dalit violence might then mark Kallarnatu’s ‘single-caste’ characteristic, where conflicts over territorial control and dominance occur within one caste rather than across castes.

Some scholars suggest that Piramalai Kallar dominance is marked by greater uncertainties and a marginality that is both sub-regional (apropos other dominant castes in Madurai) and internal (apropos the supracaste formation). Comparing Piramalai Kallar with Pudukottai’s royal Kallar, Dirks suggests that social relations and territorial control in Madurai’s Kallarnatu is affected both by the marginal productivity of land and by Piramalai Kallar’s ‘political marginality’ (1987: 215, 257-

61). If we pursue the argument that Mukkulathor dominance is but 'paper dominance' (Ganesan 2012), Piramalai Kallar dominance appears more flimsy.

Analysts (M.S.S. Pandian 2000: 502, Kohli 1990: 176) of post-1990s caste violence in southern Tamil Nadu have also suggested that most individuals from the Mukkulathor castes and the Dalit Pallar caste are in similar economic situations. The fragility of Kallar dominance, and economic similarities of its majority with Dalits, turns affect into a powerful political machine that produces a united moral community. Affect allows for a suturing of differences within castes, the production of supra-local groups, scale-jumping, and the canalisation and reterritorialization of caste conflicts. I begin analysing these processes by tracking the aftermath of the desecration of a Muthuramalinga Thevar statue in Madurai.

Desecration as Death, and worse: An Ūr responds to a Statue's Desecration

One afternoon in April 2008, Kannan, elderly Kallar man from Tenur, began arguing that the Criminal Tribes Act was actually a Kallar Control Act. Sitting under the banyan tree near the Karuppu temple, Kannan pared down this claim, asserting that the CTA was actually a Malaiur Control Act. Kannan's claims, and the routes through which he arrived at them, should have garnered my full attention. But murdered colonial policemen, Kallar lineages ancestors such as Kuppaiyandi Thevar, for whose military service the Ramanathapuram ruler had granted village Pattinamkathan, Ramanathapuram as *māṇiyam*, and so on – these references were of no help in fighting my fever-induced weariness.

By the time Kannan got talking about Kuppaiyandi Thevar and his *māṇiyam* lands, I had nearly dozed off. I was barely registering the connections Kannan had been making between poverty, ecology, and thieving, when a comment by someone else caught my attention. 'Heard the news? Seems like [they have] broken the Thevar statue.'

The courier of this news is 'Fish Seller' Pichai, middle-aged Malaiur Kallar man, whose *patta peyar* (pet name) stemmed from a job he had handled once. He is addressing other men of his caste and village, all middle-aged, in one leisurely pose

or other. Rasendran is resting on the *nārkaḷi* ('four-legged,' a rudimentary cot made by looping rough coir ropes on a wooden frame) placed before the tea-stall by Subramaniam, the owner. I notice other men, dozing or reading the dailies or weeklies.

Rasendran asks Pichai which Thevar statue has been demolished. Pichai tells them it is the Goripalayam statue. Rasendran asks Pichai how he knows of this.

Trouble. I stop listening to Kannan. I now bend an ear. I only hear snatches. Yet I sense the awakening of emotions – the incredulity, to start with – in some of the voices. An event is in motion, and it fills me with unease. I hope the news is unfounded. I hope my fears turn out to be baseless. As a last, childish resort, I stubbornly focus on Kannan's face and voice.

Within two minutes, during which time we were spared the news, Kannan paused his narrative to ask me if there was anything I wanted to know. Kannan was going through a particularly sad phase. His relation with his wife was progressively deteriorating, his three daughters and their husbands were claiming shares in his property, while his only son was waiting for total possession of property and had become a rude, lazy alcoholic. Added to which was Kannan's disposition, his penchant for playing big-man, and to read the tiniest of slights, such as not having his audience's complete attention, as a huge challenge to his importance. This was probably why Pichai, Rasendran, and the others had granted us those two minutes. Failing to come up with a query, and faltering as soon as I began, I provided the break that they had been waiting for. They addressed him.

Pichai nearly hollers. '*Maamaa*, [they have] destroyed the Thevar statue.'

Kannan is stunned. His eyes bulge as he demands to know if this is true. They affirm it. Rasendran chips in, 'just been talking about it; about a quarter of an hour...' Pichai interrupts, saying it has been a quarter of an hour since the destruction, while Rasendran continues, '...since the news reached...' They are using the Tamil verb *uṭai*, which means (among other things) to break, crack, split, or burst into fragments.

Rasendran continues to speak. He thinks all Madurai is bound to ignite. Pichai again says it has been a quarter of an hour since the destruction.

I ask, 'Which statue?' They reply that it is the one in Goripalayam. (But I already knew that).

I ask, 'Who destroyed [it]?'

In unison, the men say, 'Don't know who destroyed [it].' One of them adds, 'Don't know which *group*.'

Pichai: Only a quarter of an hour since [we] got the information.

Kannan (his disbelief belying the routine targeting of statues): *In broad daylight?*

P: Now, just a quarter of an hour ago.

Kannan says it was probably bombed. [I know of one instance when a bomb was hurled at a Muthuramalinga Thevar statue. In 1996, six people threw a bomb at a statue in a village near Vatrayeruppu, southern Tamil Nadu (M.S.S. Pandian 2000: 506)]. Pichai agrees, and proceeds to tell us how he came by the news of the destruction.

Pichai: Quarter of an hour ago...three people came in a car...two *ladies* and a man...They bought some [sweets] and ate. When [they were] leaving, [I] asked, "What is it? What is up?" They said, 'Our relatives live in the town'...Ahm... [They're] our Thevar folk only... 'We reside in Pasumalai. When [we were] coming in the vehicle, the police said "[They] have set fire to the Thevar statue and destroyed it. There will be riots. Wherever you are, just leave and reach your *ūr*.'" We were scared to go eastwards. Came here.' They asked for the way to Pykara [a locality near Tirupparankunram, where many Kallar mill workers have settled]. They are going roundabouts. [I] asked how long ago it happened [and] they said, 'Just now, about a quarter of an hour ago.'

Kannan: Meggggaaa trouble. *Periya viṇai*.

Rasendran: Mega agony [*vētaṇai*] is sure to come. Madurai will be destroyed [*aliñci pōkum*].'

Pichai: [As though] merely Madurai will be destroyed.

Kannan agrees. He says he cannot even predict all the places that would be shaken up by this news. But other men recall caste geographies in precise terms, naming

localities and neighbourhoods, and urban settlements where Piramalai Kallar predominate. Subramaniam counts the places and people that shall fill the emergent atlas of revenge. He begins with the Karimedu Kallar. In Kallar-generated representational spaces, this evocation is significant. Kannan immediately picks up on the introduction of this heroic figure. He repeats the words 'Karimedu Kallar,' his tone implying that the Kallar of Karimedu, a locality in Madurai city, are not going to let the vandalism remain unavenged.

Rasendran: Why, all of Tamil Nadu...

[I will soon know that this is only the first of many utterances when geographies of caste and violent retaliation predicate upon each other. These men's interactions will involve a movement up successive levels to include larger and larger areas of Mukkulathor dominance, and then a movement of return to places closer home, to places of Piramalai Kallar notoriety. This double move shall occur repeatedly today.].

Through representational space, Goripalayam moves nearby, even though the two locations – ours' and the statue's – are about fifteen kilometres apart. Now, one of the men wants to call someone for more information. In the meantime, Subramaniam, or Subbu, speaks acerbically, at an escalating pitch, about Tamil Nadu's current DMK government and Chief Minister Karunanidhi. He tells everyone that Karunanidhi's rule has to end, for he is the one constantly fuelling caste riots. But Rasendran brings us back to the specifics. 'Gosh, to break the Goripalayam statue! Look at their aggression (*tāṭṭiyam*).' Subbu temporarily lets go of Karunanidhi to agree with Rasendran. 'What aggression!'

The man trying to make a call rues the tendency of cell phones to stop working when most needed. I offer my phone, hoping a telephonic conversation will calm the men a bit. Temporarily forgetting everything about rumours and riots, I am reposing great faith in facts to lend a sense of proportion, even to stave off trouble. The man refuses, trying again through his own phone. Another man suggests they place a call to a kinsman who has been in *town* (Madurai city) since morning. Kannan thinks this will be of little use, and worries that 'this...this news, no one is going to speak of it.'

Subbu: Will not tell.

....

A lull and then Pichai begins embellishing – this is how his sorrow-soaked tones seem to me – or he is probably only paraphrasing his conversation with the travellers in that car. The point, in any case, is the rhetorical strategy with which Pichai underlines that it is none other than the Goripalayam statue that has been destroyed.

When the people in the car told Pichai about the vandalism, he had asked them which statue they were referring to. Is it a statue near some village (*kirāmam*), or some roadside one in *town*? No, it is the *Goripalayam* statue, the tallest Thevar statue in India, in the entire world! ‘Even that female person became sorrowful. “Look at what [they] have done. Look at what [they] have done to such a big statue.”’

[Pichai’s ‘*even that female person*’ gain significance later, when some of these men’s wives arrive at the tea-stall and try to lower the men’s murderous anger. When Malar will try diffusing their fiery mood for revenge, her husband Rasendran shall spit out, ‘What is this talk? Is this the talk of a *Kal!acci* [Kallar woman]? By now, an Usilampatti *Kal!acci* would have taken at least a broomstick and stood right at the front.’]

Subbu is unfurling that mental map again, calling out other places marked for trouble. But Rasendran is adamant. Whatever be the reactions, they are not going to be that localised.

Rasendran: Just watch, *total* Tamil Nadu will go up in flames.

Subbu: Hmmm.

Subbu is distracted. Supposing the Chief Minister, or some other government figure ‘comes, saying they will immediately install [another] statue, then? What should [we] do?’ Both Rasendran’s and Kannan’s voices rapidly ascend.

Rasendran: If [they] want to install! [We] cannot just let them do that! ...

K: Aey...

R: ...Why *da*, after it has been broken, why, is the Thevar group a...a...

Intense anger provides Kannan with a startling analogy, immediately and eagerly extended by Rasendran.

K: To slash you, and *subsequently*...

R: ...*After* cutting [you] up...ahmmm...if [the perpetrator] says '[I] will stitch [up your wounds], plaster [your broken bones], give you an injection?' How would that be? Would you accept that?

And yet, Subbu wants to think the possibility through. What if someone makes a statement and newspapers quote him saying 'I will immediately install a statue?'

[There have been precedents. Soon after the 1996 bombing of the Thevar statue near Vatrayeruppu, the government promised precisely this (M.S.S. Pandian 2000: 507). In 1998, the government was quick to replace a damaged Thevar statue in Virudhunagar with a new one (ibid). From the state's point of view, this is an appropriate move, particularly for easily breakable statues, while vandalism of later-date (bronze) statues requires a different set of responses].

Kannan scoffs at press releases and promises, as though he wants to foreclose any containment of the vandalism's consequences. He sacks Subbu's imaginary conflict arbitrator. Why bother about someone who 'took a broomstick to his tongue a long while ago?' This is a reference to Karunanidhi's, possibly all DMK leaders', loss of honour – they have performed an ultimate act of debasement, touching something as filthy as a broomstick with their tongue. This moves the others, mostly AIADMK supporters, to unfurl their own flag of anger against DMK. By 2008, a good number of Madurai residents have had it with Alagiri, one of Karunanidhi's sons. I have been hearing of him and his faction since moving to Madurai.

Subbu: Yes, now, first of all, if only [someone] can beat up and kick Alagiri out of Madurai...'

Pichai: Do not know how many people will become sacrificial offerings (*pali ākiratu*)!

[He is saying this as though these killings shall take place on their own, as though they are detached from human volition].

S: So long as [Alagiri] remains, there will be many...

[It is common perception that Mukkulathor vote en masse for AIADMK, and recent trends from Mukkulathor dominated regions suggest its partial validity. Interestingly,

the Goripalayam Thevar statue was installed in 1974 by the Karunanidhi-led government – in a move to break the anti-DMK stance of Mukkulathor groups (Ganesan 2012). Clearly, appeal to a caste’s symbols cannot permanently serve politics. The tactic is afflicted by diminishing returns; when it works, the tactic is soon mimicked, even exaggerated, by other political formations.

The men continue to blame DMK for fuelling caste riots. This is what is chilling – the perceived inevitability of a person’s or a group’s participation in a riot, even as they hold that some external force (a rival political party or a political formation representing the interests of a rival social group) is inciting their participation. It is revealing how people readying themselves to violence can blame others for inciting them. It is as though, now that an external force has incited them, they cannot help but execute that design].

....

Pichai: Why, in Madurai...if right inside the lion’s castle, the lion is killed...

Subbu approves. Yes, is this not the lion’s fortress? If [someone] enters this fortress and strikes, then, how will it be?

I have been sitting with my back to the *kirāmam*’s stage for theatre and other cultural performances. I can see it now, with all the clarity of recollection. My first visit to Malaiur. That first glimpse into how the *kirāmam* and the *ūr* fold themselves, over and over, to reproduce the Tamil village. The colourful paintings of Muthuramalinga Thevar, Subhas Bose, and Tamil deity Murugan, and their ‘vehicles,’ a lion, a dragon (!), and a peacock. I also think of all the hoardings that pin Thevar to a lion, of the innumerable references to Thevar as the southern Pantiya lion.¹ Subbu and Pichai face this wall painting, while they continue spinning tropes so heady that it begins to change reality.

¹ Generally symbolising royalty and warriorhood, the lion has additional significance for Mukkulathor, who often refer to Muthuramalinga Thevar as one. Lions are depicted alongside Thevar on book covers, paintings, posters, and statues. The lion is represented as Thevar’s vehicle (mimicking Hindu deities – for instance, the peacock as Murugan’s vehicle). Popular songs equating Thevar with a lion are played during many kinds of Kallar rituals and events.

Madurai is like the lion's fortress [*ciñka kōṭṭai*], and the lion is Muthuramalinga Thevar. Their tropes did not simply translate an event, or an affect, into something more understandable. The translations crossed over to what unfolded that day. At first, the day unfolds a series of tropes. Subsequently, this tropology begins to unfold the day, setting the event off in particular directions.

Subbu is not the only person who has taken a shine to these tropes. Others mention the arrogance of the intruders of this space.

It is at this point that Ammasi Thevar makes his appearance, pedalling his pista-green cycle back from Malaiur. He thrusts his cycle away. No preamble. With his gritty voice, he gets down to business. 'They say the Thevar statue has been broken.' Pichai briefs him. Someone stresses that it is the Goripalayam statue, no less, and Rasendran responds to this reminder. To smash the Goripalayam statue itself, then...this Madurai...what does it matter whether this Madurai exists or not?

Ammasi Thevar transports a frosty power to our surroundings. In a cold voice, he instructs the others on how to proceed.

Ammasi: Let the bus come. Will set fire. A few...In Madurai...

The next public transport vehicle to come into Malaiur. The 1 p.m. bus. Are they going to do that, set fire to it? But Subbu thinks the government will suspend public transport service and that the bus will not come.

Ammasi: So what if it does not come *today*? It has to come *one day or the other*.

Kannan: Nothing will as much as sway. Are you saying the bus will come here?

Pichai: Why will they [the government] leave the buses? Will he [angry Kallar] not ignite the buses? There, within the city, they may be plying the buses.

[There is a small pause. A pause is treason. This is how the men appear to test time today – each moment deserves to pass only if it is used. Ammasi provides a general comment, as though to fill up that short empty duration of time.]

Ammasi: 'Why, what audacity.'

The term Ammasi uses is *tairiyam* – courage, or, rather (from his tone) spunk, audacity.

....

[All along, I have been waiting to make some move, something that can immobilise this verbal exchange, halt all this at the level of words, at least. An inane question duly follows.]

Dhivya (to Ammasi, the late entrant): Did you see this on TV?

Ammasi: What?

He is not even listening to my question. He has taken his cell phone out of his shirt pocket. Meanwhile,

Rasendran: It is like hurling the Thevar race [*inam*] down and stomping on it.

[The loss of honour and public standing – this theme is beginning to predominate. Rasendran emphasizes the instrument of symbolic violence – the legs, among the most debased portions of the human body, with which the Thevar race is being trampled upon. Given the feudal representation of the human body, symbolising caste as *varna*, and meanings and actions determined by caste relations, to be trampled upon is a double dishonour. Firstly, the dishonour of being subject to this violence. Secondly, the dishonour and the loss of rank that can be both consequence and expression of being touched by another's feet. All this talk is geared towards an objective so far unstated – to blame the Dalit, at once an abstract political figure *and* a localised, identifiable social group. This talk of disrespect manufactures anger. The talk of dishonour and loss of rank brings the men closer to conjuring flesh, bones, and caste to the yet to be named destroyer of the Thevar statue.]

Although Ammasi has ignored me, Pichai responds. No. 'This is news that came now, in the last ten minutes.' It is as though Pichai has not registered my continued presence, ever since he returned to the tea-stall with this tidal bit of information.

I say, 'No, no, I am asking Ammasi how he got to...'

Preoccupied, Ammasi mutters agreement, and continues handling his mobile phone.

No news on the television. Pichai is about to tell me why this is impossible. He mentions a moratorium on electronic media coverage of "communal clashes."

Kannan interrupts. Pointing to the lorries running on a mud track at some distance, he says, 'Aey, here, here...go there. Let someone take the cycle and go...do not allow these vehicles to run.'

But Ammasi, who has been pushing buttons with a sense of urgency, finally gets through and begins talking.

Ammasi (over the phone): *Annen*, this is Ammasi speaking. *Annen*, there is some talk in Malaiur now. Is it true? [They are] saying the Goripalayam statue has...broken, is it really so? [Listening] Is it so only on that side? [Listening] Well, they have been talking of it being smashed. [Listening] Is that so, *annan*? Ok, then, [we] will find out...ok, ok...

Ammasi turns to address the other men. 'He says cow dung has been dissolved and let...'

Kannan: What?

Ammasi: It seems that [they] have dissolved and thrown dung.

[It so transpires that the statue has not been shattered or broken. No bombs. No lumps off the bronze statue. Will this translate into lesser anger?]

Rasendran: 'That is...Whatever it is, it is indecent, disgusting [*aciṅkam*].

Ammasi: 'Whatever be the action, it is indecency, is it not?'

Rasendran: Whatever it is, indecency is indecency, is it not, *pa*?

Pichai: Why *pa*, to pour dung, that is...it...is more hurtful/ more backward [*pinṅam*] than destroying, *pa*. It is like pouring human excreta on a man, is it now?

[One short call from Ammasi to his "elder brother" (*anna*), a lawyer and brother of an ex-MLA, and we have moved from destruction to desecration. A new set of emotions emerge, adapted strategically to the fresh news. I am to hear it said, repeatedly, that desecration is dishonour, disrespect, insult, indecent, *avamāṅgam*, *aciṅkam*. Losing one's honour is worse than death. Desecration is worse than destruction.]

....

Vineetha, a young Kallar woman who runs a small shop nearby, has stopped over with her daughter, a toddler. She must have perceived the atmospheric change, for she asks, 'What is it?' Pichai fills her in. 'The Thevar statue *ma...*At Goripalayam, our statue is there, right, the Thevar statue? He is saying dung has been poured.' Vineetha nods absentmindedly.

Rasendran: The *news* is not known yet. Now, imagine if the *news* flies...

[But all the while, the news has indeed been taking wing. First, Pichai's accidental journalism (which in retrospect seems to have been part-rumour, part-fact). Then, Pichai's reportage to others present in the tea-stall. Then, a (failed) phone call to connect this place of leisure to someone closer to the memorial. Then, Ammasi's entrance and another phone call.

All the while, cycles have whirred and motorbikes have revved up to where we sit. Other men have scurried to the same place. This place of leisure, this tea-stall looks more of a public place today than on normal days. It is now, at the time of an impending conflict over social space, that the tea-stall most clearly enunciates what a public place is like. It is today that the tea-stall shows itself to be catering mostly to Malaiur and Tenur Kallar, some non-Kallar, and passers-by and visitors. It reveals itself as a place barely utilised by local Dalits, even though the plastic throwaway cups anticipate Dalit presence.

The tea-stall has been a centre of broadcasting and bravado. Each time one of their kinsfolk saunter by or stop for tea, the men present ask, 'Heard?' and proceed to tell them. Soon the tea-stall assumes the role of a makeshift wartime military headquarters. The enemy is unnamed, but this will soon change. At site after site like this, the unknown desecrator of the Thevar statue might be assigned a known identity. Initially, Dalits as a whole. Subsequently, Dalits in the village or the vicinity.]

A man who has stopped by at the tea-stall predicts the outcome of the news spreading. 'Here, there, in this place and that, riots will definitely occur.'

[It is almost as though the riots are to have lives of their own, as though they would create themselves].

Ammasi is muttering about the consequences of the correction. 'He said [they] have poured dung.'

[Is there a fear that this is somehow less significant, that it shall seem less bombastic?]

Kannan shouts. 'Aey, isn't this similar?'

Ammasi: [The lawyer] said, 'That is what they are saying, that is the talk that is emerging, they have done something there'...

Kannan is adamant that the two (destruction and desecration) are analogous.

Kannan: Is this not alike? Is not what you are saying [desecration] akin [to destruction]?

Ammasi: Yes.

Rasendran: Is not pouring dung a bigger insult than breaking?

Ammasi: No matter what the action, is it not an insult?

Pichai's doubts, probably harboured for a while, surface. 'So, the news, it is *correct*? I was scared that is it false, when I kept telling [you all].' He is reassured by the other men, who say 'No way,' 'How can that be?' and so on. They stress on the 'true' nature of the lawyer Ammasi has spoken to. I notice Rasendran's wife, the typically quiet, sensitive Malar, only when she begins to speak, mentioning a need for greater verification. In my fear, and with the knowledge of my powerlessness weighing down, I have been thinking of a possible intervention. For me to call the police seems useless. I have been thinking of a CPI(M) member, who knows these men rather intimately, and also knows enough people in the district administration. I ask the men if they think he might know, if they think of him as a potential source of information. They are dismissive at first; they have already crosschecked with their own kin, the lawyer who will not lie. (Later on, others and I try calling the CPI(M) member, but he does not respond until a man whose mobile number he cannot identify makes a call).

Malar: [We] should find out who did it.

Rasendran: Whoever it may be, [he] is [going to get it] good.

Kannan: *Who* did it...

Malar: [Someone] must have seen it, right?

Kannan: In effect... in effect... we can only be angry with Harijan.

[The men shift gears, ramming their verbal rage, till now concentrated on Karunanidhi and Alagiri, against Dalits, and particularly one local Dalit caste, the Chakkiliyar].

Kannan, who had initially said that he could not possibly predict the extent to which and the places in which the effects of the vandalism shall be felt, now recalls his own past actions against Chakkiliyar, and prods others for a repeat of those actions.

Kannan: Those...now...I went, one dusk...into the Chakkiliyar...went and smashed all the Tenur Chakkiliyar houses.

Ammasi: *Must* smash...Malaiur, everything...toda...*must* finish...

Kannan: At Malaiur, you...at dusk...

Ammasi: Send a messenger, a tom-tom, to [neighbouring villages], all...What do you say, Pichai?

Kannan approvingly reminds them. 'The way you turned up last time...'

Ammasi: Yes, the same, [we] have to fetch [the others] and come...Not one should remain.

Pichai responds to Ammasi's call to relay information and commands to Kallar residents of neighbouring villages.

Pichai: Ammasi...

Ammasi: Yes?

P: These [neighbouring village] chaps are unreliable. So, just Tenur, Malaiur... now, today...

A: Blows...[in] Malaiur today...

P: Tenur...

A: ...In Tenur...beat up...

[...] Kannan re-enters this plan of action.

Kannan: All of it...enter and...

Ammasi: ...[Let us] hit, smash.

Kannan: No, today...today, there is an excellent *chance*...beat, smash...[they] must cry out, *aiyaiyō* [in grief, pain]...If anyone...anyone that says “my *contam*,” “your *contam*,” “you are my own,” “we are your own,” must be beaten up.

[This is Kannan’s Great Transformation. From where he started – painting an early-twentieth-century pastoral scene of harmony and Kallar largesse and patronage for their Dalit agrestic slaves during famine and other generalised crises, of a village full of hunger-ridden Kallar families, their ecologically determined grain-thefts, and the generous parcelling out of their nightly haul of grain to every single family, both Thevar and Harijan – to where he is now, at this moment.

And like most great transformations, the second moment contains the first, and the first moment is grasped better through the second. Kannan’s movement from summoning the Kallar as *jajman*, as patron, to bearing witness to his own perpetration of violence against Chakkiliyar, is a swift revelation of the seeds of the second moment in the first. It is this transformation, this movement from the first moment to the second, which allows us to comprehend patrons better. The second moment, the threat of violence and actual violence, illuminates the first moment, the benevolence of patronage, to show us its horror.].

There is also Selvi. Selvi, who has been fidgeting all along, finally asks Kannan, “Why, *pa*, now, will you let [people] beat up your own servant?”

Kannan: Of course, *must* beat up...

[The exact term Selvi and the others use, sounds like *paṭaiyan*, but could be *paṭiyan*. The Tamil lexicon translates the first term as ‘slave.’ The second term was used for a

category of landless agrarian labourers, who were remunerated by grains measured in a vessel known as *paṭi*].

Three or four other men repeated the Tamil term Selvi had used. It is a term I had not heard earlier here. I take this to be one of many local terms with which labouring people in a system of agrestic bondage are referred to. [The preferred term in Malaiur for former agrestic slaves or tied agricultural labourers is *paṇṇaiyā*, who were paid in cash or grain shares (Viswanath 2014: 28)]. These men dismiss the whiff of patronage that comes along with this term, one of them saying it is as useless as an aubergine (which, in Tamil Nadu, is viewed as a really useless vegetable). Kannan is even more explicit in dismissing the patron's hint about the term.

Kannan: Protection? Bollocks! (*paṭaiyāppu mayirāppu*)...

[Selvi's laughter at the slang is a little on the edge]...

Kannan: *Aey*, to date, there is not a single person in Tenur who has given the Chakkiliyan more patronage, more support [*ātaravu*] than I have...

Selvi (sardonically): Is that so?

Kannan: But on that day...see, what happened that day...

Selvi: Yes?

Kannan: ...on that day, I was the one who beat up and set fire after breaking in. Today too...today, too, I say that I am going to do the same. As soon as [I] go, all [of them] will approach, saying, 'Thevare!' Let them! Just have to thrash them and fling them down, that is all.

Selvi exclaimed, *āttāṭi āttā*. Laughs, her laughter still on the edge. Just look at him!

Kannan: What else, then?

Rasendran: Community honour [or consciousness], is that an ordinary thing, sister-in-law?

[The term Rasendran uses, while trying to placate his fictive sister-in-law, Selvi, is *kula kauravam* or *kula uṇarvu*.]

Selvi: Why *pa*, now...

Rasendran: ...By now, others – they would have boiled over and gotten blisters by now.

Ammasi (apparently referring to a past act of vandalism): To have let them go, the day [it] was destroyed/vandalised, that was a mistake.

Selvi is trying her best to intervene, but her voice is drowned out by Ammasi.

Ammasi: ...Let them go scot-free...That is why [they] can do [something like this] today, so *easy*.

[This incessant focus on Chakkiliyar belies the interpretation that anger against Dalits is directly proportional to the headway made by them in the fields of education, professional employment, and access to other kinds of resources. Were this the case, Kallar anger would reveal a particular hatred for Pallar. In the surrounding villages, it is Pallar who are the better off among Dalit castes. In Malaiur, Pallar landholding is greater than Chakkiliyar landholding (which is insignificant). Some Pallar families include magistrates and lawyers. The first person from Malaiur pursuing an MBBS degree is a young Pallar woman. Most Pallar families in Malaiur live in better houses than Chakkiliyar. For all that, Kallar anger turns away from Pallar villagers. In fact, the general opinion (among many Kallar, a significant number of Pallar, and most Chakkiliyar) is that there is much '*orrumai*' or unity between Malaiur Kallar and Pallar. Much later, in 2014-15, at the heights of a Kallar–Chakkiliyar conflict in Malaiur, some Chakkiliyar men and women shall repeat that Pallar stay away, remain on the sidelines (*otuñki iruppārka!*), and do not stick their necks out into anything.

For all their lack of social mobility and insignificant political mobilisation, it is the Chakkiliyar who become the hated figure in Kallar speech today.]

[I begin anew. Another tactic. If all these people think DMK is inciting caste riots, would it not be better to keep it at that level, where these men's targets are the Chief Minister and his powerful son?]

Dhivya: Is all this Alagiri's doing? Acts of DMK people?

Kannan: Yes *ma*. Karunanidhi himself, that is who.

Rasendran: The man himself, a terro... [They] themselves trigger caste riots (*cāti kalavaram*), trigger everything. [They will] hack down someone or the other, and...

Kannan: That is... He does not like Mukkulathor, this Karunanidhi.

[Echoing Pichai, Rasendran speaks as though they are powerless in the face of external incitement – even if they turn into violent men, they will be puppets responding to emotions created for them elsewhere].

He did it once, earlier. He does it again now. As a lorry trudges down a mud track at some distance from the tea-stall, Kannan calls attention towards it. (This track is new, having emerged from the movement of private vehicles or lorries transporting construction material to the NH7 nearby).

Pointing in that direction, Kannan says, ‘Here, look, that lorry that is coming here...go, [tell them] if the vehicle comes here, it will burn. Go. Take a cycle and go.’

Someone suggests that they wait.

Kannan (livid): No, no...just do not allow them to run, [I] ask. Why, why, who is he [the vehicle owner/ contractor], that Mr. Big wheel? [The others laugh, because Kannan is back to swearing]. Or else, get the cycle, / will go.

Rasendran tries to reason out with him.

Rasendran: Why, [have anything to do] with some individual man? To halt the *government...* the bus...

Kannan: [I say that we] must halt everything.

Rasendran (continuing): ...only if you attack there will [the government] learn. What does [some lorry driver] know?

Kannan: No, no...Word has to spread, does it not – of why vehicles are not running here?

Malar gathers courage and voices her disagreement with Kannan’s scheme. (In fact, she is going to disagree with most of the retributive actions the others, inclusive of Rasendran, shall contemplate).

Kannan: No *ma*. *Aey*...

Rasendran: Oh, act [we] must, act [we] must. Something, a...

Kannan: *Every one*. Must not even allow the motorbike chaps here to go into the *ūr*.

[There is so much method to the manifestation of emotions. This potential mob – which is what it appears to be right now – is not amorphous, without agenda, or even without limits. The men regulate their anger. They govern the performance of that anger.

I can perceive their structure of feelings, the fault-lines along which they run revealed in every utterance. I can also see the men structuring their feelings. I sense an emotional core which is neither completely internal, nor completely external.

There is the outburst of anger. Then, the cultivation of it. Then, the streamlining of it. ‘This is an excellent *chance*,’ Kannan has said, an excellent opportunity to teach Chakkiliyar a lesson. And he has urged the others to hold on to this opportunity. This is a chance to *be angry* at Dalits, a chance to *nurture* that anger, to hold on to it, and then, to *direct* it.

Likewise, this anger is routing around for objects that can receive it. And, amidst the play of emotions, decisions are taken on which of the objects are most fit for attack – not the privately owned goods carrier, but the government run transport bus.]

[Another treacherous pause skids into place. It must be expelled with an utterance. Within seconds, Kannan interjects.]

Kannan: *Cai*. (Shit!)

[This spurs the others.]

Ammasi: Great obscenity [*aciṅkam*].

Rasendran: Just obscenity? This...if [we] do not do something...

Kannan: [What,] to do nothing?

Rasendran: ...[no one] will respect (*matippu*) [us].

Kannan: Innumerable...

Ammasi: In broad daylight!

Kannan: Yes!

Rasendran suddenly positions the day and the desecration within the ritual calendar.

Rasendran: Festival (*tiruvilā*)!

Pichai: Crowded...must have been so terribly crowded, right?

Rasendran: What audacity (*tunical*)!

Kannan: At prime time (*mukkiya nēram*).

Pichai: This Chakkiliyan, Pallan...

A: Had [they] at least done it on the sly...but in broad daylight, on a festival day!

[The men correlate the statue desecration with the sacred rituals during the Tamil calendrical month of *Cittirai* (mid-April to mid-May). Here in Madurai, *Cittirai* is perceived as a seamless combination of two temple festivals. One is the *Cittirai* festival of the main deities of the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple, the city's primary sacred centre. The other is the *Cittirai* festival of Alagar, a form of Vishnu and the main deity of the Alagar temple, located at about 21 kilometres from the city centre. This season of major temple festivals begins with the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple's twelve-day *Cittirai tiruvilā* (in a sense, the annual renovation or a re-orienting of the city towards its sacred centre) and ends with the nine-day Kallalagar festival – known so because the deity is dressed as a 'Kallar.'

This second festival has some overlap with the first. It commences at the Alagar temple, situated near 'Ambalakkarak territory' (Ambalakkarak is the honorific of eastern Madurai's Kallar subcaste). On the fourth day, the procession of Kallalagar to Madurai begins. On the sixth day, the processional idol reaches and enters the Vaigai river at a central location in Madurai, and is then taken to Vandiyur, where the idol and the procession halt overnight. On the seventh, the procession returns to the riverbank and the deity reveals himself through Vishnu's 'ten avatars.' During the festival's last two days, the procession returns to Alagar temple, with the idol travelling again in a '*poo pallaakku*,' a flower-decked palanquin. This is what the men

refer to – the festival, the thousands who participate in it, the extremely crowded space of Madurai, and the ‘centrality’ of this period within sacred time.

At first, the men only recall the day’s significance while second-guessing the desecrators’ tactics. They are astounded that this could occur during the festival, when crowds mill about the city. How could someone fling dung at the statue without being noticed when, even on normal days, at least five or six traffic policemen are stationed at the Goripalayam junction? The logic is then turned on its head – the desecrators probably gave this a lot of thought and chose their moment well. This *aciñkam*, this grotesque desecration during sacred time, angers the men all the more. The sacredness of time makes the desecration all the more meaningful.]

Meanwhile, Pichai makes a call and gets through to his son, currently in Madurai. He is still trying to find out what exactly has happened, even though no one else is bothered about what exactly the statue has been subjected to. Pichai finds out that the desecration has occurred at daytime (this generates greater anger) and that public transport buses are still plying in Madurai (this generates surprise).

Now addressing the others, Pichai repeats, ‘Yes. [They] have flung dung.

I have not stopped yearning for tactics.

Dhivya: Did [they] do this at night?

Pichai: Morning. At ten.

Dhivya: Which means, within everyone’s sight.

[This is the ‘tactic’ I come up with. I have been thinking that if the desecration has occurred in ‘broad daylight,’ identifying the desecrators will be easy. I have also recollected the backroom talk of some civil liberties activists and others. Of occasions when caste organisations (or political parties) desecrate the icons or statues of their own leaders (or leaders of constituencies they are wooing), so that the incident and its aftermath can be utilised as a rallying point. Incidentally, the cue for these recollections came from Rasendran, who obliquely referred to that possibility, if only in connection with DMK. I also think that to deface a statue in daytime, at a crowded venue, requires some assurance, a great deal of public support, and a confidence that

can only stem from dominance. It could also be an act of resistance, an act of desperation, or even the act of a ‘madman.’]

Pichai: Yes. And as to *how* [he] flung [it], and *who* flung it...

Someone finally gets through to the CPI(M) member; everyone is informed that the desecration occurred at around 9 am. Rasendran cannot stop repeating this.

Rasendran: At nine? At nine? Then, then, how are the buses plying?

Someone else – it is Mokkarasu – comes by and begins to bubble.

Mokkarasu: ‘Here, has everyone...Are the Kallar still in the *ūr*, or have they died, all?’

The rest explain. They only heard of the desecration a while ago, that in their *area*, very few know, and that since this occurred ‘within’ the festival, the details are still unknown. The mention of the festival brings the focus back to the ritual calendar. Chinna Kalai, who arrived late and has been mostly silent, now remarks.

Chinna Kalai: And tomorrow is the day of the flower palanquin.

Rasendran: Let it be. Let it be the day of the flower palanquin. Ignite. Completely. Throw a bomb.

Chinna Kalai laughs nervously. I have known this middle-aged Malaiur resident as a gentle and thoughtful man, one of the few villagers affiliated to CPI(M). I now think of his political leanings.

As for the rest, now is the time to get back to their own ritual, the reintroduction of specific villains.

Pichai: These Vitutalai Ciruttaikal – those fellows must have done this. Those guys...

Rasendran: Sure it is them.

Pichai: They must be the ones who did it.

[...]

Pichai: Between them and us...

[I have not given up. Would the quest for knowledge serve as a tactic? Could an 'innocent' query douse the fire?]

Dhivya: Vitutalai Ciruttaikal, [they] are...?

Rasendran: Thirumavalavan.

Chinna Kalai: Thirumavalavan.

Pichai: Yes. Thirumavalavan.

[These men equate the Dalit Panther Iyakkam or Vitutalai Ciruttaikal (Liberation Panthers), the movement and the subsequently formed electoral party with a (Dalit) Paraiyar mass base, with its leader, Thirumavalavan].

Dhivya: This...there is someone else, isn't there? That Puthiya Tamilakam? He...

Kannan: That chap...he has [gone] *off*.

Kannan is suggesting that Krishnaswamy, leader of Puthiya Tamilakam (a party with a Pallar base) has 'switched off.' He thinks Krishnaswamy has gone off the radar.

Rasendran: They all are...barely some fifteen people remain now.

Everyone laughs. I laugh. I find out that I have laughed loudest.

[If they perceive their rivals as weak, they may spare the execution of the violence].

Chinna Kalai: Yes, they must be the ones who have done it.

Mokkarasu recalls Muthusamy, another Dalit politician.

Rasendran: Muthusamy, Thirumavalavan...

Mokkarasu: Yes. These are probably the ones who did it.

Chinna Kalai: Devendra Kula Vellalar...all these...all these dogs, all.

[For a second, I think Chinna Kalai has his own tactics. Talk of violence makes him uncomfortable. He wants to play the part of a Kallar man, nonetheless. Or perhaps he wants to play this part only so that others will not dismiss him when he turns on his fire-fighter hose each time a specific act of violence is mentioned. I wonder if I am

being liberal towards Chinna because of his sympathies with CPI(M). I get this sense because I see him struggling to get the insult – ‘dogs’ – out of his mouth. The interpretive moment passes].

....

The men continue with their verbal assaults, with their mapping of vengeance, with their contemplation of action. Pichai is saying, ‘By nightfall, the turbulence [*kontalippu*] will become known;’ Pichai is saying, ‘Making trouble...there, those who live southwards, in Virudhunagar, and...;’ and Kannan is talking of ‘that Goripalayam *area* itself’ (which abuts Kallar-dominated localities); and Ammasi has come to know that some people are already, at this very moment, staging a road-block, right by the Thevar statue; and Rasendran is saying, ‘within Madurai...for some ten...ten days, it has to be on fire, which is when [they] will be scared. And [is it enough] to just talk? [We must] go there and...’

Then, Chinna Kalai points out, with some trepidation, that they have ‘only poured dung, right? Have not done anything else, [have they]?’

Ammasi: Now what...[can] surpass that!

Rasendran: What is there, that can top this?

Chinna Kalai’s disquiet turns into awkwardness at the retorts and he turns sheepish. ‘No, he had said, [they have] chopped it, stabbed it...that’s why.’

Pichai: Throwing dung, or destroying – aren’t they one and the same?

Chinna: Ah, so, that is the way [it is].

Pichai: Then, this Chakkiliyan...the extent to which...

Chinna: Then, who, who...who is the one who poured?

Subbu: Alagiri’s party men.

In the meantime, a father has called his son, who studies in a college in Madurai. In the conversation, the son is cautioned. The father tells him, ‘This is going to take a different *movement*. [So] you could even *cut* college and return.’ The conversation

generates more rumours. Those listening on are angered, when they hear that the desecrators had come in 'two groups.'

Rasendran: Just look at that, the way [they] are acting. [He continues, cutting across other men who begin to speak]. As a *group*! [If they are coming as a group] and tipping [dung], then, look at how [the situation] is!

The men remind one another that people are already picketing by the Thevar statue. The inevitability of an altercation is considered. Ammasi brings everyone back to their immediate surroundings. 'No, no, these folk...Today...the thrashings that these Chakkiliya lads.' [He doesn't quite mean young Chakkiliyar boys, nor is he simply infantilizing all Chakkiliyar. Like the singular 'Chakkiliyan' the men have been using, Ammasi's words are intended to be disrespectful].

And Rasendran returns to the public transport bus, which he had earlier identified as the proper target of anger.

Rasendran: ...No! I say, the bus, *our* bus – [let us] set fire to it.

But Chinna Kalai, having failed to dissipate anger by downplaying desecration, now chuckles nervously. The bus is not just a thing, he reminds others. 'No way! Must tell the driver and conductor "get down and go," and then...' Ok, Rasendran agrees. '[We will] tell each one of them, "Get down, get out," and...' That is not even necessary, says another. 'What do you think, they'd still be sitting in the bus?' This prompts someone else to suggest that they empty or finish off [*kāli*] some two or three buses. And Malar, with all this talk of retribution, begins to wonder what those Sellur chaps are doing. I try to deflect.

Dhivya: Those who live in Madurai? In Karimedu and...?

Rasendran: All...our people only, so many people live there.

Malar: Karimedu, Sellur...

Those who had contacted people in Madurai inform us of developments. Kallar groups have been reaching Goripalayam. When the father of that student says, 'These boys, they are going to Goripalayam in fours and fives,' Rasendran is quick to

retort, 'Why are they going to Goripalayam? Why not hold up a bus [wherever they are] and set it alight?' The father says, 'That is *my* son,' and laughing nervously, reminds others that there are consequences of such actions. 'If he *does*...'

Rasendran pipes down, 'No, [I'm] just talking.' The father says, however, that all those college students there, have already formed groups. Kannan responds, saying, 'Oh, mother! This sort of thing, this is what is *timepass* for college fellows.'

....

The men tick off whoever objects to the planned retaliation. They plan a roadblock at the state highway the next day. Ammasi comes up with a more detailed plan. By night, they are going to send a message to surrounding villages – nobody is to work the next day, but should instead proceed towards and block the state highway. Pichai says this is important, that things will be fine only if there is action here and there. Rasendran fondly recollects a young man from Malaiur. Appreciating his 'speed' [*vēkam*], Rasendran wonders what would have happened by now had *he* come to know. But the father's reminder of the consequences of violence seems to have left a mark on others. Now, Ammasi is saying, 'No, why *this* work for *him*? But at dawn, *we*...' Rasendran agrees. Ammasi wavers again.

Ammasi: Look here, folks. Only when something is done in the *night* will they fear.

Selvi protests again. But this time, she alludes to laws and prisons. Ammasi dismisses her protests.

Ammasi: What better work than that, for us? [We'll just] go and stay in the *jail* for some ten days. Hit the SCs, using this opportunity.'

The wavering continues. Some think they must do something in Malaiur, others prefer the roadblock. Then, I am ticked off – 'enough, your being here, head straight home, stay put, do not step out for two or three days.' The perils of the outside are not spelt out, but my fever and my fear staple me to the interiors of my rented abode.

Those who dished out the stay-safe-indoors advice to me were the ones who intended to make certain homes unsafe; some had mentioned vandalising and

destroying Chakkiliyar houses in the past, and some desired to repeat this violence. They also intended to make public spaces risky. I stayed at home.

Despite the moratorium against reporting exact details of incidents that are bound to cause disturbances, news of the Thevar statue desecration had spread. Censorship was no match to the mobile phone. (Prior to the advent of this technology, people informed their fellow caste members and organised themselves by other means, such as pasting posters on buses). There was a general sense of unrest in Madurai, especially in Usilampatti taluk, for some days. A number of buses were attacked and damaged through stone pelting. Shops remained shut. Some picketers were arrested for blocking roads.² The day after the desecration, Kallar men and women jammed the Wellington road–highway t-intersection. Luckily, reactions to the desecration did not reach the levels threatened; the roadblock was the high point. And yet, no ‘jail’ for the men and women who blocked the highway. This is part of what infuriates subordinate social groups protesting in a similar fashion.

Dalit activists note that when their organisations seek permission to organise processions, the authorities seldom grant it easily. In 2005, southern district administrations refused to grant Puthiya Tamilakam permission to hold pre-election public meetings or conduct processions in Virudhunagar (Rajapalayam), Tirunelveli (Sankarankoil), Ramanathapuram (Paramakudi) districts. Hearing writ petitions filed by party members challenging these refusals, the Madras High Court judge quoted from a number of colonial era judgments, which in turn referred to English law on public gatherings, that

Highways, indeed, are dedicated to the public use, but they must be used for passing and going along them, and the legal mode of use negatives the claim of politicians to use a highway as a forum, just as it excludes the claim of actors to turn it upto an open-air theatre. The crowd who collect, and the persons who cause a crowd, for whatever purpose, to collect in a street, create a nuisance.³

² ‘Thevar statue vandalised, tension in Madurai,’ *The Hindu* 22 April 2008, ‘Madurai tense after statue is vandalised,’ *Times of India*, 22 April 2008.

³ *Dr. K. Krishnasamy and Anr. vs The Superintendent of Police and Others* (Madras High Court). Available at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/545499>, accessed 19.12.2014.

This ruling illustrates the conceptions of space, particularly that of public space, that underwrites such legislations. Here we see that legislators, planners, bureaucrats, and police consider only particular users (and use) of space as legitimate.

On 21st April, once I reached home, I tried contacting someone I thought would be of help. He finally returned my call late evening, busy with meetings on the desecration. I conveyed what I had heard in Malaiur that afternoon. He said that a Kallar political outfit had likely desecrated the statue.

When I head out to Malaiur a couple of days later, I get Ammasi and this man to speak over the phone. (They know each other well). Ammasi is genuinely shocked when he hears what I had earlier heard. The Thevar statue is so overpoweringly sacred that he cannot believe that a Kallar, or another Mukkulathor person(s), might have desecrated it. Clearly, the sacred is no surplus here, it retains its grip over the surface of the political; this is not quite a disenchanting world where acts like defacement and desecration are required to out the public secret, the sacred roots of power (Taussig 1999).

Political organisations can desecrate statues of their own icons. The Goripalayam incident may well have been one such instance. But can such news be revealed? Hardly. A few days later, the district administration pins the blame onto a 'madman,' a homeless person with a mental illness. Ammasi and others refuse to accept this; they know the madman to be a scapegoat.

It does seem beyond belief that someone mentally disturbed could desecrate the statue with such great precision. Dung was splashed on at least two specific areas. One was the face. Whoever had defaced that statue had done so by climbing the iron stairwell used during commemorations – when leaders and individuals climb up these stairs and stand on the wide platform to garland the statue. The polluting substance had been lugged up the same staircase which was used regularly by a group of elderly Kallar women to transport pots of water with which they cleaned the Thevar statue. (It was one of these women who had noticed the desecration).

The other place where dung was smeared was the plaque naming the inaugurators of the statue. So, dung over the name of M. Karunanidhi, DMK Chief

Minister in 1974, at the time of the statue installation. And hung over the name of P.K. Mookiah Thevar, Pappapatti born Piramalai Kallar leader, All India Forward Bloc, and close disciple of Muthuramalinga Thevar.

Perhaps the point of a desecration is that the whodunit is relatively unimportant. Once enacted, it allows people to respond as they would like. Each act of desecration reveals relationships between social groups, between humans and objects, and between objects themselves. Michael Taussig is right in pointing out that defacement is an energy flowing from an active and activated object of critique (1999: 43). An inter-object constellation became evident in the weeks following the Goripalayam statue desecration. A few more Thevar statues were desecrated. But one Thevar statue saw a fresh start, a birth of sorts.

In Malaiur, the Goripalayam desecration provided an opportune moment for Kallar residents to install a Thevar statue. Since I was ill and had to leave for Bangalore, I returned after nearly two weeks had passed. When I returned, the statue was the first matter to come up in my interactions with Kallar villagers. A middle-aged woman from Sivanandi Thevar's family (one of Malaiur dominant families) said they had decided to utilise a *bandh* day to install the statue. This was long pending. Others said there had been many attempts to install a statue, but unsuccessfully, due either to conflicts within the caste, or to the government's new protocols on statue installation. The taut atmosphere following the Goripalayam desecration gave these Kallar villagers an opportunity they seized. The situation was so tense, they had calculated, that no one could dare stop them.

Once they unofficially unveiled the statue, the local police had received an anonymous phone call. Scores of police personnel had been sent to Malaiur but the Kallar villagers were prepared. Many of the conversations about the statue were marked by the pride with which women's participation in the skirmishes with the police were recollected. The police could do little. The statue had been installed without government approval. The only concession to bureaucratic procedures was the covering of the statue with gunny sacks. The sacks were to stay until government sanction for the statue was obtained.

Moreover, following official 'requests' for a bronze statue, Kallar villagers formed a Thevar Statue Forum (Thevar Cilai Peravai). It had fifteen members representing Malaiur's Five Thevar Lineages. The forum decided to replace the cement statue with a bronze one. For this, they collected *vari* (contribution) from all households of the five lineages. The representatives also began to search for the best bronze Thevar statue they could commission. Malaiur Kallar had agreed to enter this 'age of bronze.'⁴

The Age of Bronze

In many of southern Tamil Nadu's cities, towns, and villages, statue vandalism has served as a trigger of caste violence. Desecrated statues of Ambedkar and Muthuramalinga Thevar, in particular, have the ability to dramatize ever-present conflicts between caste groups. The state government's responses have varied, but initially, in the late-1990s, it devised a series of new rules regarding public statues and other memorials.

These procedural changes have had their own effects. These effects are legible in specific instances where local bureaucracies and social groups have confronted and negotiated each other, ostensibly on procedural grounds. Before examining the effects of new procedures, let me return to the 2008 negotiations between the district administration and Malaiur Kallar over the Thevar statue installed in the wake of the Goripalayam desecration.

After some days of high drama, Kallar villagers acquiesced to one of the government's injunctions. They agreed to the ban on cement and Plaster of Paris statues, and embraced the idea of bronze statuary. For the moment, the local bureaucracy could congratulate itself on its persuasiveness and success.

⁴ I intend for the term to suggest two references. The first is to Rodin's 'The Age of Bronze,' a bronze statue that looked so real that its viewers thought he had simply cast a living person. This reference opens up an idea of statues 'livingness.' The second alludes to an article on statue installation and politics in India, titled 'The Bronze Age' (Ahmad 2008). By turning the title on its head, I reverse the assumptions of this article (indeed, of the vast literature on statue wars) that spending public money on statues deflects attention from health, housing, education, and other pressing issues. This presages my review of dominant ideas on what a statue in space is or does.

What exactly did caste associations or groups and political parties agree to, when they concurred to rules regarding the material of statues? This pact had partly to do with the considerable value of bronze. A group or association that can afford to sponsor a metal statue proclaims its existing dominance or its social mobility. Already, in 1979, Tamil Nadu's Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department had stipulated that all costs involved in statue installation and maintenance had to be borne out by concerned individuals or organisations.⁵ This included the reimbursement of all expenses (e.g., to remove and reinstall water supply pipes or sanitation lines, and to repair footpaths or roads) incurred by local administration in urban areas. In 1995, a department letter clarified that existing statues, so long as they did not obstruct the flow of traffic and their installers had paid the full amount required for maintenance, could remain in their current locations; if the full amount was not paid, the government could remove the statues, without disturbing peace.⁶

Firstly, statue installers had to be able to afford maintenance costs. Secondly, statue installation, re-location, or removal often does 'disturb peace.' The government sought to mitigate such conflicts by specifying the material of the statue – as though the permissible bronze would work against the partible nature of 'society.' In turn, this specification escalated installation costs. While increasing commissioning, installation, and maintenance costs limit the kinds of organisations and individuals that can share in this practice, I am more interested in linking this stipulation with the bureaucratic faith in objects' ability to absorb social conflict.

In 1990, prior to the eruption of statue desecrations, the Municipal Administration and Water Supply Department emphasised the necessity of having statues made out of bronze.⁷ By the end of that decade, much appeared to have changed regarding statues and social space. The 'caste clashes' in Tamil Nadu's southern districts only revealed the workings of a social space in movement, of the utilisation of differential space by social groups, and of statues 'sparking' off

⁵ G.O. (Rt) No. 1711, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, 26.10.1979.

⁶ This correspondence (Letter No. 15661/ C3/ 94-96, Rural Development Department, 12.06.1995) took up suggestions of a Public Works Department report, referred to in G.O. No. 248, Rural Development Department.

⁷ G.O. (Rt) No.193, Municipal Administration and Water Supply Department, 23.08.1990.

underlying conflicts. In response to this explosion of contradictions in space, the state government appointed a high-level committee, headed by a retired Supreme Court judge, to examine reasons for repeated caste violence and to suggest preventive measures.

The committee made three main recommendations pertaining to statues – one, that neither the government nor any individual can install (new) statues of any leaders; two, that existing statues must be protected in suitable manner; and three, that when possible, existing statues be shifted to safe places.⁸ These recommendations stemmed out of the committee's opinion that the vandalism of unprotected statues was precipitating caste riots.⁹ In September 1998, the Municipal Administration and Water Supply Department passed an order accepting these recommendations, adding that the government's permission was required prior to shifting existing statues to a safer place (where vandalism could be avoided).

This initial bureaucratic response – to ban new statues – could not, however, be sustained.¹⁰ At an all-party meeting that met twice in October 1998 to discuss caste related violence in the state's southern districts (and prior to which the committee's report was circulated among all parties), the earlier decision to ban new

⁸ G.O. No. 186, Municipal Administration and Water Supply Department, 21.09.1998.

⁹ Ibid. I rely on secondary reports due to my inability to access the committee report, *Report of the High Level Committee for Prevention of Caste Clashes in the Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu, 1998*. The committee, headed by (Retd) Justice S. Mohan, also recommended that 'existing statues be bunched together,' 'a mass campaign, with prayer meetings and human chains, be launched against untouchability,' and 'an awareness campaign be launched among Dalits that people belonging to other castes are not their enemies.' The committee reasoned that 'casteist violence' is connected to the practice of untouchability, and to a Dalit misunderstanding of other castes as enemies although 'reservation benefits enjoyed by them had the unqualified support of leaders belonging to other castes' (UNI release, <http://www.rediff.com/news/1998/oct/22tn1.htm>, accessed 27.04.2015). By reducing caste to untouchability, and treating it as the outcome of a 'mind-set,' the committee misrepresented caste relations. These analytical moves rid the committee from turning its eye to conflicts over control of different resources (land, water, and transport infrastructure), places, and public space in general. Instead of redirecting the government's attention to long-pending demands over resource-access and control, the committee posited rather vacuous recommendations, such as organising human chains and prayer meetings, or ridiculous ones, such as the resolution of caste conflict by educating Dalits in the virtues of amicability and peace. Apart from recommending a total ban on installation of political leaders' statues, the committee also recommended that the practice of naming transport corporations or districts after leaders be discontinued. The government could not accede to the ban on new statues. It did, however, retract from naming a section of its transport corporation after Dalit icon Veeran Sundaralingam. (See also 'Shift statues of caste leaders,' *The Tribune*, 23.10.1998).

¹⁰ G.O. No. 186, Municipal Administration and Water Supply Department, 21.09.1998.

statues was dismissed.¹¹ The deliberations concluded with a decision to allow new statues to be installed contingent on prior government permission. A government order issued the following month included this rule, and others, for the installation and maintenance of statues, memorial archways, or memorial pillars.¹²

These rules did not stipulate the material of statues, but bureaucratic responses and later litigation on conflicts rendered the material used more important. At some point, the government's guidelines regarding statues' material became part of the wider set of procedures for memorial installation and maintenance. Conflicts and petitions regarding permissions for statue installation have led to more frequent citation of the guideline that statues be made of bronze.

I have already mentioned that the bronzing of statues leads to an escalation of costs. Recall that representatives of Malaiur's Five Thevar Lineages collected *vari* from all Kallar households of the five lineages. The statue tax placed additional strain yet very few complained about it. (Although I often heard individuals bemoan prestations at life-crisis rituals, I did not hear anyone complaining about temple-related *vari* or about this statue *vari*).

Although bronze statues cost much more than cement or Plaster of Paris ones, the material's value cannot be reduced to money terms. Through its gold-

¹¹ Recently, however, the Supreme Court of India ruled that 'henceforth, state government shall not grant any permission for installation of any statue or construction of any structure in public roads, pavements, sideways and other public utility places' (I.A. No. 10 of 2012 in S.L.P. (C) No. 8519 of 2006). Interestingly, the bench's impulse to treat religious and political structures (e.g. mosques, temples, churches or other places of worship, and statues) as though they were sheer excess (at best) or obstruction (at worst) in places of 'public utility' (e.g. roads and highways) must be compared with what the order does permit. The bench clarified that '*obviously*, this order shall not apply to installation of high mast lights, street lights or construction relating to electrification, traffic, *toll* or for *development and beautification of the streets*, highways, roads etc. and relating to public utility and facilities' (emphasis added). The representation of space forwarded by the Court takes roads and highways as neutral infrastructure, as though these sites are devoid of politics and religion. It also props up a fictive division between tollgates and temples, and between street-beautification and statue-installation. In contrast to tollgate constructions and beautification drives, which are represented as though bereft of beliefs and politics, temples and statues are represented as places saturated with beliefs and politics obstructing public utility. That individuals make strategic use of such a logic is best illustrated by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister's early-2015 directive that all 'illegal statues, cut-outs and flexis' be demolished, since they posed a major threat to commuters. Although CM Chandra Babu Naidu cited the Supreme Court order, he intended perhaps only to target the statues of his predecessor, the late YSR Reddy (from the Congress), and hoardings erected by YSR's son, now heading a rival party. 'Remove statues of leaders of all hues in 15 days: Naidu,' *The New Indian Express*, 07.02.2015.

¹² G.O. No. 248, Rural Development Department, 23.11.1998.

mimicking sheen and colour, the material of bronze transports the statues of 'caste icons' to a realm hitherto reserved for deities and for political figures privileged by nationalist historiography.

At first sight, this new emphasis on bronze seems like a measure to minimise accidental damage. Consider an Ambedkar statue in Cuddalore district's Palaya Pattinam village, which was slightly damaged by a pole accidentally falling on it. The Madras High Court judge who heard a petition regarding later developments and conflict over the statue's installation and re-location fleetingly refers to this accident. (I analyse this conflict later). Referring to the accidental damage caused to the Ambedkar statue, the judge reiterated the need for the government to permit only bronze statues, since 'a bronze statue will avoid any such development.'¹³ Bronze is also an insurance against 'nature.' It is more impervious to heat, dust, and moisture than clay, cement, and Plaster of Paris. Bronze's suitability derives from its lesser instability than that which inheres in other materials (cement, clay, Plaster of Paris, or even stone).

Yet the most important angle to the bureaucratic privileging of bronze lies in the alloy's capacity to offer better protection against vandalism and desecration. We have now moved from natural causes to human action. Whatever the cause of damage or desecration, the Tamil Nadu government sought to externalise politics onto *material*. The most common bureaucratic reasoning to convince statue installers to adopt bronze runs as follows. Bronze makes statues less susceptible to damage and vandalism; make it difficult for mischief-makers to break the face, arm, or torso, or remove the entire statue in stealth, and under cover of night; put statues behind bars, if need be, but ensure they do not look jailed.

It is unsurprising for a judge to hope that bronze would help avoid certain kinds of damage. The alloy does have the ability to insure against some kinds of damage. More striking is the belief that bronze would absorb social conflict. In August 2008, Rajesh, a Malaiur panchayat official, stated that replacing the cement statue with a bronze one boded better for the entire village (*motta ūr*). He said it would be

¹³ *T. Amirthalingam vs The State*, (Madras High Court 2010). Available at <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1531674> accessed on 19.12.2014.

good for 'these people and those.' As Rajesh spoke, his hand movements articulated more precisely what he meant by 'these people,' *ivarkal*, and 'those people,' *avarkal*.

As Rajesh said *ivarkal*, his right hand went up and out towards the direction of the tank bed where the Thevar statue had been recently installed, thereby denoting a social group (Kallar) through its icon (Muthuramalinga Thevar's statue). When he said *avarkal*, Rajesh pointed in the direction of the Chakkiliyar settlement, thereby exactly signifying the non-Kallar residents who had most cause to worry. Rajesh's gestures also communicated an inherent shift in socio-spatial terms. He had, within seconds, passed from denoting a symbol or a memorial in village space, in case of Kallar, to denoting mere location in that space, in case of Chakkiliyar. And Rajesh also embodied the bureaucratic faith in bronze statues to reduce trouble for all concerned.

Kallar villagers explained their decision to replace the cement statue with a bronze one differently. Weeks before my conversation with Rajesh, the Thevar Statue Forum's members had provided some explanations for the replacement. The reasons they cited had little to do with permission or government procedures or bronze's avowed ability to stave off social conflict. In fact, I do not recall anyone using the term 'permission' during that period. Somehow, the forum members (and other Malaiur Kallar) conveyed the impression that officials had *suggested*, not ordered, a bronze replacement.

At the time, I knew little about the rules related to statues. When I returned to Malaiur after a short trip in May and heard about the cement statue installation and police presence, the preferred terms of reference in our conversations were words like 'trouble' or 'problems' (*piraccanai*). When forum members mentioned the skirmishes between police and *ūr* Thevar, they only used 'trouble' while proclaiming that the trouble with officials would end slowly. Bronze or not, once a statue was installed, it would become fixed.

The trouble with officials did disappear. I no longer took conscious notice of the statue. I failed to note when exactly the gunnysack covers came off the statue, or whether at all they came off during my first stay. When I returned in 2010, I saw that this veil of ignorance, the bureaucratic pretence of the statue's non-existence,

was no longer necessary. None of the residents could precisely date the unloading of the gunnysack covers from the statue. Their responses were vague – ‘right away,’ ‘days ago,’ and even ‘then and there.’ The village and the bureaucracy wilfully forgot that the statue was not supposed to be there. The cement statue’s existence in space went unquestioned even as the village awaited the commissioned bronze statue.

‘A statue necessarily means headache’ [*cilai enṛālē talaivali*] said one revenue official in Madurai. Clearance for a statue was no small matter. It cut across administrative fields. No objection certificates had to be gathered from revenue officials, who would have to check details of the land in which the statue had to be installed; from the Public Works Department, which would have to assess possible effects on sanitation and water supplies; from the Highways Department, in case the statue was to be installed alongside or on a highway; and from the Police Department, whose records on caste or communal riots generated knowledge of the topophilic and topophobic characteristics of that place.

The Madurai revenue official spoke of the difficulties tahsildars and other revenue administrators met with whenever statue installation led to the eruption of earlier land disputes. He also sympathised with police personnel, who, poor things (*pāvam*), had to man these sensitive spots, while their hands were tied by what he thought were the knotty politics of caste. It would be better for each community to be responsible for its own statues, he said. Precisely such a move – the privatisation of protection – has been one of the administrative responses to southern Tamil Nadu’s statue wars (which I elaborate later).

Yet the reordering of protection to statues, by making them with sturdier material, has hardly made them more thing-like. Instead, the *material* move has led to a greater *humanisation* of the thing. The bronze statue is even more life-like. Since bronze provisions greater insurance against nature, changes to such statues are traced more urgently and immediately back to the world of humans. Since natural damages are technically reduced, bronze statues have become more susceptible to acts of desecration. It is more difficult to saw off the neck of a bronze statue, but the neck can carry a ‘garland’ of footwear. It is not so easy to stick a rod into a bronze statue, but bronze makes for a great showcase of smears and swabs. It is not so easy

to take the face off a bronze statue, but eyes and lips of bronze are surfaces that attract and hold, and exhibit and reveal, substances such as human and animal excreta.

If the bureaucratic move was to externalise conflicts over statues onto the world of objects, it has failed. The object of the statue is now all the more subjectified. Acts of desecration – readily available means to symbolise, extend, or conclude conflicts via statuary – have granted not only more sacred but more human qualities to statues. What it means to be human in South Asia is tied to caste relations. Caste attends to identities and personhood. How human one is and what kind of human being one is – these are subject to (contested) gradations, and are inherently relational.

If we bring to any analysis of caste, Marx's observation that what is thought of as inhuman is dependent on how the human is defined at that moment, we expand our analytical horizons to include many competing frameworks. We begin to see that pure and impure, sacred and secular, citizenship and human rights, dignity and honour, and inhuman conditions of labour and subhuman 'traditional' caste occupations generate caste relations and subjectivities. Some of these are much older regional frameworks that permeate the world of objects – rather, the entire world. But it is due to the amalgamation of these frameworks that a statue desecration can pull up to the surface of social life not only the characteristics of sacred space and qualities attributed to idols and deities but also qualities attributed to human subjects and citizens. A statue's desecration is not just met with rituals (e.g. bathing and anointments with special substances) to re-inscribe its sacredness, but also with talk of dignity, honour, citizenship, and rights.

Exactly which of these two trends – the sacralisation and the humanisation of the statue – takes the upper hand is a thoroughly contingent affair. For one, this depends on the groups taking the initiatives. The 2008 Goripalayam Thevar statue desecration was met with grand gestures on behalf of political formations and bureaucracy. Through his mobile phone conversations on the day of the desecration, Ammasi relayed that there was already a successful roadblock at the Goripalayam junction. The next day, newspapers carried reports of what else transpired in

Goripalayam. The district administration was quick to mobilise the equipment and personnel of the nearest fire station.¹⁴ Powerful jets of water were utilised to wash away all traces of dung. Political organisations mobilised their own resources, bringing in huge vats of milk and rose water to anoint the statue with, in ways similar to idol *apicēkam*. N. Sethuraman of the All India Muventra Munnani Kalagam declared his intention of sitting on a hunger strike until the administration caught the desecrators. The administration took him in and released him later that evening, while negotiating with other ‘representatives’ such as an AIFB state committee member. Effervescent groups (the ‘mob’ or the ‘crowd’ proper, in legalistic parlance), such as the students and young men who reached the venue, responded to the desecration in ‘autonomous’ ways.

Many smaller incidents contributed to the agoraphobic mood. As bureaucracy and political formations negotiated, the political was simultaneously being fashioned and stretched through seemingly minor events such as stone-pelting and aggressive vehicular movements (jeeps, motorbikes, and other vehicles used by Kallar men). Roadblocks and *bandhs* generated silence and stillness. All this produced immense fear.

Following the desecration, at Goripalayam, political formations appear to have emphasised sacralisation; at Malaiur, Kallar responses contained both sacralisation and humanisation. Both sacralisation and humanisation worked in tandem to produce affect. Since personhood and divinity intermingle by practice and as concepts across South Asia, I must clarify what exactly I mean. We could simply comprehend these processes as illustrating the co-constitution of the sacred and the human. Seen this way, the statue’s humanisation is unsurprising; it would only index regional contiguities of deities, persons, and objects.

Yet, statue desecrations do not so much reveal a hidden transcript of sacredness (cf. Taussig 1999) as the hidden humanness of the object. The emphasis on dignity and honour in Malaiur was no simple refraction of sacredness and distinction. In revealing its own humanness, the desecrated statue revealed new

¹⁴ ‘Thevar statue vandalised, tension in Madurai,’ *The Hindu*, 22.04.2008.

notions of human beings. Through a remarkable simulation of certain Dalit political conceptualisations of dignity and honour, the humanisation of the statue by Malaiur Kallar revealed the humanisation of honour. That is to say, they appear to have inadvertently adopted the idea of rights-bearing individuals. This signals the intrusion of 'rights-talk' in older styles of making distinction.

Malaiur Kallar may have unwittingly borrowed from this socio-political field, when they spoke of the desecration as though it was not just an affront to the sacredness of the statue but also an affront to their own subjectivities, their own human qualities. Of course, base and polluting substances, such as dung, are an affront to the statue's subjecthood. When Pichai translated the desecration – to pour dung over a statue is like pouring human excreta over a human being, and that this is more hurtful than destroying the statue – he humanised the object much more sacralised it. Of course, Pichai's act of transduction highlights the contiguity of deities, people, and objects. But it does so through an illustration of caste atrocities, where often, reports of violence against Dalits foreground humiliating and dehumanising actions such as having human excreta poured down a Dalit person's throat.

Ambedkar statues highlight other, interrelated, aspects of these processes. Groups opposing Ambedkar statues confront not only Dalits' rights to public space, but also the statues' right to be in space. The Ambedkar statue's right to be in space can now be framed independent of the rights of groups seeking its installation. National or state-space must, after all, make way for the statue of the man considered to be the 'Father of the Indian Constitution.' What is important is that it is state-space that Dalits take recourse to when installing (and protecting) Ambedkar statues, thereby rescaling their demands and interests.

Statues as Portals to Scale-Jumping

Multiple scales co-exist in, and contribute to the making, of every place (Agnew 1987). Late capitalist place-making occurs in a social space produced through multi-scalar actions of social groups, things, and abstract entities. As crises of accumulation become more pronounced and spatial fixes to the 'limits to capital' became more

widespread (Harvey 2006), social classes and groups also rescaled their actions. This reality led to a resurgence of academic interest in the scale question – in geographer Neil Brenner’s words, the ‘post-1970s shaking-up of the scalar hierarchies and interdependencies associated with organized capitalism in a new round of crisis-induced sociospatial restructuring,’ made academics more aware of how social groups utilise scalar restructurings to heighten or resolve contradictions (2001: 603). But how do scalar restructurings link with ‘other forms of sociospatial structuration’ (ibid)?

In itself, rescaling is not unique to capitalism. Networks of *nāṭu* and *ūr* temples, and of temples, irrigational infrastructures, human settlements, and trade routes emerged in a space that was characterised by *periyānāṭu*, *nāṭu*, and *ūr* spatial scales (Stein 1977) and was produced by warrior, mercantile, peasant, artisanal, and labouring groups that constantly rescaled their practices (chapter 1).

In April 2008, when Rasendran, Kannan, and Ammasi evoked the geographies of terror, they were bearing witness to older territorialities. Their responses also evoked recent territorialities and rescaling of caste relations – a Mukkulathor identity, which had, like other supracastes, emerged out of the deterritorialization and reterritorialization impulses of a colonial state-space and the subsequent national state-space (Goswami 2004). In May 2014, some Malaiur Kallar installed a memorial in their village and utilised a commemorative moment to organise a Piramalai Kallar Conference. Here, too, they were seeking to jump scales.

Let me return to the Ambedkar statue in Cuddalore.¹⁵ This statue was installed in front of the Palaya Pattinam village library after an August 2008 *grama sabha* or village council meeting endorsed this. Nearly half of the village’s 700 families were Dalit. Soon, however, a section of the village (including some of its Muslim residents) rallied to shift the statue to the banks of a pond near the Dalit settlement. This section had the support of local officials – e.g. the tahsildar and the revenue divisional officer of the block in which the village was located.

¹⁵ Details and citations are from *T. Amirthalingam vs The State* (Madras High Court 2010).

One village resident approached the court to prevent the statue re-location. In January 2010, as soon as the High Court passed an interim stay order, the petitioner conveyed the same to the tahsildar and the revenue divisional officer. That very night, however, a large police contingent descended on Palaya Pattinam – not to ‘protect’ the statue, but to aid local officials who had hired an earthmover to forcibly remove and relocate it. A large number of villagers had gathered near the library in order to protest against the relocation. The massive deployment of forces – about 200 policemen – around the Dalit settlement readily conveys that the police were primarily hedging in Dalit protestors. Meanwhile, the seven-foot statue was extricated from its five-foot pedestal and shifted to the pond near the Dalit settlement.

It is as though a most reductive metonymy is at work here. The drive (overseen by police menace) to shift Dalit protestors from the *ūr* to their settlement parallels the forcible shift of the Ambedkar statue from the *kirāmam* centre (between the panchayat-administered village library and the office of the Village Administrative Officer) to its periphery. The struggle over statue location switched between turning Ambedkar into an exclusively Dalit icon and Dalit assertions of Ambedkar’s universality. In fact, the judge who ordered that the statue be restored in its original location deplored ‘that a National Leader is sought to be considered as a leader of a community disregarding his contribution to citizens of India irrespective of their caste, religion, and community.’ He also added that the petition challenging the statue relocation ‘unceremoniously to a [D]alit settlement’ helped ward off the ‘dis-honouring’ of Ambedkar.

The language of honour and dishonour resonates with what became evident in Malaiur following the Goripalayam Thevar statue desecration. In both cases, individuals and associations, and petitioners and institutions, pitched dishonour as the ultimate insult to a great leader. It is true that Thevar and Ambedkar serve as icons of particular claims and as figureheads of certain social processes – for Mukkulathor mobility, dominance, and claims to subalternity, and for Dalit mobility and assertion. Yet caste groups seldom find it sufficient to box their icons within particular histories and politics.

Particularity is forever being mitigated by public claims to the universal relevance of their icons and leaders. This has been easier with Ambedkar than with Thevar, for reasons linked to the two leaders' political actions and projects. One way to claim universal relevance is to hitch the icon onto the national canvas. This transposal often (e.g., Puli Thevar and the Marutu brothers; chapter 5) evokes the category of the 'freedom fighter.' The appeal to the national scale, and the naturalised nation-state, is a means to naturalise dominance. Such appeals also heft struggles against domination.

A number of spatial categories, dimensions, and scales were at work in Palaya Pattinam. During the conflict, whenever – e.g., Ambedkar's birth and death anniversary, the anniversaries of the Mahad *satyagraha* and the Manjolai tea plantation workers' massacre – a group (whether Dalit villagers, or political organisations) sought to garland the statue, other village groups and the local bureaucracy opposed them. Statue vandalism (which here took place under official patronage) and the repeated opposition to garlands and other means to commemorate Ambedkar is significant to our examination of the conflict. But styles of commemoration, such as garlanding, is of no less significance.

The commemoration of Ambedkar in this village seems formally similar to the Perungamanallur martyrs' commemoration (chapter 5). Indeed both Kallar and Dalit commemoration and desecration tactics borrow from a wider network of symbols and interpretative universes. And within this universe, commemorations of Ambedkar often include the garlanding of his statues. This symbolic act of placing garlands over Ambedkar statues make sense when it is placed within the larger political and cultural field.

The garland exists as a symbol of honour, respect, *mariyātai* and divinity or a high social standing. But the garland, just as much as the dung thrown on the Goripalayam Thevar statue, is a symbol that exists within wider political and social fields. This is why even subordinate groups, whose own positions in society are partially caged through ideas of purity and pollution, or of sacred and polluting substances, are game to utilise the same symbols. There is, after all, a path dependency to 'symbolic' resources, just as there is to capital and labour flows. And

it to this galaxy of signs that Dalit mimetic actions (such as placing garlands, lighting lamps, making speeches that bind hyper-masculinity to political assertion, or even acts of desecration) ought to be traced back.

But there are other political strategies and tactics. In Palaya Pattinam, as soon as the strategic move to relocate the statue from village centre to caste settlement and the local bureaucracy's participation in it became evident, Amirthalingam, a village resident, made a representation to Cuddalore's District Collector. He then filed the petition that initially resulted in the statue's hasty relocation (before the High Court's stay order was officially conveyed) and finally led to the ruling that the statue be shifted to its original location.

This incident illuminates a significant aspect of spatial scales. When the petitioner reached out beyond the village, he was not simply borrowing frameworks (for example, of rights, which does not even appear once in the court order) at higher spatial scales to resolve a local conflict. Already, to install an Ambedkar statue in a village, is for Dalits to utilise a multiscale strategy. This is one of the means by which Dalits overcome Ambedkar's fear of the Indian village, which he rejected as 'a negation of the republic.'

An Ambedkar statue has the potential to turn local conflicts into regional, national, or international issues. Ambedkar statue installers in Palaya Pattinam and Karanai villages (see below), like Malaiur's Thevar statue installers, are actors in a relational space. They are residents of villages that already contain the global, the national, the regional, and the sub-regional (cf Mines 2005: 217). A statue works as a portal to different scales simply because it contains within itself all these scales. To understand this is to simultaneously work through the conceptual troubles regarding spatial scales (Brenner 2001), such that the heuristic nature of the scale concept is not forgotten, and nor do we forget that spatial scales are not separate hierarchical levels but are more nested and intercalated with each other than the concept seems to suggest (Lefebvre 1991).

Objecthood, like subjecthood, involves an intermeshing of spatial scales – in the creation of objects, in commodity production, and in the uses and concrete

meanings of commodities and objects. And nothing captures this better than the utilisation of Ambedkar statues in land-related conflicts.

The most dramatic instances of scale-jumping via statues have occurred during recent struggles, such as in Chengalpattu district, to reclaim Depressed Classes land or *Panchami* land. Caste relations in this northern Tamil region are partly a product of decades-old conflicts between landed groups and agricultural labourers. Here, a repressive *mirasi* tenure, existing well into the late colonial period, provided *mirasidar* proprietors with complete control over land, including those classified as *purambokku*, wasteland or government lands. Here, ecological uncertainties, together with the socio-political relations that determine tank irrigation and resource-access, rendered cultivation a tricky business. Large tracts were left uncultivated and classified as wasteland, and land-related conflicts escalated from the mid-nineteenth century (Basu 2008: 270).

Social space in this region, then, emerged out of conflicts between dominant classes and subordinate groups whose numbers swelled with Dalit, predominantly Paraiyar, agricultural labourers. *Mirasidars* strategically included wasteland while declaring their total landholding, and preferred 'ulkudi' labourers who could be more easily dominated (Basu 2008). If these strategies culminated in greater *mirasidar* usurpation of wasteland, it also intensified Dalit demand for land.

By 1891, a famine year, conflicts had escalated to such an extent that Chengalpattu's District Collector submitted a report on the conditions of depressed classes, particularly of agrarian bonded labourers. The question of land resurfaced when the collector – J.H.A. Tremenheere, the first to recognise the 'Pariah Problem' as a state problem (Viswanath 2014: 96) – highlighted the importance of provisioning land and turning Depressed Classes into landholders. In 1892, the government passed the Depressed Class Land Act, and distributed twelve lakh acres of land to Depressed Classes. These Panchami lands were, by law, not transferrable to non-Dalits.

At the start of the twenty-first century, little of this land remained in the possession and control of Dalits. For instance, by 1992, locally dominant sections, aided by revenue officials and other administrators, had usurped most of the 650

acres granted in 1933 to Dalits of Chengalpattu's Karanai and surrounding villages (Devakumar 2007: 42). Karanai only illustrates state-level statistics on the extent of such appropriation – estimated to be two and a half lakh acres (Thangaraj 2003: 148). It is into this social world that the Ambedkar statue entered, effecting not only symbolic changes but also material ones. Ambedkar statues allowed Dalit social groups and movements to synchronise conflicts over objects *in* space and conflicts over land, over space itself.

In 1991, Chengalpattu's Dr. Ambedkar Centenary Movement sought to reclaim *Panchami* land by installing Ambedkar statues (Mosse 2012: 223). In October 1992, activists installed an Ambedkar statue in land owned by a Karanai Dalit resident. The same evening, a prompt counterattack began with locally dominant groups and officials trying to bring down the statue. This initiated a series of rapidly unfolding events, and resulted in the death of two Dalits and gunshot injuries for 14 Dalits at the hands of the police (Devakumar *ibid*: 42-4).

Yet such retaliations cannot fend off the effects of yoking statues to land. Being 'a potential source of caste clashes if damaged or desecrated by non-Dalits, [Ambedkar statues] acquired state protection' (Mosse *ibid*), thus indirectly enabling Dalits to consolidate their claims over land. In many villages, Dalits have adopted the same tactic to reclaim land, utilising the concrete power of the thing (of the statue) to contend over the abstract power of the thing *qua* commodity (of land). Dalits here have thus played these two kinds of power against each other.

Thus, contending claims to land could find expression in statues. Statues, alternately, could result in or consolidate new claims on land. This is perhaps why state authorities regularly retrace statue desecrations and their reinforcement of space's sacralisation and humanisation back to the stark worlds of abstract space. For example, the local police briefed the media that the desecration of an Ambedkar statue in a village in Mau district in December 2008 and subsequent protests by Buddhist-Dalits was actually 'the fallout of a land dispute between a section of Buddhist followers and locals.'¹⁶

¹⁶ 'Ambedkar statue desecrated in UP village,' *The New Indian Express*, 12.12.2008.

Bureaucrats and locally dominant castes repeatedly make such statements, representing caste atrocities and caste relations as though these were not about land or access to other resources. The idea is that conflicts over material resources do not count as caste atrocities. When the well-known 2006 Khairlanji massacre in Maharashtra came up for hearing, the judge considered it to be outside of the purview of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, precisely because a land dispute had triggered the event.

Clearly, the labour of the statue in Indian politics is a strained one. No statue can completely protect, translate, or further social groups' interests. For all that, though, the Tamil Nadu government sought to provide protection to statues. Since the late-1990s, moreover, it has returned this work of protection to the social groups themselves.

Protecting the Statue: New Developments in Malaiur

The Goripalayam statue desecration incited some Malaiur's Kallar in mid-2008 to agitate around their own installation, a cement statue of Muthuramalinga Thevar. Desecrations open up the field for other desecrations, for re-sacralisations, and provide moments of easy victory in a social group's negotiations with the district administration. Tamil Nadu's statue wars birth additional statues. An event relating to one statue affects an entire network of statues.

When the Thevar Statue Forum was set up in Malaiur in 2008, its immediate agenda was to commission a bronze Thevar statue. Some members travelled to Chennai, and finally settled for a *shilpi*, a sculptor, or a workshop near Mahabalipuram, site of the renowned Pallava period sculptures. Forum members mischievously admitted to have chosen that workshop simply to travel afar.

The bronze statue was to replace the cement statue that had an equally interesting story. A group of young Kallar men were reputed to have lifted the cement statue from Tirupparankunram, where it had languished in a kinsman's home, unrecognised and lifeless. One amongst this group was Karnan, an unmarried construction worker who shared a small house with his mother. It was from his mother that I first heard of the story behind the cement Thevar statue. In 2015, I

heard his mother refer to that incident again. Gathering pride as she went on, she spoke of her son's enthusiastic involvement in the transportation of this statue to Malaiur, concluding with the words, '*Thevar na uyiru.*' It was the sort of utterance bound to addle a translator's head. She had simply strung together the words 'Thevar,' 'means' [*eṇṛā*]; colloq, *ṇā*) and 'life' [*uyir*]. Which could mean any or all of these things – that Karnan held Muthuramalinga Thevar – or his statue, or others representation – to be close to his own life; that Karnan holds Thevar to be dearer than his own life; or else, that for Karnan, a Thevar statue *is* life. It is this collapse between symbols and people, and between objects and subjects, that this chapter aimed to understand.

By my January 2015 visit, the new bronze statue had replaced this cement statue. The new statue was roughly eight feet, nearly half the size of the Goripalayam statue. Like the Goripalayam structure, the Malaiur one had Thevar holding a rolled-up petition, and symbolised him as leader of anti-CTA agitations. This was a statue meant to dazzle, through its material, if not size. It seemed as monumental as the more famous one in Goripalayam.

It called attention to itself, exhibiting its newness. I nearly missed registering the few constables who were mulling about near it – the statue had such an even lustre, shining like a huge sunlight collector. Whoever said that the monument is the most invisible thing in the world? It was the police I was (almost) blind to.

Within a minute, I reached the houses near the bus stand. Those I ran into gathered as much news of the ethnographer as they could in minutes. (Headline style). I was repeatedly asked, 'Have you finished writing?' My answer was no. 'Have you found work?' No, I had not. '*Pāvam.*' And the women asked, 'Children?' No, I had none. '*Pāāāāāvam.*' Having my failure established on all these counts, having turned into the object of universal pity, I plotted my escape by running into the nearest house where (I thought) I could ease my way out of the interactive nature of ethnographic knowledge.

Question hour in Arumugam and Jyothi's house was gentler. I tried gradually to reassert myself as an anthropologist. Soon, their neighbours and relatives, and some of the women I had already met on my way, came over. They asked me about

my life. I asked them about theirs. Some of the young adults I had known had exchanged the child's curiosity for the teenager's semi-diseased state of shyness. Some of the boys had taken a nutcracker to their voice. Some of the men and women I had known had died. Some of the young women I knew had married and moved to their new homes in other villages, cities, or even a couple of streets from their parents'. All this while, I had not finished writing, I was yet to start working, and I had not produced children. *Pāvam, pāvam, pāvam*. I just about wedged in a question about the new statue.

Actually, I was not even sure if it was officially installed. There were reasons for my doubt. The statue had looked garden-fresh. Plus, its face was covered by a piece of cloth that flapped cheerfully in the breeze when I caught sight of it. To put a lid on a face, I thought, could only mean that life had not yet been breathed into the statue by the state or the public. Assuming the statue was to be unveiled soon, and thinking the police presence in Malaiur was related to this, I asked when the unveiling was to take place. There was some prevarication.

'Oh, that...'

'Hmmm...'

'Nothing of that sort...'

Finally, one woman (it was an all-Kallar gathering) grinned and said, '[we] kept it [there] way back.'

Once I got past that public secret, I did not have to press much for details. The only confusion was over the exact date of the installation. When I pursued my query on when that had taken place, it once again became clear that we all have different conceptions of time, and different notions of what counts as important and what does not.

With my fact finder's interest in exact dates, I asked, 'When?' Year? Month? What date, even? (Why not?)

'Way back. How long has it been since you came here, Dhivya?'

I had last been in Malaiur in May 2010. Yes, it has been that long. And there was no bronze statue then. So, when?

‘Much later.’

And when was that? I do not know why, but I feel like this is the one vital thing to establish, right away. Not the effects of the statue’s presence per se, but how long it has been there for. For the people I was conversing with, the statue itself, its being there, is what matters.

Jyothi indulged me. ‘Deepavali *time*.’

‘Last Deepavali? Two months ago?’

No, the one before that.

So, the statue had been installed two Deepavalis ago. Everyone seems bored with my quest for dates. I had to let it rest – it was probably installed in the last quarter of 2013 – and move on.

I exclaimed – but the face is covered!

Why is the face covered still, after all these months? As per government rules, no one could install a statue without obtaining prior sanction from the district administration. Had my informants installed it first and only then bothered to seek permission? Such things are known to happen. This had happened once before in Malaiur. In 2008, during my first round of fieldwork.

Nonchalantly, I asked if they are awaiting permission before unveiling the statue. Arumugam responds, ‘*Permission?* Is that even a problem for us?’

A cluster of voices. Each marking pride in its own way. Each partaking of a collective pride. A room full of animated faces. Each with an expression somewhat singular. Each showcasing a collective recollection of some pleasant memory. I get to hear of the time of that Deepavali, when a great number of police descended on the village in order to prevent the statue from being installed. Pechi speaks (and others repeat these words, over and over) of the men and the women, the elderly and the young, and the young and the younger still, who, together, had fought with the police. Another woman recollects the *entire ūr* to have participated in that show of

strength. Hundreds of – no, no, at least a thousand – police were deployed. And yet, they couldn't halt the installation.

After 2008, I ought to have known that the covering of the statue does not necessarily mean sponsors awaiting permission to unveil it. I did not recollect this immediately, though. And there was no way I could have guessed that the 'un-facing' or covering up of the statue, was actually a new development, an outcome of an ongoing caste conflict.

It so transpires that they covered the statue's face only recently. Moreover, this is the result of a tacit agreement between *ūr* Kallar and district administration. Nearly everyone said it was the police that had suggested this. Once again, the dominant section of the *ūr* had collaborated with the local bureaucracy to create the temporary fiction of the statue not actually being where it was.

The statue may not yet have had its official birth, but local residents were more than aware of the life-like qualities it possessed. These attributes were also signalled in another way. In December 2014, or the Tamil Margali month, as villagers prepared for their annual pilgrimage to the Murugan temple in Palani, Malaiur had served as an arena of caste conflicts. This dispute between Kallar and Arundhatiyar (or Chakkiliyar) had turned Malaiur into a visibly conflictual space. But one Arundhatiyar man linked the new restrictions imposed on his caste-members to the new statue.

Pandi, one of the few Malaiur Arundhatiyar who participated in organised Dalit politics, traced the latest expression of village-level conflicts in the realm of temple festivals back to the Thevar statue. Referring to a recent diktat that prevented Arundhatiyar from accessing public space near the tank bed during one of their caste-specific festivals, he stated that this Kallar-imposed restriction was connected to the Thevar statue. Pandi said that *ūr* Kallar had argued that Chakkiliyar access to public space during their temple festivals put the newly installed Thevar statue at risk.

The December 2014 conflict blazed through January 2015. Pandi asked me, rhetorically, why he or any other Arundhatiyar would harm Muthuramalinga Thevar's statue. Thevar had fought for our entry into the Meenakshi Amman temple, Pandi

said. Why would we want to dishonour *his* statue? But Kallar folk did not even follow the actions of their own leader, even though they were so quick to put up his statues all over. Pandi reiterated that Kallar justification for denying Arundhatiyar access to public space was completely unfounded. ‘They have nothing to fear from us; we are not going to do anything to the statue.’

Then, Pandi went on to add another level to his argument, which was that the statue was being used by the Thevamar to control Chakkiliyar. (These are Piramalai Kallar, he stated, at one point, as though it was important to identify the subcaste, a distinction most non- Kallar do not bother about). From temple to statue to a generalised sociology of Dalit life in Malaiur, Pandi’s analysis of the events pressing down upon him and his fellow caste members was simultaneously an analysis of Dalit contributions to the making and remaking of the village.¹⁷ And they were remaking the village – the policemen and policewomen I saw each day I visited Malaiur in January 2015 had been stationed there only because Dalits participate in the production of space.

This is the counterpoint to the rhetorical question posed by Kallar villagers, who had asked why the administration needed to provide protection to the statue, at all. ‘We are there for protection, are we not,’ (*nāṅkaḷ irukkōm illaiyā, pātukāppukku*) was a common refrain I heard. Indeed, this is what the Tamil Nadu government had unleashed, when it shifted protection or *pātukāppu* of statues to the ‘community.’

Government rules and subsequent juridical clarifications suggest that the District Collector only permit those statues for which ‘reliable’ persons produce an affidavit taking full responsibility for statue protection. There are at least two ways of judging the reliability of concerned persons. One simply tests their capacities to

¹⁷ This crisscrossing between sites and events is dramatically captured in the murder of Sawane, a police constable in a Maharashtra village in 1992 (Rao 2010). Sawane’s murder had taken place outside a Hanuman temple. It was the first case to be framed as a caste atrocity and heard under the Prevention of Atrocity Act. While dominant caste groups suggested that Sawane’s presence had desecrated the temple, the judge retraced the murder back to Sawane’s repeated attempts to install an Ambedkar statue in the village.

provide security and protection. The other seeks provisional judgment on the troubles that the proposed statue could cause. This consideration would open discussion on social space and the 'users' of space, on the history of riots and conflicts of the site, and on the general trends in the communities' past utilisation of statues in such conflicts.

Of these two notions – the community's reliability in providing security to the statue versus the community's reliability in not evoking caste 'sentiments' via the statue, that is, its respect for the lives of others – Malaiur's Kallar preferred the first one. Pandi's arguments suggest that the 2014-15 Malaiur caste conflict was an outcome of the state returning *pātukāppu* to the community. The community had its own idea of furnishing *pātukāppu*. Protection of a statue opened up the possibility of further oppressive practices. In order to protect the statue, another community (Dalit castes) had to be restricted, and in rather new ways.

CONCLUSION

There is sufficient scholarship to destabilise the conception of space as mere setting for human life, everyday concerns, events, and patterns of dominance and subordination. Across disciplines, scholars have read space as a text, treated space as metaphor, and seen spatial arrangements as expressing relations between social groups. This literature helps exorcise the dominant Cartesian conceptualisation of space as an empty container, an 'unvarying suitcase of the world' (Ernst Bloch in Ahuja 2009: 19).

This thesis was neither solely interested in the spatialisation of social relations nor in the social *construction* of space. It also avoided focussing on representations of space only to show that innumerable human tactics destabilise dominant conceptions of space. Taking off from Henri Lefebvre's thesis on the *production* of social space, and utilising his triad of representations of space, spatial practices, and representational space (1991), it offers some lines of enquiry for an anthropology of space.

The first relates to transformations of social space. The thesis highlighted the dynamicity of space, different aspects of contemporary spatiality, and the importance of historical processes to the production of social space. It considered the relationality of places, the dynamicity of place-making, the links between territories and scales, and locations and networks. It concretised the abstract thesis of the production of space through deliberations on sites, territories, location, uneven development, uneven space-time compression, the intercalations of spatial scales. It attended to conflicts and processes that produce social space and render it dynamic.

A second line of enquiry relates to transformations of social relations. The ethnography of South Asia touches upon this theme but subsumes the processual and relational nature of social groups under a focus on social change. Part of the problem emerges from long-standing and dominant representations of this region as a static space. This assumed inertia gave historical, regional, micro-regional, and

ecological specificities of social group formations the short shrift, and fixed patterns of dominance and subordination for all times and spaces. Given these frames of representation, any change would make for a noteworthy topic of discussion.

It is unsurprising, then, that there are a number of ethnographies on caste social mobility (e.g. Hardgrave 1969, Osella and Osella 2000) but few that capture the 'mobility of Asia' (Ludden 2003). To do so, one must account for the dynamicity of space itself, and recognise that conflict is an important aspect to the production of space (Ahuja 2009). Few ethnographies of South Asia pursue this course; fewer still seem interested in arriving at the connections between dynamic space and dynamic social relations. The third line of enquiry relates to this socio-spatial dialectics. The account of this dialectics also involved examining how space, people, and things act on each other.

The emphasis on process, dynamicity, and relationality, and the socio-spatial dialectics called for a particular mode of exposition. The thesis engaged with these lines of enquiry not as separate ones but as a triadic one, grasping these elements as a single mode of enquiry that an anthropology of space can engage in. Let me summarise how I did this.

Reflections on enquiry and exposition

I organised much of the ethnographic, historical, and comparative material around particular kinds of sites. I considered each site as a concrete abstraction, moving beyond the binary of the general and the particular, and disclosing interconnections and co-constitution of places, people, and things. A form of query structured the entire thesis. Its three parts fanned out from very simple questions. What are field-sites, roads, and memorials? How do they become visible to us? How do we comprehend them?

At least four reasons mediated my choice. One, it helped me challenge isolating and fragmenting treatments of places and sites. Two, it allowed me to demonstrate that places and sites only come into being through relations and networks that render them co-constitutive of other places and sites. Three, I could highlight enduring patterns and dynamic processes in the co-production of space and

social relations. Finally, framing the discussion around sites permitted a better grasp of the dynamicity of dominance and conflict. As Lefebvre puts it, space often exhibits a dual nature. It confronts us as with ‘an immediacy and an objectivity’ but also offers a ‘mediating role,’ enabling us to reach beyond surfaces and through ‘opaque forms’ and ‘apprehend something else’ (1991: 182-3).

Part I took up the relations between places, revealed history’s presence in the production of contemporary caste essence, and examined the links between knowing and representing, imaginaries and practices, cities and villages, villages and micro-regions. It introduced regional spatial categories and territories, and emphasised the internal relations between places. It also introduced Malaiur – the place, the residents, and the socio-spatial relations at the centre of my ethnographic investigations – as a representational space or locus of imaginaries, and linked these to the production of village and caste subjectivities.

Part II was organised around roads and highways as they generate new rhythms and space-times, speculative land markets, and property and inheritance disputes. Here we saw infrastructure’s multiple effects – the facilitation of certain kinds of dominance and subordination; the transformation of territories, places, and social relations; and the creation of new grounds for contestation. This involved looking into social groups, individuals, and institutional frameworks as well as roads’ effects on people and other objects. In analysing conflicts between social groups and conflicts between things (e.g. roads, land, and water), chapters 3 and 4 attended to the many actors who produce space and to the simultaneous action of social space on these actors. International and national institutions, bureaucrats and planners, national and local politicians, real estate companies and local brokers, village big-men and indebted small landholders, sons inheriting property and daughters demanding their share in inheritance, road and land, field and water, tank and road, *ayacutdars* and bureaucrats deliberating on the meaning and effects of road and tank – all these actors impacted project implementation. To see highways transforming property, kinship, and caste relations in a village was to see, simultaneously, how these relations and local land, labour, and credit markets affect infrastructure projects.

Part III looked at memorials as they were unhinged from their seemingly mute existence as landscape objects through periodic commemoration or desecration. Commemorative structures and statues installed by political parties, governments, caste associations, or statue installation forums consisting of lineage representatives revealed networks of administrators, political representatives, and rural and urban caste members. The chapters here also highlighted the networking of social and spatial relations, and of people and things. Statues transformed the land they were installed in and tanks and temples they were situated near. They enabled Dalits to strengthen their claims to land. They led Kallar to enforce new restrictions to Chakkiliyar everyday mobility, pilgrimage participation, and observance of temple rituals and festivals.

I could have approached my thesis aim and themes through other sites such as temples and houses. As a site, a temple differs from roads, tanks, commemorative pillars, and statues. The social relations and contradictions that temples express and generate are partly unique, reflecting site-specific characteristics. Using temples as one of my framing sites would have highlighted site-specific modes of reinforcing social relations, and of sharpening, or birthing, conflicts. I could have analysed how temples and attendant practices (new roadside temples, lineage temples, household shrines, reconstructed *ūr* and *nāṭu* temples, pilgrimages, rituals, consecrations, membership, honours disputes) weave absolute and abstract space as they produce and partake in processes of resacralisation that enhance the extraction of surplus value here. As it now stands, my thesis does not explicitly examine temples. But temples incorporate socio-spatial relations – *ūr* and *nāṭu* territorialities, the rural and the urban, castes and lineages, the political and the economic, honour disputes, rituals and built environment, practices and narratives, and social relations of land and water. They also exist in a network that includes other sites – roads, tollgates, land, markets, fields, textile mills, irrigation, houses, statues, herostones. What I withheld as a framing site resurfaced as matter scattered across the chapters' main text and footnotes.

Likewise, I could have engaged with houses as a separate site and taken up themes I have hardly touched upon. I could have simply confirmed the house as a

domestic and intimate site that could unite body, cosmos, and dwelling, invite the evil eye, and exist as a living plot, or even as the locus of a daily refreshed habitus – themes reiterated in regional ethnography (Daniel 1984, Osella and Osella 2000; 2009). I could have treated the house along with many associative elements. This approach would have entailed discussions on housing projects (government policies of housing for rural poor, or for adivasis, Dalits, and other communities), kin circles and credit societies, temporalities of loans and gifts, and attempts to synchronise biological time and rhythms of prestations (during life-crisis rituals) with the social time of house construction and reconstruction. Such an enquiry would highlight intercalating spatial scales, the territorial spread of crises, the fixing of overaccumulated capital in the housing sector, and credit and commodity markets. It would simultaneously examine settlement patterns and relations of dominance and subordination, interiors and exteriors, the poetics and politics of dwelling, and caste and kinship networks. Together, these examinations would grasp the socio-spatial dialectics through which the house, the home, and housing projects and policies come into being.

I could have shifted the lens this way or that, approached the matter at hand through this object or that, one built form or the other, and still come to similar conclusions. Put another way, this work exists in a space somewhere between what I have included here, and the interpretations and analyses that did not make the final cut. This excess, however, influenced the themes and sites that I did explore in my thesis. By way of summarising this thesis' contributions, let me link my themes and aims to existing anthropological fields.

Revisiting ūr, kirāmam, nāṭu

By approaching the themes from an ethnography of caste relations, dominance and subordination, village and micro-regional territories, and social space in rural south India, this thesis intervenes in the urban-centric anthropology of space. Much of the critical literature on space relates to urban territories and the urban form. Metropolitan cities, the sites of capital's concentration, appear more frequently than rural spaces or the smaller cities and towns comprising most of the world's human settlements (Heitzman 2008). This urban-centric approach and focus is one of many

aspects to have cast a shadow on rural studies. Anthropologists have recently remedied this state of play with questions such as ‘do villages matter?’ and if so, ‘how?’ and ‘why?’ (Mines and Yazgi 2010).

This thesis forwarded one approach towards comprehending how villages such as Malaiur matter to an anthropology of social space. It also dealt with other kinds of territories, and stressed the relationality of places and territories. One of my opening moves was to introduce *ūr* and *kirāmam*. I shall now revisit that discussion. Recall that Valentine Daniel (1984, 2010) suggested that *ūr* is ontic whereas *kirāmam* is epistemic. Throughout, the thesis showed that representations of space, or space as conceived by the state and planners, are not just ways to know space; they make material interventions. Representations and epistemologies generate path dependencies and patterns to the circulation of human beings and things. Yet we have seen individuals and groups challenging abstract representations with their practices, and by mobilising emotions and affect. We saw them evoking representational spaces to contest plans, documents, and other individuals and social groups. How may we review the debate over *ūr* and *kirāmam* in this light?

This calls for recalling the processes, relations, and incidents examined in this thesis. I now offer that *ūr* and *kirāmam* are best conceptualised as relational and dynamic categories. This is to say that epistemological changes intervene in ontology, and transformations in ontology lead to new epistemologies. Take the redefinition of *kirāmam*; the redrawing of *kirāmam* boundaries; modifications in enumeration; reclassification of human settlements; changes to rules, policies, and procedures; new ways of understanding administration, rule, and participation; new plans for circulation and rural connectivity; and the emergence of new concepts of rights, individuals, representation, and democracy. Have they not transformed territories as live projects, place-making, *ūr* and *nāṭu* relations, centres and peripheries, and temple rituals, festivals, and processions?

Take the time and space specific project of what we constitute the world to be. Consider what objects and subjects are; how the animate and inanimate, and divinities and persons, and space and time interact; what the real consists of; and what measures of boundedness, embeddedness, extensions, and exchanges

constitute these. Do these not impinge upon conceptions of space and time, ways of knowing human subjects, animals, other animate entities, things, and nature; ways of administering territories and populations; and the knowledges through which we seek mastery over or co-existence with self, other, and world?

Decisions on where to relocate, to build or install new shrines, statues, homes, hotels, worksites, and roads, and conflicts between Dalit Panchayat representatives, and caste and lineage representatives occur in a space that merges what we conceive (if only heuristically) as separate realms.

I set my arrival scene at Malaiur during the January/ *Tai* Pongal celebrations in 2008. Towards the end of the last chapter, I began sketching my (equally bogus) exit scene. Let me return specifically to 26th January 2015, as Malaiur marked India's Republic Day, to concretise my observations about *ūr* and *kirāmam*. On both occasions – tourist Pongal, 2008 and Republic Day, 2015 – I was witness to the folding in of *ūr* and *kirāmam*.

In end-2014 and early-2015, Malaiur was bursting at the seams, ripped through conflicts between Kallar and Chakkiliyar groups. I earlier mentioned aspects of that moment (chapter 6). Recall that *ūr* Kallar had imposed new restrictions in 2014. They disallowed Chakkiliyar access to the main tank during the festival cycle dedicated to Kaliyamman, a fierce goddess. The five Chakkiliyar lineages had separate shrines but commenced their festival after Tenur Chakkiliyar commenced theirs. In December that year, conflict heightened as the *ūr* prepared for the annual pilgrimage that men undertook to Palani's Murugan temple. Malaiur residents have undertaken this pilgrimage since the late-1970s. From a small group of ten to twenty individuals, the pilgrims' group swelled up to over hundred and fifty men. The pilgrimage itself, and the accommodation for pilgrims and other villagers at Palani, was not marked by caste differentiation.

This, at least, is what I observed in January 2009, when I travelled in a private vehicle that families of some Kallar and Pallar pilgrims rented so that we could reach Palani on the same evening as the pilgrims. Whatever 'spiritual factionalism' existed – pilgrims now undertook the journey in two separate groups – was over the meaning of pilgrimage. The split revolved around the extant and nature of permissible

comforts during pilgrimage. The smaller of the groups, headed by Ponnusamy, a Kallar cultivator who lived in a largish house by Malaiur's main tank, hired a vehicle that carried utensils and other belongings, and arranged with an Agamudaiyar caterer from a neighbouring village to prepare food during the pilgrim. At Palani, this group also performed *aṅṅatāṅam*, feeding Malaiur pilgrims and others. All this meant the group collected more pilgrimage *vari* (tax or contribution). The larger group roughed it out – camping at roadside, rest house, or at porches of accommodating house-owners along the route, and eating wherever and whenever they could.

Both factions included Kallar, Pallar, Chakkiliyar men, and men from other Malaiur castes. Once the pilgrims started walking out of the *ūr* and towards the Palani *koil*, caste did not seem very central, a point Pandi reiterated in January 2015 whenever he spoke of the conflict between some of his caste members (Chakkiliyar) and some powerful members of Kallar. But at the threshold, having received the blessings of god dancers embodying lineage deities, when the pilgrims finally assembled at Malaiur's Vinayakar temple (situated near the main tank), priests distributed sacred substances in a caste-specific order. Pilgrims across castes received these sacred substances but they did so in an order that reflected caste relations through *mutalmai* and *mariyātai* distinctions. In January 2009, the entire process had appeared as though pilgrims could achieve oneness with god (Daniel 1984) only *after* they were caste-differentiated.

In 2014, some Kallar individuals refused to allow Chakkiliyar pilgrims into the Vinayakar temple. Much of the temple-related disputes were, as Pandi emphasised, a result of changes to the built environment. The recently installed bronze Thevar statue was close to the main sites of conflict – the tank that Chakkiliyar women were prohibited from accessing during their festival, and the temple at which Palani pilgrims congregated before leaving the *ūr*.

Other disputes supplemented these. To protest the new temple-related restriction, Chakkiliyar funerary specialists withdrew their ritual services when a Kallar man died in the village. They relented when Malaiur Kallar threatened to restrict Chakkiliyar access to their own burial ground. Some Kallar men also

reportedly beat up a Chakkiliyar sweeper during this phase. At the time, Malaiur *kirāma* panchayat employed ten Chakkiliyar men and women as sweepers. These individuals had avoided the pilgrimage-cum-temple dispute much to the chagrin of more militant Chakkiliyar. Pandi and others interpreted this avoidance as lackey behaviour, aimed at securing employment through the panchayat. But these sweepers were on a partial strike. They had refused to sweep their lineage temples. Pandi interpreted their refusal as a strike against the *ūr*, and said they would refuse until *ūr* people ask them to. Panchayat employees, however, said they would recommence sweeping the temples only if the *kirāmam* decided to increase their token wages.

Although the panchayat-employed sweepers participated in the Republic Day celebrations, they continued to neglect their own deities. On Republic Day, these ten Chakkiliyar men and women yelled at and fought with the panchayat officials, the president, and other representatives, in public view. The arguments were not about temples or wages. They were about a non-wage entitlement, the set of new clothes that the panchayat had to provide them with on the occasion of the Republic Day.

Later that day, I accompanied panchayat-employees Muniamma and her husband, Panaselvam, to their home. Both stated the joint resolve of the ten sweepers to fight for the new clothes. When the panchayat failed to hand over clothes they were entitled to receive in 2014 Deepavali, they had not pursued the matter. But this time? This time, we will not let them go scot-free, said Muniamma.

The temple conflict and contestations in the ontic space of *ūr* impacted Chakkiliyar individuals employed as sweepers by the *kirāmam*, the panchayat. The sweepers' decision to neglect fierce gods added another dimension to the *ūr* dispute. The neglect of fierce gods and the withdrawal of funeral work could threaten the entire *ūr* (Mines 2005). Wage disputes and access to space commingled. That is to say, conflicts only appeared to be occurring separately as *ūr* and *kirāmam* disputes. We cannot comprehend one without comprehending the other. And all dimensions to the conflicts transformed Malaiur as *ūr* and *kirāmam*.

This is an apt moment to revisit *nāṭu*, to see how the project of agrarian territoriality has fared (Ludden 2002: 236), and sum up tensions between *ūr* and

nāṭu, different kinds of *ūr*, and contests over centrality and distinctions within *nāṭu*. This is about the many territories that are important to social life and space but absent in current scholarship. I shall hinge this discussion around *mutalmai* and *mariyātai*, and summarise the relationality and dynamicity of places and territories.

One of the objections raised initially over my interest in Malaiur emerged from individuals who froze centre and periphery in Kallarnatu. These non-Malaiur Kallar fixed the village as peripheral to *nāṭu* while Malaiur Kallar sought centrality. Through narratives that incorporated historical processes and location in abstract space, residents turned their *ūr* into the site where caste *kuṇam* was most concentrated. These narratives were backed by, and fed into, transforming spatial and social practices. An early notification of village Kallar under the CTA, millwork, usury, the sponsorship of special dramas at *nāṭu* temple festivals by millworkers' association, urbanisation, highway-building, and changes to land use provisioned some Malaiur Kallar families social and economic success and rendered Malaiur mobile within *nāṭu*.

Malaiur Kallar seek to relocate claims to centrality, *mutalmai*, and *mariyātai* in an abstract space by emphasising village–city relations and suppressing *ūr–nāṭu* relations. Likewise, Chokkatevanpatti Kallar ascribe *mutal nāṭu* status to Valandur, the *nāṭu* their *ūr* was part of, by locating this territory in relation to a national highway. Valandur's contention with Tidiyan *nāṭu* for primacy took in referents of Nayaka kings, kingship and territoriality, and overlordship and micro-regional chieftainship, and newer referents such as proximity to national highways and the condition of village approach roads.

The sheer existence of *mutalmai* disputes illustrates that abstract space did not freeze precolonial considerations of rank and honour. New disputes incorporate new idioms. If British colonialism turned honour into a commodity (Dirks 1987), residents of some Kallarnatu territories incorporate characteristics of abstract space to reinterpret honour. Consider villages close to Madurai city (Malaiur, Tenur, Pechikudi), infrastructure networks (Chokkatevanpatti), and urban centres and significant property investments (the SEZ villages Vadapalanji and Kinnimangalam); villages near Madurai Kamaraj University campus on NH49; and those near

Chekkanoorani and Usilampatti (urban centres). The consolidation of empty, homogenous space has aided the re-inscription of these villages into an absolute space of Kallarnatu. The commoditisation of space, the primacy of exchange value over use value, has generated a revaluation of centrality and peripherality in *ūr-nāṭu*, *nāṭu-nāṭu*, and *upakirāmam-nāṭu* relations.

Primacy, distinction, and rank – rather than becoming fixed by colonialism and capitalism – are resignified through considerations of caste, lineage, kinship, village, kingship, and territoriality. What colonialism appears to have frozen, new ruralities have thawed. Millwork, usury, real estate speculation, cinema theatres, granite quarrying, and road and canal infrastructures – relating to land, labour, credit, and property markets, and spatial practices of production and reproduction – destabilise colonial constructions of tradition, and hereditary offices, titles, and gifts by introducing a new dynamism into *mutalmāi* and *mariyātai* claims.

Dynamic social relations and their geographies

As I returned to Malaiur one last time before ‘writing up’ this thesis, local caste relations seemed to resemble structural models of caste in more ways than they did earlier. To catch Malaiur in a brief net would likely cast the village as that dreaded sink of localism, a location of ‘age-old’ repression of Dalits through practices and idioms of untouchability and purity and pollution. It would easily fit into the template of anti-caste reportage, a village that continued to impose traditional restrictions, refusing Dalits access to tanks and temples.

Yet from my time in Malaiur over the years, I recognised some of these as new restrictions and new practices. In 2015, Chakkiliyar individuals at loggerheads with Kallar groups often spoke as though the past was better than the present. Pandi’s mother stated that ‘those were better days; more freedom to walk anywhere; our children entered any temple.’ Most Chakkiliyar men and women presented the conflict using older regional terms signalling entitlements and shares while a handful, such as Pandi, also used the concept of individual and human rights.

Recall (chapter 6) that some Chakkiliyar connected these new restrictions to the Thevar statue. Kallar effort (or ruse) to protect the statue had generated new

restrictions on Chakkiliyar. This is another manifestation of the newness of the old (Bate 2011). It illustrates that patterns of caste dominance and conflicts now exhibit more similarities across regions. Dalit groups jump scales to contest caste relations. Local dominant castes import modes of oppression from other regions. Dominant and subordinate groups reinvent religion as a sphere of struggle, transduce struggles for land as struggles over statues, and transform protection of statues into restrictions over social groups, sacralise statues, humanise statues, and deify and desecrate caste icons. The state sought materials and objects appropriate to a political fix while castes sought actions appropriate to materials. Courts, police, and media could reduce conflicts to a simplex reading while subordinate groups and individuals could add elements to conflicts. Having recalled these processes and events, let me demonstrate how this thesis has responded to calls for rethinking caste relations and domination (Natrajan 2005, Mosse 2012).

We have seen that both dominance and resistance operate at intercalated spatial scales and are reterritorialized. We have noted that intercalations and reterritorializations do not emanate only from human actions. As our analysis incorporated objects, we saw that power is not only involved in the production of objects; it enters into and dwells in them, and emanates from them.

From Malaiur Kallar responses to the Goripalayam Thevar statue desecration, and the focus on Malaiur Chakkiliyar in their canalisation of representational space to local caste relations, it would appear as though the relative inability of Chakkiliyar, as opposed to village Pallar, to leave the village and significantly avoid participation in agriculture makes them more vulnerable to caste atrocities. Luckily, the violence did not materialise. Firstly, Kallar efforts to mobilise en masse failed, thwarted by caste members who diffused the situation, and somewhat checked by the fear of legislative and police action. Secondly, Chakkiliyar themselves were not totally removed from administration, police, and regional politics. In January 2008, four months prior to the statue desecration, an elderly Chakkiliyar agricultural labourer from a nearby village had stated that young Chakkiliyar boys had found some support at the police-station administering to a number of villages including Malaiur.

Neither Kallar dominance nor Chakkiliyar subordination seemed total. Domination and resistance are ongoing projects. Yet, the presence of Malaiur Chakkiliyar in the worlds of agrarian production – where relations of dependence and extra-economic coercion are immediately obvious – is a noteworthy issue. Like other poor villagers, younger Chakkiliyar men sought to escape the village through the construction labour market. To do so, however, they again had to negotiate caste, kinship, and village solidarities.

This calls for re-examining the modes by which caste relations shape rural and urban India, and production relations. When placed alongside the fragmented labour markets in non-agrarian sectors, which have their own caste and kinship gateways, we see that caste is internal not only to agrarian production but to subcontinental variants of capitalism. We could read this as region-specific manifestation of a worldwide trend, where ‘capital has always sought the fragmentation of labour through cultural, formal and spatial means’ (Narotzky, in Natrajan 2012: 109). When we see caste relations as internal rather than external to capitalism, and locate this relation with the colonial and postcolonial histories through which the abstract space of capitalism emerged here, we begin to grasp social space’s hybridity.

In turn, this highlights the non-tenability and instability of many popular conceptual distinctions – rural and urban, caste and capitalism, extra-economic and economic. This thesis approached the problematic through additional moves. It focussed on the hybridity and dynamicity of social relations themselves. Here we saw that social groups garner their relative permanence not only from notions of community and caste through which they are united, but also through things, and through space itself. Roads and buses as much as threshing grounds and village squares; urban caste neighbourhoods as much as village caste streets; temples as much as toll-gates; fields as much as factories; worksites as much as places of leisure produce this social space. They provide certain enduring patterns to dominance-subordination relations and provision new venues for contestation.

Positing either modernity or capitalism as the salvage to a ‘caste-ridden’ subcontinent has aided us little in understanding contemporary space, dominance, and resistance. For fundamental to such views is an inability to see that the actual

social fragmentation of communities is linked to the effacing of fragmentation through the 'ontological heaviness' of caste, the reification of community itself (Natrajan 2012: 108-9). By devoting its attention to conflicts and competition within Piramalai Kallar, this work clarifies how fragmented, rather than homogenous, castes become internalised to the logic of capital and part of capital accumulation. The processes and relations, and the event and the everyday, described in these chapters can be annexed to substantiate that 'fragmentation makes the idea and reality of "community" appear simultaneously as labor's need for identity to gain livelihoods and capital's need to fragment class action through the reification of differences other than class' (Natrajan 2012: 109).

As processual and dialectical relations, space and dominance can be approached through examinations of social groups, money, abstract markets and real marketplaces, future and spot commodity trade and their instruments, policy papers, archival documents, government orders, statues, billboards, canals, wells, pump-sets, and electricity cables.

By attending to details and minutiae, we see dominance and resistance materialising and transforming through statues of community icons and idols of temple deities; television sets, mobile phones, and loudspeakers as well as drums, documents, and hoardings; and roads and streets as well as land and irrigation. Schools, enumerated categories, government policies, and legal institutions announce social relations as much as houses, temples, statues, and informal panchayats. We see these social relations expanding and shrinking, embedding and dispersing. We see them transforming as they jump scales, produce scales, and are reterritorialized and deterritorialized. Territoriality and scale, space and place, location and relation, documents and monuments, streets and houses, *ūr* and *kirāmam*, are operationalised when castes disperse and regather – now appearing as local groups, and now as supralocal groups, now as territorially embedded subcastes, and now as geographically extended supracastes.

Finally, as to what fieldwork in Madurai and the subsequent years of research, thinking, and writing most impressed upon me. It is this. That attending to details and tendencies; relations and networks; and actors, actions, and the acted upon helps

demonstrate reveal the stealthy and continuous traffic between social space and social relations, and between people and things. This thesis is offered in the spirit of exploration. We would benefit from further disclosures of the ways in which South Asia's integration into and location in global capitalism has resulted in a hybrid social space.

GLOSSARY

Only frequently occurring terms are included here. I follow the convention of glossing caste names by references to their ‘traditional occupations,’ with the caveat that this is an identity-producing practice, more than a reflection of these groups’ histories.

Agamudaiyar	One of the three Mukkulathor castes predominant in southern Tamil Nadu
ā ka	people, category of people (caste)
ayacut (āyakaṭṭu)	command area of an irrigation source (e.g. tank)
cāti (jāti, jati)	caste
caṇṭiyar	rogue, dominating person, a tough
Chakkiliyar (Arundhatiyar)	a Dalit caste with leatherwork as a ‘traditional’ occupation, often employed as agricultural labourers
conta ūr	native village
iṇam	community, ethnic category, caste or race
iṇām	a category of tax-free land
Kallar	‘warrior castes’ in southern and central Tamil Nadu; one of the three Mukkulathor castes
Kallarnatu (Ka arnāṭu)	Kallar country; here, region westwards of Madurai city inhabited mainly by Piramalai Kallar
kammāy	irrigation tank
kāṭu	forest, wasteland

kāval	watching, protection, policing
kāvalkārar	person with guarding duties
kirāmam	village (as administrative territory)
koil (kōyil, kōvil)	temple, palace, church
Konar	caste with shepherding as a ‘traditional’ occupation
kuṇam (Sanskrit guṇ)	property, fundamental quality, attribute
Maravar	‘Warrior caste’ predominant in Tamil Nadu’s southern districts, one of the three Mukkulathor castes
mariyātai	Distinction, honour, respect
Mukkulathor	a supracaste comprising of Tamil-speaking Agamudaiyar, Kallar, and Maravar castes, three castes attributing similar warrior pasts to themselves
mutalmai	primacy, firstness
Nadar (Shanar)	caste whose ‘traditional’ occupation is toddy tapping
nāṭu	country, region, territory, agricultural tract
pāḷaiyakkārar (English Poligar, Polygar)	person commanding a <i>pāḷaiyam</i> (fortress or military camp)
Pallar	one of the two largest Tamil Dalit castes, mostly employed as agricultural labourers
paṅkāḷi	shareholder, co-parcener, agnate, kin
paṇṇaiyāḷ	bonded labourer

Paraiyar	one of the two largest Tamil Dalit castes, often employed as agricultural labourers
Piramalai Kallar	Kallar subcaste predominant in 'Kallarnatu,' west of Madurai city
taricaṇam (Sanskrit darsan)	heightened visual perception, exchange of qualities between viewer and viewed
toḷil	work, occupation, labour, toil
ūr	village
ūrani	pond, usually a source of drinking water
varalāru	history, past
veḷḷaikkāraṇ	white man, often referring to British coloniser

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