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47

Jukka Jouhki

Imagining the Other

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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Orientalism and Occidentalism in Tamil-European Relations in South India

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

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ABSTRACT

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The theoretical approach of this study concentrates on the images of the Other manifested in Orientalism and its counterpart Occidentalism. Orientalism as a discourse was first described by Edward Said who in his book *Orientalism* defined it as hegemonic Western popular and academic discourse of "the Orient." Said analyzed the relationship between European colonialism and the intertwined discursive formations constructing the European experience of "the Orientals." Occidentalism, respectively, is a more recent field of study of the discourse constructing Europe or "the West." My study of Orientalism and Occidentalism is based on ethnographic fieldwork during which I collected material on the relationship between Europeans and Tamils in Auroville, a multinational intentional community and Kuilapalayam, a rural Tamil village in India.

According to the material gathered, the Europeans of Auroville followed the traditional Orientalist discourse in desribing their Tamil neighbors. In accordance with Said's findings, I found Europeans emphasizing certain key elements of "being Tamil," namely the *ancientness* of Tamil people and the image of Tamil culture as a significantly confining entity. On the other hand, in the discourse images of Tamil intuition, spontaneity and freshness were applauded although they were seen viewed as in opposition with Western qualities like organizational capabilities. The Occidentalism of Tamil villagers, in which "the West" was interpreted mainly through observing the behavior of other Tamils living in Auroville, constructed an image of Europeans as a highly financially oriented group with little or no spiritual qualities. The cultural impact of Auroville was lamented but its economic impact was welcomed.

On the whole the two discourses seemed to produce a simplified and exaggerated image of the Other. The traditional Orientalist binary ontology was visible in European discourse whereas in Tamil discourse perhaps the lack of Occidentalist tradition and thus the significantly limited archive in the Foucauldian sense was reflected in less binary views of Europeans and Tamils.

Keywords: Auroville, discourse, Edward Said, India, Occidentalism, Orientalism, Tamils.

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PREFACE

"This is the strangest life I've ever known."

I have studied the relationship between Auroville, an experimental multinational community, and Kuilapalayam, an urbanizing Tamil village. One could say this equation is anthropologically and as a context of everyday life rather exotic, quite unique and most challenging. Hence my understanding of both sides of the equation is far from excellent, poor at worst and, hopefully, sufficient at best. However, I have been most fortunate to have such ready and willing participants whose significance in my study would be understated if they were to be called mere informants. Hence I am most grateful for the kind and abundant help of the people of Kuilapalayam and Auroville. I owe them greatly, and I can only wish I wish that all anthropologists had such enthusiastic people to work with during their fieldwork. It is perhaps not surprising that my fieldwork in the Tamil land of South India often made me recall the line above quoted from James Douglas Morrison. My nine months in India were a voyage to the unity and diversity of humans, and are now in all their strangeness and familiarity a significant part of me as a person and an anthropologist.

Moreover, I am most grateful for the support I have enjoyed here in Finland. The funding arranged by the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation and the grants and the post provided in the University of Jyväskylä by rector Aino Sallinen and professor Petri Karonen, the Head of the Department of History and Ethnology gave me an opportunity to concentrate on my research full-time. As for invaluable anthropological advice I am indebted to professor René Gothóni and professor emeritus Matti Sarmela, the reviewers of my study, and professor Ilmari Vesterinen, the supervisor of my study. For the meticulous work as a language consultant I would like to thank Mrs. Eleanor Underwood, lecturer at Department of Languages of the University of Jyväskylä. For the most thought-provoking discussions and insightful opinions about my research I am most obliged to my father Mr. Yrjö Jouhki.

In the end I would like to give special thanks to Ms. Riitta Hänninen for the encouragement during my writing process, my dear friend Ms. Maija Jouhki for her faith in me, and the distinguished gentlemen and fellow researchers Mr. Joensuu, Mr. Tuikka and Mr. Peltola for sharing massive doses of caffeine at lunch breaks during which all but research was discussed.

On the first day of 2006, Jyväskylä
Jukka Jouhki

CONTENTS

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."
(Rudyard Kipling, *The Ballad of East and West*)

1 IMAGINING US AND THEM

Edward Said Applied in South India

The ambivalence of the West[1] towards the East is age-old. The rich cultures, superior civilizations and ancient wisdom of the Orient have inspired many Westerners, but on the other hand, the threats of its monstrous mysteries and absurd religions hailing from its stagnant past have abhorred at least as many. Exaggeration, fantasy and imagination together with a range of stereotypes connected to popular prejudices have been essential to these views. For many the Orient has been a dominion of hordes and despots or spiritual mystics and exotic sensuality. Encountering the East has been significant for the self-image of the West and it has produced identities that have used discursive elements ranging from decadent European modernity to cultural, racial and moral superiority.[2]

In his highly celebrated but also vastly criticized book *Orientalism*[3], Edward Said (1935–2003) embarks on the description of a long European tradition "of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience." This tradition Said calls "Orientalism[4]." For reasons that I will discuss further on, Said concentrates mainly on French and British Orientalism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries andsubse-

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1 In this thesis I treat the concepts like "the East," "the West," "the Orient," "the Oriental," "the Occident," or "the Occidental" and their derivations as representations of imagined entities. Thus they should be written inside quotation marks. However, for the sake of brevity and clarity, I have chosen to omit the quotation marks around these terms, unless emphasis requires otherwise.

2 Clarke 1997: 3–4.

3 *Orientalism* was first published by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd in 1978, then by Peregrine Books in 1985, and reprinted by Penguin Books in 1991. The edition used here is the Penguin Books reprint of *Orientalism* with a new Afterword published in 1995.

4 Said's choice of the rather highly generalizing term Orientalism has been widely disputed in subsequent academic discussion. See e.g. Smith 2003: 46–49; Heehs 2003: 169–171 and Kopf 1980: 498–499. Said also contemplates his choice in *Orientalism*.

quently on contemporary American Orientalism. Said's analysis of Orientalist discourse draws on various academic and non-academic sources. Said was

> a part of a more critical conjuncture in the 1980s that was facilitated by theoretical developments in poststructuralism, neo-Marxism, and deconstructionism and feminism, where the Enlightenment topic of subject-formation prevailed.[5]

Since then many scholars influenced by Said have continued to probe and develop the study of Orientalist phenomena. Orientalism as a discourse functions as an example of the postcolonial predicament of Asians and Westerners alike. In Western scholarly work the West has been either implicitly or explicitly, but nevertheless often rather uncritically, accepted into a dichotomous relationship with "the Rest." The Western imagery of the Orient has been required to make the image of the Occident possible, and it has produced a discourse that has evolved into a kind of imagined binary ontology. This ontology has remained surprisingly strong, although at the same time it has become more obvious that the "two parts" are less distinguishable because of reasons like globalization and its interconnecting phenomena like large labor movements, global markets, ethnic tensions, diseases, the mass media and so forth.[6]

Orientalism, for Said, means European academic and popular discourse about the Orient. The Orient has been significant to Europe not only for its sheer proximity, but because European states have had their richest and oldest colonies in the territory that was also seen as the source of European civilizations and languages. In a way, the Orient has also been Europe's cultural rival and, hence, one of the most significant images of the Other. Although Europe has defined its Other by looking at the Orient, and used the contrasting images, ideas, personalities and experiences of the Orient to define itself, Said emphasizes the fact that the Orient, for Europe, has not been a merely imaginary entity, but has been an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Thus, in Orientalist discourse, the Orient has been expressed and represented with the support of "institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles."[7] In Said's words Orientalism is

> the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line. These two aspects of Orientalism are not incongruent, since by use of them both Europe could advance securely and unmetaphorically upon the Orient.[8]

Orientalism is "a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient." Orientalists, Said claims, have plotted their narratives about the history, character, and destiny of the Orient for centuries but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the geographical vastness of the Orient had shrunk, the scholarly

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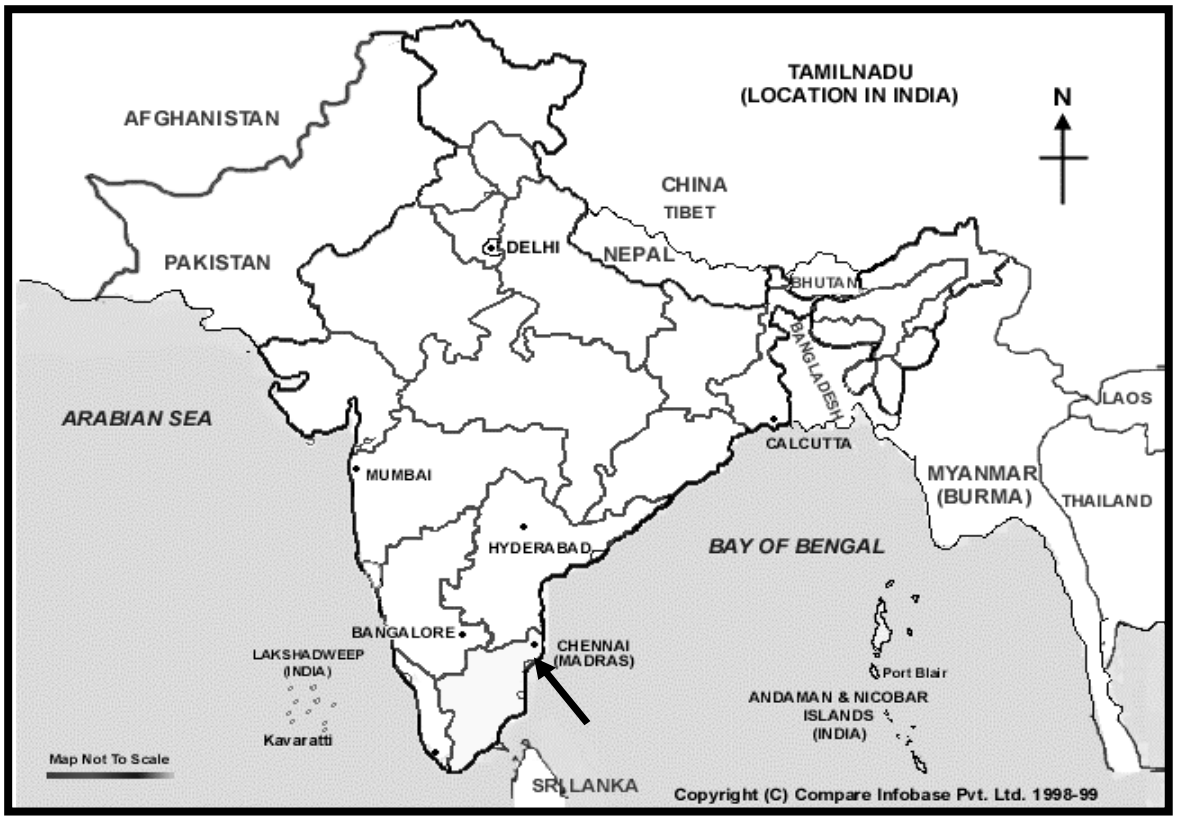
5 Bhatnagar 1986 in Breckenridge & van der Veer 1994: 3–4.
6 Ibid.: 2–3. See also Carrier (ed.) 2003.
7 Said 1995: 1–2.
8 Ibid.: 73.

discipline studying the Orient had expanded with colonialism, and "Orientalism had accomplished its self-metamorphosis from a scholarly discourse to an imperial institution." There was a new, positive, twist to Orientalism: "since one cannot ontologically obliterate the Orient [...], one does have the means to capture it, treat it, describe it, improve it, radically alter it."[9]



MAP 1 Auroville and Kuilapalayam in India.

In his much quoted verse chosen as the epigraph of this thesis Rudyard Kipling reveals something of the nucleus of the long-lived tradition of Orientalist thought, the essentialist division of the East and the West. Although Edward Said concentrates mainly on European Orientalism focusing on the Arab Middle East, the Saidian approach to Orientalist discourse is thought to be validly applicable to other parts of the non-Western world, and various scholars influenced by Said have expanded his approach to include India. There have also been various studies (e.g. in feminist anthropology) that have applied Said's approach to the study of a sort of Western internal Orientalism that focuses on the (often subaltern) Others of "our" society.

In this study I have concentrated on Orientalism and its counterpart Occidentalism in the multinational community of *Auroville* and its neighboring village of *Kuilapalayam* in Tamil Nadu, South India[10]. At the time of my most re-

9 Ibid.: 94–95.
10 See MAP 1.

cent fieldwork in 2003 Auroville was[11] a so-called intentional community with spiritual or utopian[12] leanings of about 1700 inhabitants. It was located in the Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu, 160 km south of Chennai (former Madras) on and inland from the Bay of Bengal. Roughly one third of Aurovillians were native Indians, about half of them originating from the nearby villages of Auroville and other areas of Tamil Nadu and the other half coming from northern India[13]. There were a few Aurovillians originating from other Asian countries and South America, but the remaining Aurovillians were mostly "Westerners," that is, Europeans and North Americans.[14]

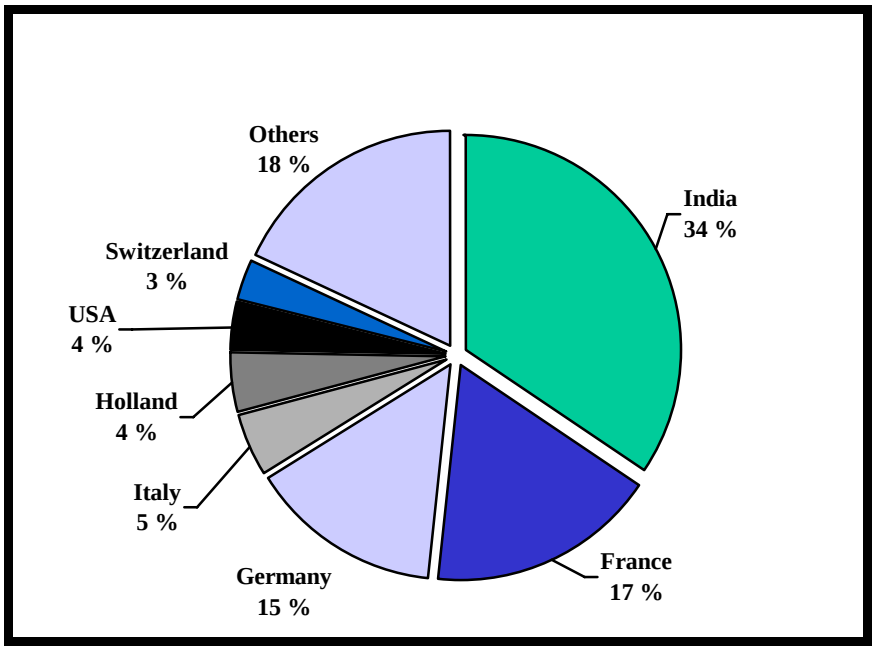


FIGURE 1 Auroville by nation.

Auroville was inspired by Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950), the famous politician, nationalist and, later, spiritual guru and yogi. His spiritual practices and teachings attracted numerous followers and finally the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry was established. Aurobindo's main spiritual quest was to develop

11 At the time of this writing, in 2005, Auroville still exists as does the village of Kuilapalayam. However, I discuss the peoples of Auroville and Kuilapalayam based on my fieldwork in the area in 1999 and 2003. Thus there is a lag between the fieldwork and its presentation in writing in this thesis. Contrary to common anthropological convention, I have chosen to use the ethnographic past tense instead of the present tense as I feel that it is important to emphasize the fact that the subject of my research (as the subjects of anthropological research in general, i.e. cultures, societies and peoples), the people under observations, did not form some kind of stagnant and monolithic entity but a field of dynamic and thus constantly changing phenomena.

12 Meier 2004 emphasizes the spiritual side of the community and Jouhki 2002 the utopian side. Obviously, these two concepts may and do often overlap, as they did in Auroville.

13 Many of the Indian Aurovillians originating from the North had first moved to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry and the moved to Auroville.

14 See FIGURE 1. Source Jouhki 2002.

a new mode of spiritual exercise, the Integral Yoga, to contribute to the inner growth of its practitioners and thus to hasten the spiritual evolution of the human race. Mirra Alfassa (1878–1973), or *the Mother*, a French expatriate, was first his disciple and later his successor in the development of human spirituality and the spearhead of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It was the Mother's dream to found an innovative multinational community where ethnic, religious and cultural conflicts would be overcome and where people would live in harmony according to Aurobindoan ideals. Auroville was founded by the Sri Aurobindo Society in 1968 to promote human unity in diversity, a goal that attracted many Indians and Westerners of the revolutionary decade and many followers of Aurobindoan philosophy. By 2003, the year of my latest fieldwork in the area, Auroville had developed into a flourishing community with a spiritual ideology and a population including peace seekers, gardeners, farmers, environmentalists, new-agers, adventurers, administrators, development co-operators, hard-working and relaxing Westerners and Easterners living in a relatively well-off society.

Kuilapalayam[15] in 2003 was a rapidly growing village of ca. 2200 inhabitants all of whom were of the *Vanniyar* (farmer) caste[16]. Kuilapalayam was an exceptional Tamil village as it did not have any *Dalit* (Harijan/untouchable) families. Usually a Tamil village has a colony, i.e. a separate section for *Dalit*s. The village was the closest one to Auroville and most of the working population (ca. 85 %) were employed in Auroville. About half of the employed were also small landholders and did seasonal farming, while about a third of the Kuilapalayam workers in Auroville were totally dependent on their work in the multinational community. Most of the Tamil Aurovillians came from Kuilapalayam and the rest form the other surrounding villages, or from other parts of Tamil Nadu and the nearby city of Pondicherry[17]. There were some Aurovillian settlements including the Financial Service and a grocery store in the Kuilapalayam area. In addition, the eastern access road to Auroville ran through the village producing a thriving business street on the village side of the border between Auroville and Kuilapalayam. Most Kuilapalayams not working in Auroville were farmers or agricultural laborers and the rest were employed in small businesses and services, usually in the village or in Pondicherry. Obviously, Kuilapalayam was immensely affected by Auroville's economy and vice versa. Moreover, in the nearby Aurovillian community[18] of New Creation there

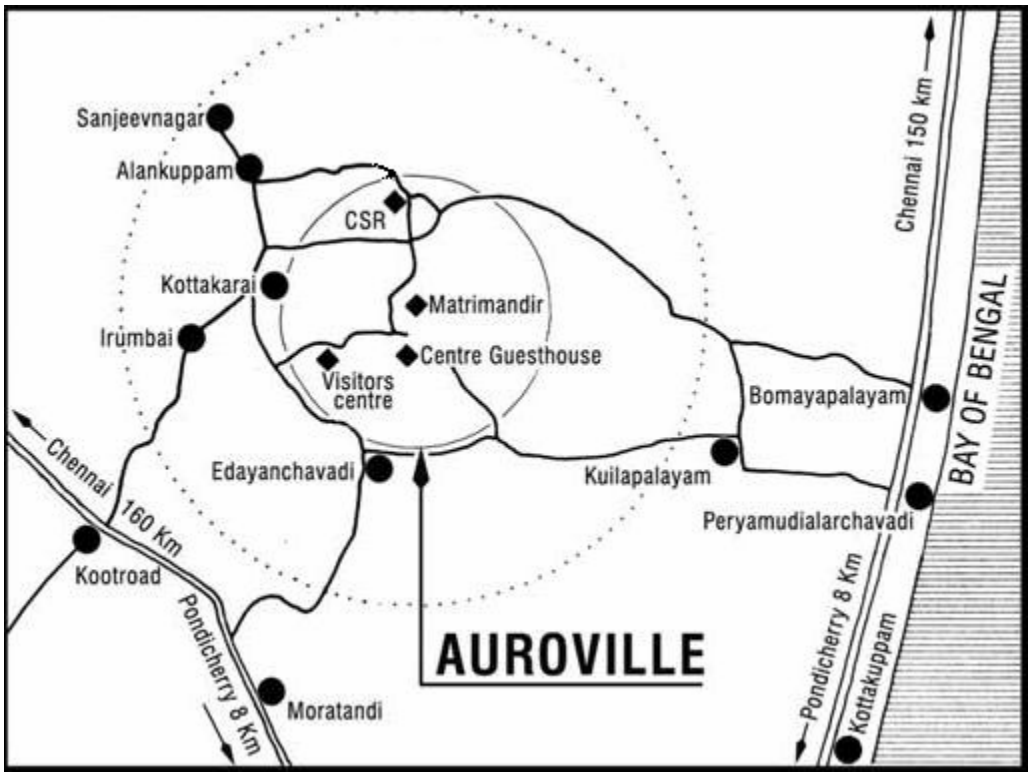
15 See MAP 2 on page 16. Source WWW1.

16 The word *jati* is a more accurate term to describe the actual occupational/ethnic unit of social hierarchy whereas caste or *varna* refers more to a social category. However, the word caste was commonly used to denote *jati* by both Tamils and non-Tamils in English conversation in my research area.

17 Pondicherry was founded by the French in 1674 and it remained in French possession until 1954. Since 1962 the city has been a part of the Union Territory of Pondicherry which includes other small areas of former French colonies around India. The influence of Pondicherry has always been significant to the Tamil countryside around it, including Kuilapalayam less than ten kilometers away from it.

18 Auroville was formed of dozens of small communities scattered over a large area.

was a free school for village children with over 240 students, most of whom were from Kuilapalayam.



MAP 2 Auroville, Kuilapalayam and other villages.

Aim and Method of the Study

The Question

This study is based on two periods of fieldwork conducted in the Auroville-Kuilapalayam area. In 1999 I spent three months in Auroville in order to collect data for my master's thesis[19] about Auroville as a utopian community. The material collected was sufficient also for the subsequent licentiate thesis[20] where I examined culture change in Auroville. Finally, in 2003, I returned to the area for six months in order to study the relationship between Auroville and the surrounding Tamil villages, mostly by participating with, observing and interviewing Tamil villagers and Tamil, Western and North Indian Aurovillians. I lived in Indira Nagar, a village outside the Auroville-Kuilapalayam area. Living in a village not affected by Auroville gave me valuable experience of what village life was like in a village not so intensely exposed to the ways of foreign people.

19 Jouhki 2000.
20 Ibid. 2002.

My initial intention was to focus on the borderline culture[21] between Auroville and the villages. However, during the fieldwork I started to notice certain distinctive discursive patterns in the way the Western Aurovillians perceived the surrounding Tamil culture and society. They vividly reminded me of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the text which I later decided the theoretical approach of this thesis should draw on. Thus the objective of my research turned into approaching Aurovillian Orientalism in relation to the Tamil people of the area. As a counterbalance to Aurovillian Orientalism, I wanted to study Tamil Occidentalism[22] in relation to Western Aurovillians. Most studies of Western Orientalism have not been interested in the counter-discourse of the Other or "the Orientals." Although the critical study of Orientalism has produced many insightful studies of the way "our" image of "them" has been constructed, I have often been left wondering about the imagery constructed and used by the Other. In other words, I have been exceedingly interested in how "they" see "us." This "non-Western" or "ethno-Occidentalism[23]" has been studied to some extent[24] but I have not come across any significant studies where "our" Orientalism and "their" Occidentalism have been studied at the same time, not to mention in the same place.

Thus, I decided to complement the study of Aurovillian Orientalism by analyzing Tamil Occidentalism. Obviously, any "we" describing "them" ends up – at least indirectly – describing "us" also. Thus, my objective in this thesis is to analyze two kinds of Orientalism and two kinds of Occidentalism, namely, the Orientalism of Western Aurovillians and Tamil villagers, and the Occidentalism of Tamil villagers and Western Aurovillians. More simply put, I have intended to describe how Aurovillians and Tamils perceive Tamils (Western and Tamil Orientalism) and how Aurovillians and Tamils perceive Aurovillians (Western and Tamil Occidentalism).

My research is highly dependent on numerous interviews of Aurovillians and Kuilapalayams. Over forty interviews and over a hundred pages of field notes from my fieldwork conducted in 1999, hundreds of emails from Westerners and Tamils from 1998 onwards and diverse archival material I collected gave me a strong basis for the fieldwork of 2003 when I conducted over forty interviews which were recorded with a digital audio recorder. In addition I conducted numerous formal and informal interviews recorded in my 170-page fieldwork journal which also includes observations of Kuilapalayam and Auro-

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21 See e.g. Raiskio 1997 for borderline culture between Finnish missionaries and Bushmen.

22 It should be noted that Edward Said did not study the Occidentalism of non-Western societies. However, I found it important to balance the study of (Aurovillian) Orientalism with (Tamil) Occidentalism.

23 Carrier 1992: 197–199 has defined four categories drawn from Edward Said's basic model of Orientalism. Orientalism means the ways Westerners perceive their Other whereas ethno-Orientalism means the way non-Westerners perceive themselves. Occidentalism, in contrast, means the ways Westerners perceive themselves whereas ethno-Occidentalism means the way non-Westerners perceive Westerners. It should be noted that Carrier uses the prefix "ethno-" in an ironic way to express conceptual divisions.

24 See Chapter 4.

villian lifestyle, conversations, festivals, rituals, elements of discourse and my personal reflections. The interviews I conducted over six months in 2003 were mostly non-structured or occasionally semi-structured as I did not want to lead the interviewees into certain themes too much but presumed significant themes would emerge naturally in the interviews without direct questions from my side.

However, there were certain themes I attempted to cover in all the interviews. I usually started the interview by having the interviewee tell me about his/her background including education, childhood, work and so on. Often, at some point of the interview, the topic would change into the relationship between Auroville and Kuilapalayam. At this point I often encouraged the interviewee to elaborate on his/her experiences and the rest of the interview would usually be spent on covering various aspects of the relationship. If the issues I was interested in did not to come unprompted, I would ask direct questions about what living close to the community meant for the interviewee and how he/she felt about the Aurovillians or the people of Kuilapalayam. Obviously, people's talkativeness varied and so did the length of my interviews, with the shorter interviews lasting about fifteen minutes while the longest lasted for several hours.

In interviewing Aurovillians – whether Westerners, Tamils or North Indians – I used English, the *lingua franca* of Auroville. Hence, most of the interviews were conducted in a language that was the mother tongue of neither the interviewer nor the interviewee, and I am conscious of the limitations this has implied for the reliability of my interpretations. Further limitations occurred in interviewing the Tamil villagers as most of them did not speak English, and I often had to use two different interpreters[25], which, I suspect, was a more serious threat to understanding the people of study. However, there was a fortunate side-effect to having two interpreters. Both of them were Tamil Aurovillians, but the one I hired first was a young man who had a dislike of planning the interviews. Hence, we ended up interviewing practically whoever we happened to meet first on our round of the village. Sometimes we would go and interview a farmer who had just come from the field and was relaxing on his porch or sometimes we would meet an old-timer smoking his tobacco in his tumbledown old shack right at the entrance to the village. Often we would interview the relatives or friends of the interpreter.

Thus the people interviewed with the help of my young interpreter were chosen more randomly than was the case with my second interpreter, who was a middle-aged man with rather definite views on who were the "right" villagers to interview. The right villagers were usually those he considered more traditional and thus more Tamil-like. These interviewees sometimes had a high status in the village. Some of them remembered the British era and the fight for independence. Some of them had worked for sixty years in the same paddy fields and seen their village grow from a mud hut village to an urbanizing vil-

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25 I needed two different interpreters because both of them were too busy to be able to cover all the occasions when I needed an interpreter.

lage with cable-TVs and even cell phones. Hence I ended up with roughly speaking three groups of interviewees. The first group, the people I more or less bumped into with my younger interpreter, represented a rough cross-section of the village. The second group, the friends and acquaintances of the younger interpreter, represented the generation of young adults who, I presumed, might have been most exposed to change and outside influence. The third group, the ones chosen by my older interpreter, consisted of the more traditional and the older villagers, and represented a common image of what my interpreter seemed to think were the more "real" villagers. All the Kuilapalayams I interviewed had relatives or friends working in Auroville or had themselves been employed in the community.

In Auroville, first of all I basically interviewed whomever I met and who seemed to be talkative enough for an interview. At some point I simply knocked randomly on people's doors and asked them for an interview. In a more planned way, I also interviewed Western and Indian Aurovillians who were in one way or another in close contact with the villages. They worked in the hospital treating or employing villagers, in development co-operation with the villages, as teachers of village children or supervisors of village employees in construction, agriculture and so forth. Then, for contrast, I wanted to interview Aurovillians who had little or no daily contact with Tamils. However, most Aurovillians had at least some contact with Tamils as five thousand of them worked in the community and hundreds of Tamils had joined the community. Moreover, as Auroville was scattered on a vast plateau with villages in and near the area, most Aurovillians met Tamils and interacted with them frequently. Obviously, I wanted to interview Aurovillians from various backgrounds but most of the interviewees were either Tamil or European.

In my opinion the interviews of Aurovillians covered a sufficiently represenative cross-section of the community, which could, moreover, be categorized in three significant groups: the Western Aurovillians who had intense contact with villagers, those whose contact with villagers was virtually non-existent, and the Tamil Aurovillians, most of whom were from Kuilapalayam. The fourth group in my material, the North Indians of Auroville, were small in number which, however, was compensated with their enthusiasm and ardor.

Reflections

The attitudes of Kuilapalayams and Aurovillians towards me as a researcher varied. None of the Kuilapalayams refused to be interviewed but there were some Aurovillians who thought a person representing an academic discipline could not grasp the spiritual atmosphere of their community. There were also some Kuilapalayams who, despite my explicitly explaining my profession and purposes, regarded me as one of Aurovillian *Vellakara*s[26] and criticized me for the policies of "our" community. Moreover, it seemed a bit inappropriate for me as a (European) man to interview Kuilapalayam women. Thus, there is a

[26] *Vellakara* (masc.) or *Vellakachi* (fem.) means white-skinned person in Tamil.

slight gender distortion in my fieldwork material owing to the fact that Kuilapalayam men were simply easier to reach as, at least I presume, it was more proper for me to interview village men than women. Nevertheless, most Kuilapalayam and Aurovillians interviewees were friendly and talkative during my interviews. Most of them felt genuinely eager and interested in contributing to my study, and am truly greatful for their help.[27]

At this point one must be reminded of the crisis of representation in a humnanistic discipline like anthropology[28]. Obviously, in addition to the use of interpreters and not being able to communicate using my mother tongue, my own "cultural baggage," the personal background of the researcher, affected my interpretation in the field and in the writing process. As Anttonen says, a researcher is not a remote observer but a part of the field of research. Thus the anthropologist must be aware of the significance of his role and the subjectivity of the research process.[29] In the recent history of anthropology there have been many ways to attempt to decrease the personal bias of the researcher, especially in fieldwork. One of them has been the systematization of research meaning emphasizing tests, categorizations, strict methods and techniques, in other words the elements that make anthropology seem more scientific. Another way to approach the problem of subjectivity has been to openly admit its existence and bring in the person of the researcher as a part of the study. Thus, since 1980s, self-reflection, writing out the experiences of fieldwork and contemplating its relation to the writing process have emerged as new tools of coping with subjectivity.[30]

Anthropologists most certainly are also humans and perceive the world through "cultural lenses" as does anyone else. Our social perception varies and different anthropologist end up writing different theses or, if studying the same subject, emphasizing different phenomena. There are countless ways in which my research subject could have been studied, and perhaps different scholars would have come to slightly or even significantly different conclusions[31]. The anthropological interpretation process is affected by infinite factors within and outside the researcher. Perhaps the fact that at the time of the fieldwork I was an academic 29-year-old non-religious male from Eastern Finland affected my interpretation of Aurovillians and Tamils. Maybe the different cultural environment, fluctuating state of health, high temperature, flora and fauna, spicy diet, loud sounds and strong smells of India skewed my perception. Perhaps my explicit and implicit ideologies channeled my research in a certain direction.

René Gothóni emphasizes the significance of empathizing with the subjects of study in fieldwork. Gothóni himself studied pilgrims on Mount Athos in Greece and slowly shifted from the position of a detached observer to the posi-

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27 In this thesis I have protected the identities of my informants. Thus they have been given aliases. See also the code of anthropological fieldwork by American Anthropological Association in WWW2 which I have done my best to follow.

28 See e.g. Fisher & Marcus 1986.

29 Anttonen 1999: 23–26.

30 Junkala 1999, 192.

31 Cf. ibid., 194–195.

tion of the pilgrim as he deeply experienced the same kind of religious emotions his subjects did. However, Gothóni also emphasizes the ability to regain the role of the researcher after fieldwork.[32] Self-reflection of the researcher has often been thought of as an aid to objectivity. I do admit that my personality has affected my interpretations of Tamils and Aurovillians. Unfortunately, I did not achieve as deep a level of emphatizing as Gothóni did, not with people of Kuilapalayam nor with Aurovillians. Simply put, Aurovillians were sometimes hard for me to understand and Tamils even harder, and thus no complete and "perfect" interpretation was possible by me – or would be by anyone, not even if the researcher is willing to list personal properties that might or might not have affected their research. As Steedman says, knowledge cannot be separated from the knower[33], and I am aware of the fact that here we are dealing with *my* knowledge of Auroville and Kuilapalayam.

Needless to say, I did suffer from the usual problems of doing research in an unfamiliar surrounding: I had difficulties breaking the ice, I was lonely and often irritated. Depending on the day, I felt like the celebrity or the clown of the village. In Auroville I often felt ignored as I by no means was the only scholar studying the community and asking Aurovillians self-explanatory questions. Sometimes I felt like I was treated as an exalted being in the village and my interviewees wanted to please me with their answers. Occasionally I realized I had not not acted discreetly enough or I had made a fool out of myself.[34] However, in my opinion, the study itself, the coherence of the text, the level of analysis and consistency are more significant evidence of the researcher's position on the imaginary line between objectivity and subjectivity. Suffice it to state that I am cognizant of the problem of subjectivity in anthropology and particularly in my research.

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the way the members of two different communities view "us" and "them." My thesis is inspired by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a highly debated text that concentrates on European Orientalism, a discourse of long tradition comprehending vast research material. "Eastern" – not to mention Indian or Tamil – Occidentalism is a subject that has been much less studied. This imbalance seems to be reflected in my thesis also. Auroville was a community that had a relatively well recorded history and an extensive media archive on which to draw for a thesis like mine. The villagers of Kuilapalayam, however, had only their (translated) voices to contribute to this study. Thus the Aurovillian discourse has received more versatile coverage.

Nevertheless, although in my thesis the representation of Aurovillian material is slightly more extensive than that of Kuilapalayam material, I hope the reader will not find the setting too imbalanced. Furthermore, as I attempt to describe certain discursive formations and thus sets of representation, I refrain, at least to some extent, from suggesting what the "reality" behind the discourses is. In other words, I am not claiming to know nor do I even suggest

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32 Gothóni 1997. See also Gothóni 1993 & 2000.
33 Steedman 1991, 53.
34 Cf. e.g. Reddy 1993, 11–13 & Eriksen, 14–15.

how the Others presented in this thesis should be more correctly viewed. However, I am attempting to analyze why certain hegemonic discursive patterns have evolved among the subjects of this study. Furthermore, as Edward Said's *Orientalism* has been so widely defended and attacked in theoretical discussion and applied in academic research, I have attempted to comprehensively analyze that work and the ensuing debate over it. Furthermore I have found it important to discuss Orientalisms focusing on India as well as Occidentalism, the counterpart of Orientalism. Hence the theoretical part of this thesis is relatively extensive.

2 ORIENTALISM

Introduction

Although Said's view of Orientalism has been criticized as monolithic[35], Said obviously sees many variations and modes in the ways Europeans have constructed the Orient in their discourse. In his most general division, Said distinguishes between academic, general and corporate Orientalisms. In academic Orientalism, "[a]nyone who teaches, writes about or researches the Orient […] is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism." Said does acknowledge the vagueness of Orientalism as a term, and the negative connotations it has by association with European colonialism. Nevertheless, Said believes that academically Orientalism still lives on as congresses are held and books are written with the Orient as their focus and the Orientalists as their authority. Doctrines and theses are still being produced with the Orient or the Oriental as their subject.[36] I would dare to question whether, thirty-seven years after the publication of *Orientalism,* "the Oriental" is the subject of any thesis. Nevertheless, the stereotypes still live on, even in scientific discourse, let alone popular culture.

As a style of thought, Orientalism draws on the epistemological and ontological distinction between the Orient and the Occident. In general Orientalism, a great number of writers, of prose, poetry, political theory etc., Hugo, Dante and Marx amongst them have accepted the East-West distinction as a foundation for their theories, themes and descriptions of the Orient and its people. There is certain kind of exchange between academic and general Orientalism, and Said suggests that this exchange has been disciplined or even regulated. Finally, corporate Orientalism is materially and historically more defined than the other two meanings of Orientalism. Corporate Orientalism is the way Europe has ruled the Orient, and also how the Orient has been stated about,

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35 See e.g. Clarke 1997: 9–10; Dawn 1979; Lele 1994: 45–47 and Kopf 1980: 498–499.
36 Said 1995: 2.

reviewed and taught institutionally. It is as significant part of the "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[37]

Said also makes a distinction between latent and manifest Orientalism. Manifest Orientalism has been comprised of "the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology" etc. whereas latent Orientalism has been more a stable, unanimous and durable mode of thought[38]. In manifest Orientalism, the differences between Orientalist writers, their personal style and form of writing have been explicit, but the basic content of their writing, "the separatedness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability," has reflected the more or less unified latent Orientalism. Moreover, latent Orientalism and race classifications have supported each other, especially in the nineteenth century. The "second-order Darwinism" of Orientalism has seemed to justify the division of races into backward and advanced, and further, using the same binary typology, in terms of backward and advanced cultures and societies. The lesser civilizations have been thought to have suffered from biological determinism. Hence they have been seen as in need of moral-political admonishment and even colonization by Europeans. Orientalist discourse has been highly similar to the discourse relating to delinquents, the insane, women and the poor within Europe. They have all been deemed lamentably alien. Like other marginalized people, the Orientals have been *seen through* (not looked at) and analyzed as problems (not as citizens), and confined or taken over. As Said states, whenever something was designated as Oriental, the act included an evaluative judgment. "Since the Oriental was a member of a subject race, he had to be subjected […]."[39]

To Said, latent Orientalism seems to have been a significantly male-oriented world-view. The Orientalist gaze in general has had sexist blinders rendering Oriental women objects of a male power-fantasy. Oriental women have been seen as unlimitedly sensual, lacking in rationality and, most importantly, willing. Said claims that the male conception of the world has made the Orientalist discourse "static, frozen and fixed eternally.[40]" Thus also, the Orient has had no possibility of development, and the Orient and the Oriental could never be seen as transforming and dynamic entities. In a way, the Orient – like a woman to a man – has been the weak and inferior partner. The Oriental has needed the Orientalist to be animated. The feminine Orient has been waiting for European penetration and insemination by colonization.[41]

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37 Ibid.: 3. Said also sees many differences between Orientalisms from one European nation to another. For example, see p. 224–226 for British and French Orientalisms.

38 One might say that latent Orientalism is sort of a more stabile subtext of the more labile manifest Orientalism.

39 Said 1995: 206–207.

40 It should be noted that Heehs 2003: 169–171 blames Said's view of Orientalism for the same. Heehs also sees a paradox in the relationship between the seemingly changing manifest Orientalism and the ever-static latent Orientalism. In his opinion, the way in which Said and his epigones criticize the essentializing of the Orient is itself an essential category.

41 Said 1995: 207–219.

Said boldly claims that Orientalism has significantly – but not necessarily categorically – imprisoned the Orient so that it "was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action." The discourse has been there whenever the peculiar entity of the Orient has been in question. The Orient as well as the Occident have been and still are man-made. In a way the Orient could even be seen as a surrogate or underground Self of Europe, giving strength and identity to European culture. The West and the East as European ideas have a long tradition behind them including certain ways of thinking, imaging and vocabulary which give the ideas "reality and presence in and for the West." Obviously there *is* an Orient, a geographical area that has its reality outside Western imagery, and this Orient is *not* a creation without corresponding reality. The Orient is not *essentially* an idea, because there are peoples, nations and cultures that are situated in the area called the Orient. The lives of these peoples have histories and customs, and a reality that is something beyond the scope of European imagery. Said acknowledges the existence of a "real" Orient, but in examining Orientalism he is not interested in whether the discourse is true in relation to the Orient of reality. Instead, Said's purpose is to study the "internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient […] despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient."[42] The fact that Said is not giving any options to the Orientalism he so intensely criticizes has, not surprisingly, caused frustration in the academic circles defending Orientalist disciplines but has also given rise to at least as many comments aiming to fortify Said's position.[43]

For Said, the academic study of cultures, ideas and histories has to involve the examination of their power configurations. The relationship of the Occident and the Orient is one of power and hegemony that is manifested in complex ways and in varying intensities. The Orient was "Orientalized" by Westerners, Said claims, not only because it was *found* to be Oriental, but also because it could be *made* Oriental. The foreign, wealthy, dominating European writers could tell their readers how the Oriental was *typically* Oriental, without letting the subject being described speak for himself.[44] The Orientalist immersed in the discourse had the power to define the Orient and its people without significant counter-discourse from the Orient's side[45]. However, Said warns his readers not to think of Orientalism as just a system of mere lies or myths about the Orient. For Said, Orientalism is more valuable as a sign of Western power over the Orient than as a scientific discourse corresponding with reality (which is what Orientalists have claimed it to be). The "sheer knitted-together strength" of the discourse, its connections to socio-economic and political institutions, and its strong, durable foundations are something Said seems to be in awe of. Some-

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42 Ibid.: 3–5.

43 For example, see Porter 1994; Bhatnagar 1986: 5–6; Joseph 1980: 948; Rassam 1980: 508; Savolainen 1993; Clifford 1988: 259 and Turner 1997: 31 & 101–102.

44 Here Said gives an example with Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan who never spoke for herself in his text but still represented for him the model of the Oriental woman.

45 One could also say that the Orientalist immersed in the discourse was power*less* to define the Orient and its people because he was confined by the restricted terms of Orientalism.

thing this powerful and durable cannot be just a collection of lies. Material investment has been essential in creating the body of theory and practice of Orientalism and, consequently, in forming "an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness" and into general culture.[46]

Hence, Orientalism for Said is a form of cultural hegemony at work. Some cultural forms predominate over others, just as some ideas are more influential than others. Said draws on Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, a form of cultural leadership, to understand Orientalism's strength and durability. The idea of Europe as "us" and non-Europeans as "them" (who "we" are against) is never far from Orientalism. The notion of European culture and identity being superior to their non-European counterparts is "precisely what made [European] culture hegemonic in and outside Europe." Needless to say, this European hegemony has affected Orientalist ideas about the Orient, "themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness […]." The European observer in the Orient has never lost the upper hand to the Oriental, claims Said. The European has gone to the Orient, has been present there because he has been *able* to, and has experienced the Orient in a way that has met little resistance from the Orient's part. From the late eighteenth century onwards the Orient that could be displayed, theorized, and reconstructed emerged under the umbrella of Western hegemony, placing Western consciousness at the center of thought. There was a mass of material with entrenched presuppositions as to European superiority on which the individual writers, the pioneering Orientalists elaborated.[47]

It is indispensable to note that for Said, Orientalism is not only a positive Western doctrine about the Orient of a certain era, but is also an academic tradition with significance influence *and* a part of *popular* Western culture, taking in travel literature, business, governmental institutions, military activities, natural historians, pilgrims and so on. To Westerners, academic and non-academic, the

> Orient is a specific kind of knowledge about specific places, peoples, and civilizations. For the Orient idioms became frequent, and these idioms took firm hold in European discourse. Beneath the idioms there was a layer of doctrine about the Orient; this doctrine was fashioned out of the experiences of many Europeans, all of them converging upon such essential aspects of the Orient as the Oriental character, Oriental despotism, Oriental sensuality, and the like. […] *[E]very European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.*[48]

Orientalism has borrowed many strong ideas and doctrines prevailing in the surrounding culture. Said describes how the Orient was and is studied linguistically, racistically, and with Freudian, Spenglerian and Darwinist applications. Even

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46 Said 1995: 5–6.

47 Ibid.: 7–8.

48 Ibid.: 203–204. Emphasis added. However, immediately after Said's rather judgmental last sentence comes an apology as Said reminds us that *all* human societies have offered the individual mostly imperialist, racist and ethnocentric tools to deal with "other" cultures. Orientalism, for Said, is understandable – although not necessarily justified – because it represents common human characteristics, but with a significant element of political domination in addition.

though Said makes use of various types of literature and the material is massive, his work is far from a complete history of Orientalism. This "failing," as Said calls it, he is very conscious of. Said's purpose is to describe a part of the fabric of Orientalism during a certain time span[49], while at the same time only suggesting that there is a larger whole.[50]

The Realm of Orientalism

Epistemological Questions

Edward Said designates himself a professional humanist. According to Said, the works of a humanist are not usually thought of as involved in anything political because the results of his work are not relevant to political reality. However, the reality of humanism is more problematic than it seems, because the background and environment of the scholar affect his research, and the belief in "true knowledge" veils the politics of knowledge-production. The practitioners of human studies should not ignore the fact that they are involved in the field as humans with certain defining circumstances. For Said, this fact becomes even more significant when studying the Orient or colonized countries, or examining earlier research about them. Said claims that a European or an American experiences the Orient first of all as a representative of Western society, and only secondly as an individual. This particular tendency of involvement and experience has its roots deep in the Homeric era. Europeans and Americans have had political interests in the Orient, but as Said claims, it has been *the culture* mixed with "brute political, economic, and military rationales […] [that has made] the Orient the varied and complicated place that it obviously was in the field I call Orientalism." [51] Said goes on to elaborate on Orientalism in the following paragraph. For him, Orientalism is *not*

> a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the Orient; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot to hold down the 'Oriental' world. It is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of 'interests' which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in

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49 However, one must note that at times it seems that Said sees Orientalism as something more "eternal" or essential than simply a phenomenon occurring during a "certain time span." For example, in Said 1995: 11, Said claims Orientalism has been around "almost since the time of Homer." Although Said acknowledges the dynamism and change in Orientalism, it seems that, at least sporadically, he presumes the existence of a rather changeless and hard core in the discourse.

50 Ibid.: 22–24.

51 Ibid.: 9–11.

> some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistic or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do or understand as 'we' do). Indeed, […] Orientalism is – and does not simply represent – a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world.[52]

To Said, Orientalism is a cultural and political fact(or), and what can be said about the Orient is limited by the discourse, although there are nuances and personal elaborations in expressions. Orientalist texts exist in a certain context, and intertextuality and rhetorical styles define the outer limits of creativity. Nonetheless, Said claims the Orientalist writers have thought their texts to have emerged from an unpolluted mind. Certainly there have been different ideologies and even opposing views expressed within the Orientalist discourse, and trends of different eras have affected the writers. Yet, although different writers might disagree with each other on certain matters, their ideological, ethical and even racial underpinnings have been more or less shared.[53]

Said's purpose in *Orientalism* is to study the dynamics of the interplay between political power and authors, or to be more exact, the reciprocity between the significant political concerns of the great Western empires (i.e. British, French and American) and individual Orientalist authors in the intellectual and imaginative realm of the empires.[54] Said elaborates on the questions that are raised by the political study of Orientalism:

> What other sorts of intellectual, aesthetic, scholarly, and cultural energies went into the making of an imperialist tradition like the Orientalist one? How did philology, lexicography, history, biology, political and economic theory, novel-writing, and lyric poetry come to the service of Orientalism's broadly imperialist view of the world? What changes, modulations, refinements, even revolutions take place within Orientalism? What is the meaning of originality, of continuity, of individuality, in this context? How does Orientalism transmit or reproduce itself from one epoch to another? In fine, how can we treat the cultural, historical phenomenon of Orientalism as a kind of *willed human work* – not of mere unconditioned ratiocination – in all its historical complexity, detail, and worth without at the same time losing sight of the alliance between cultural work, political tendencies, the state, and the specific realities of domination?[55]

An issue that has raised a lot of questions is the fact that in *Orientalism*, Said focuses only on British, French and American Orientalism, and within this realm on the Orientalists' experiences of the Near Orient, mainly of Arabs as a people and Islam as a religion. To Said, the quality, consistency and mass of Orientalism in these three Western nations was above that of other European countries. Said

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52 Ibid.: 11–12.
53 Ibid.: 13.
54 Ibid.: 14–15.
55 Ibid.: 15. Emphasis added.

acknowledges that he has had to ignore other parts of the Orient and to concentrate on the Near East. To Said, the Near East is a significant focus mainly because of its long history as the Other of Europe. Said also leaves out Germany as an Orientalism-producing nation, because, as Said claims, German Orientalism was not tied up with colonial presence in a manner equal to that of French and British experiences in their colonies.[56] Many scholars have criticized Said's omission of Germany, mostly because of the significance of the sheer volume of German Orientalist texts.[57] To Said, the critique he has faced about the exclusion of German Orientalism is trivial[58]. Needless to say, a scholar has to outline his field of study, and so does Said. No doubt *Orientalism* would have been academically weightier with the inclusion of Germany and many other countries as sources of Orientalism, and of countries of the Far East – if not the whole of the "non-Western" world – as a target of Orientalism. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that Said's limited focus has not affected the validity of his argument.[59]

Authority, Domination and the White Man

> There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analyzed. All these attributes of authority apply to Orientalism, and much of what I do in this study is to describe both the historical authority in and the personal authorities of Orientalism.[60]

Said embarks on studying authority with a methodological device he calls *strategic location* which describes "the author's position in a text with regard to the Oriental material he writes about[.]" *Strategic formation*, on the other hand, is a more general concept used to analyze intertextual relationships, groups or even genres of texts which with their mass and density have acquired a sort of self-referential power inside the formation, and, consequently, even in the culture at large. A strategy is something an Orientalist writer has to have in order to control the

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56 Ibid.: 16–19. It should be noted that the contribution of German Orientalism (in the Saidian sense and as a scientific discipline) was very significant indeed, especially within Indology. However, Germany had no colonies in the Orient. Hence, Said could be and has been, relevantly criticized for holding colonialism as a prerequisite of Orientalism. However, as Bagchi 2003 discusses, German Orientalists in the Orient strongly identified with European colonialists and obviously perceived themselves as "us" with the colonialists against "them" of the Oriental peoples. I will return to this discussion later.

57 See e.g. Clarke 1997: 27; Warraq 2002; Clifford 1988: 266–268; Pollock 1994: 82; Heehs 2003: 174 and Turner 1997: 5. I will return to Said's critics in the next chapter.

58 Said 1985: 14.

59 However, Said might have been somewhat extravagant with the naming of his concept. "Orientalism" connotes the area called the Orient which means, depending on the definition, either the whole of eastern hemisphere or the countries east of the Mediterranean. As Said's focus is the Arabs and Islam and the representations of them, the title of the book might as well have been *Arabism* or *Islamism*. Then again, in my and many other scholars' view, the theses of *Orientalism* can indeed be, at least to some extent, applied to other parts of the Orient and Western constructs of them, and, more generally, to any Other(ing) implemented by a hegemonic "us."

60 Said 1995: 19–20.

overwhelming source material. The writer must *organize* the Orient, *locate* himself in relation to it, *translate* it into his text, *structure* and *imagine*, *thematize* it in order to contain it and, finally, to *represent* it or speak on its behalf. Every Orientalist writer draws on some Oriental precedent that serves as an authority for referral. A text about the Orient becomes affiliated with other Orientalist texts, with certain audiences and institutions, and, finally, with the Orient itself. To Said, the result of this ensemble of relationships is a formation that can be analyzed. Further, the formation is reinforced and authorized by its "presence in time, in discourse, in institutions."[61]

Said emphasizes the exteriority of an Orientalist text. An Orientalist writes about the Orient, but remains outside the Orient. The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation, where "the Orient is transformed from a very distant and often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar […]." The representation is dramatically immediate, and in being so, obscures the artificiality of the Orientalist-constructed Orient. It does not matter whether the text is academic or artistic: it is nevertheless not a "natural" depiction of the Orient. The texts have their own styles, settings, ways of narrative, historical and social circumstances. In Orientalism, the "real" Orient becomes displaced, and

> that Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient […]. Orientalism responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West. Thus the history of Orientalism has both an internal consistency and a highly articulated set of relationships to the dominant culture surrounding it.[62]

A significant issue in studying Orientalism is obviously the definition of "Oriental." In Said's view, the term has been used canonically by a wide range of writers, in works of scholarship, prose or poetry.

> [I]t had been employed by Chaucer and Mandeville, by Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, and Byron. It designated Asia or the East, geographically, morally, culturally. One could speak in Europe of an Oriental personality, an Oriental atmosphere, an Oriental tale, Oriental despotism, or an Oriental mode of production, and be understood. Marx had used the word, and now Balfour was using it; his choice was understandable and called for no comment whatever.[63]

As a concrete example with which to elaborate on the term "Oriental" and the related "knowledge over the Orient," Said presents Alfred Balfour's[64] speech on colonizing Egypt. Baconian themes of knowledge and power dominate Balfour's

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61 Ibid.: 20.
62 Ibid.: 20–21.
63 Ibid.: 31–32.
64 Balfour was a Conservative Member of Parliament belonging to highly intellectual, wealthy, aristocratic circles. He was also highly religious, and defended the significance of faith for science during the great Victorian struggle between science and religion. He was devoted to scientific and philosophical problems throughout his life. See e.g. Tomes 1997. Examining Balfour's statements Said uses archived quotations from Balfour's speeches to the House of Commons in *Parliamentary Debates* 1910 and Judd 1968.

remarks on the subject. To him, the British supremacy that justified occupation was not so much related to military or economic power but with *knowledge* over Egypt. The British were *able* to survey Egyptian civilization from its "ancient beginning" via its "civilizational glory" to its "decadent present." Knowledge, in this case, means rising above and "into the foreign and distant." It means scrutinizing a vulnerable object. In Orientalism, the object – the fact – is a fluid entity that changes as civilizations do, but in a fundamental ontological way it is stable. This knowledge gives authority to the knower, "[a]nd authority here means for 'us' to deny autonomy to 'it' – the Oriental country – since we know it and it exists, in a sense, as we know it." The British knowledge of Egypt in Britain *is* Egypt, and the burden of that knowledge is heavy. In Balfour's speech, Egyptian inferiority is taken for granted, and the blessing of the Egyptians is to have a superior nation like Britain to occupy them. Said notices that it never occurs to Balfour to let the Egyptians speak for themselves. It would be simply absurd. As Said reads Balfour, the "races" with which the British deal do not appreciate or even understand the good of being colonized. For Balfour, every Egyptian who does indeed speak for himself is a trouble-maker, an indecent native and an agitator unappreciative of England's altruistic act of occupation. Said goes on to describe the meaning of Balfour's "Oriental":

> If [Balfour] does not speak directly for the Orientals, it is because they after all speak another language; yet he knows how they feel since he knows their history, their reliance upon such as he, and their expectations. Still, he does speak for them in a sense that what they might have to say, were they to be asked and might they be able to answer, would somewhat uselessly confirm what is already evident: that they are a subject race, dominated by a race that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves. Their great moments were in the past; they are useful in the modern world only because the powerful and up-to-date empire have effectively brought them out of the wretchedness of their decline and turned them into rehabilitated residents of productive colonies.[65]

In Orientalist discourse, a sort of Platonic essence seems to have been attached to Orientals. This essence is exposed to Orientalist (scholarly or administrative) examination and understanding. Said makes observations upon Lord Cromer's[66] Orientalist wisdom about the Orient and the Orientals. For example, in Cromer's view the lack of accuracy was the main characteristic of the "Oriental mind," a fact that had made the Oriental degenerate into untruthfulness. In contrast, the European could reason without ambivalence. This quality was natural for the European of Cromer's imagination: the European was a logician and a skeptic by nature whereas the Oriental had a mind shadowed by asymmetry and he practiced reasoning in most slipshod ways. As Said construes Cromer, the Orientals *had* possessed rationality in their ancient past, but now they suffered from a general degeneration which had numerous manifestations in the Oriental mind and character:

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65 Said 1995: 33–35.

66 Lord Cromer (1841–1917), expert in the government of "eastern peoples," was in charge of British occupation of Egypt from 1883 on.

> Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, 'devoid of energy and initiative,' much given to 'fulsome flattery,' intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; […] Orientals are inveterate liars, the are 'lethargic and suspicious,' and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race.[67]

For the colonialist, the Oriental acted in ways diametrically opposed to the Europeans. Said claims that the Oriental was, tautologically, expected to act like an Oriental, and any deviation from the norm was seen as unnatural (e.g. Egyptian nationalism) or not of indigenous origin. This kind of view seemed to buttress justification of colonialism. In fact, Orientalism did not merely justify colonialization but paved the ground for it in advance.[68]

Obviously, people have always imagined there to be factors creating divisions between peoples and used their imagination to distinguish groups, peoples and nations from each other. In Said's view, "the absolute demarcation" of the Occident and the Orient developed over a period of centuries and the increasing contact brought about by discoveries, trade contacts and so on reinforced this demarcation. However, the most significant elements in defining the relation between the Occident and the Orient were the vastly increased systematic knowledge about of Orient in Europe and the colonial encounter reinforcing that knowledge. In addition, there was widespread popular fascination with alien, unusual and non-European ways of life, and this was exploited by the developing scholarship and a large body of popular literature.[69]

What distinguishes Orientalism from other stereotyping and "othering" discourses is the European position of strength or even domination in relation to the Orient. "The weak Orient" was contrasted with "the powerful Europe," although the relationship was often disguised in admiring the "greatness" of the – often ancient – civilizations of the Orient. But there is no denying that Orientalism has valued Europe more highly in almost every aspect proposed for comparison, whether it be politics, culture or religion.[70] The rational, virtuous and mature European, it was supposed, has been able to see that the irrational, depraved (fallen) and childlike Oriental is living in a world that is organized and has a certain national, cultural and epistemological coherence of its own. Yet, the intelligibility of the Oriental world is not the Oriental's credit, but an outcome of Western manipulation of knowledge in many complex patterns, creating an identity for the Orient and yet for Western use. The knowledge of the Orient, in a way, has created the Orient and the Oriental for Europe. As a result, the Oriental has become something one can judge, study, discipline and illustrate, and, hence, contain and represent.[71]

In Said's view, many white men colonialists equated the color of their skin with a "superior ontological status" and the power to rule the rest of the world.

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67 Baring & Cromer 1908: 146–167 in Said 1995: 38–39.
68 Said 1995: 39.
69 Ibid.: 40.
70 One must, of course, take the romantic Orientalists into account, who, at least in their rhetoric, held many aspects of Oriental cultures to be superior to Europan ways. The Romantics will be discussed later in the text.
71 Said 1995: 40.

Being a White Man was self-confirming. "One became a White Man because one was a White Man." It was a destiny that left little time for seeking causal explanations from history. At the same time, White Man was an idea and a reality. With this mode of existence came a certain code of action and feeling. In addition to being regulated by norms of behavior suitable for distinguished white male gentlemen, being a White Man meant specific judgments and evaluations. It was a very concrete way of being-in-the-world, incorporating a policy towards the world, and it was expressed, diffused and implemented in institutional forms like colonial governments and commercial establishments. The White Man *ruled*, and took hold of reality, language and thought. Only an Occidental could speak of Orientals and only the White Man could identify and designate the nonwhites. Typologies distanced the nonwhite from the white, and traditions and education kept the Oriental/colored in his separate place for the Occidental/white to study him.[72]

Said examines Orientalist experiences of the Arabs, and notices that White Man has always been the observer distancing himself and his kind from the Other who, in the process, was deprived of any traces of individuality, cleansed of anything that suggested annoying exceptions to the imagined collective mind and denied the normal processes of history. The history of the Arabs had only served the Arab to "refine [him] down to his quintessential attributes, and to tire him out morally in the process." The Arabs had had a timeline filled with experiences that had produced no wisdom. The collective Arab entity had remained the same. The White Man's "*the* Arab" was epistemologically defined, and avoided the distractions of experience. Naturally, racial theory, rising imperialism and the incomplete and inadequately assimilated sciences reinforced each other. Thus, the image of *the* Oriental produced by this conglomeration was almost totally undisputed. As Said says, one could study the ancient Oriental civilizations only because

> a white specialist with highly refined scientific techniques could do the sifting and reconstructing, and […] because a vocabulary of sweeping generalities (the Semites, the Aryans, the Orientals) referred not to a set of fictions but rather to a whole array of seemingly objective and agreed-upon distinctions.[73]

Biological "truths" in numerous socio-biological and Darwinist volumes concurred as to the (in)abilities of the Orientals. There was a deductive chain from distinct languages to the similarly distinct minds, cultures and capacities of the users. Ontological and empirical truths combined with the study of origins, development, character and destiny gave these distinctions validity. The differences between races and civilizations were seen as radical and indissoluble. The typologies determined the ways in which races and civilizations were constructed. The "discovered" origins attributed to peoples their eternal essences as compelled the acceptance of a vision of difference. Things in common between human groups were dismissed, and polarities *within* groups were reduced to the

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72 Ibid.: 226–228.
73 Ibid.: 229–233.

immutable origins. Joy, suffering, political organization and so on were determined by the essence of the group. Thus, there was *Arab* joy, *the Oriental* mode of production, *the Indian* mind, *Asiatic* superstition and so forth. Any contemporary native element of behavior could be assigned to its origins, whose definition then became reinforced, which in turn reinforced the *discipline* of Orientalism. No Oriental could advance in time and outrun the effect of his origins, and, as Said says, "no Semite could ever shake loose the pastoral, desert environment of his tent and tribe." All manifestations of actual Oriental life could and should be seen in the explanatory context of the category of "the Oriental."[74]

Orient, Occident and Orientalism in Change

The interwar period manifested signs of a will to independence throughout the European colonies in the Orient. The Orient rebelled against European domination and thus constituted a challenge to Western power over it and to Western spirit and knowledge. Moral questions about Europe's encroachment in the Orient, European treatment of Orientals, Oriental nationalist movements and so forth arose and became more delicate and acute. Hence Orientalist knowledge of the Orient came under reconsideration. Orientalists were accused of not understanding the Orient, a failing which was thought to have produced feelings of rebellion among the Orientals. Now Europeans would have to penetrate native societies with more vigor and better perception and discover their fundamental values so as to offer European understanding, help and, of course, products. In its suffering, the Orient threatened Europe. A transformation of Orientalism was needed, and indigenous political insurgencies would have to be handled, and colonies administered with more sensitivity, since the White Man had almost an apocalyptic civilizing mission. For example, after World War II, Oriental literature became more respected *per se*, and not only for its use in European colonialism. Orientalism as an academic discipline was thought to widen Western vision, not only to serve colonialism. As the demands for native independence grew, the notion of "natural" colonization and the "need" for European enlightenment in the Orient diminished. But the perception that the West and the East were two separate entities remained dominant.[75]

To go back a few decades, Said describes how using "types" as an analytical device and seeing familiar things in new ways was an "important and methodologically formative cultural force" in the postwar period in Orientalism. Weber, Durkheim, Lukacs, Mannheim etc. introduced the new idea. Weber entered the Orientalists' realm and was affected by the nineteenth-century discourse of East/West ontological differences in economic and religious "mentalities." Islamology consequently received a sort of external confirmation from Weber (he never studied Islam) of Orientalist theories about economi-

74 Ibid.: 233–234.
75 Ibid.: 248–257.

cally/rationally incapable Arabs. The notion of types – Oriental, Islamic, Arab etc. – survived even after Maxime Rodinson's cliché-breaking *Islam and Capitalism* of 1966, and they are still flourishing, claims Said. Orientalism focusing on Islam has remained retrogressive, ideologically and methodologically backward, and does not take into account contemporary economic, social and political circumstances. This comparative lag in relation to other Orientalist fields was already apparent (to other Orientalists too) in the late nineteenth century. Today, as Said observes, although

> it is no longer possible to write learned (or even popular) disquisitions on either 'the Negro mind' or 'the Jewish personality,' it is perfectly possible to engage in such research as 'the Islamic mind,' or 'the Arab character' […].[76]

Still, in the interwar period Orientalism seemed to hold on to the notion that the problems of humankind could be separated into Occidental and Oriental. As Said says, "[i]t was believed, then, that for the Oriental, liberation, self-expression, and self-enlargement were not the issues that they were for the Occidental." For example, a Muslim was thought to resist change (as the Orientalist studying Islam did). To Said, Orientalism even seemed to resist the attempts at mutual comprehension between the East and the West and the modernizing of gender roles. So deep was the resistance to change, especially among Orientalists studying Islam that their apocalypse, Said polemically states, was not the destruction of Western civilization, but the destruction of the barriers between the East and the West. Changes (e.g. nationalism) in Muslim areas were opposed by Orientalists, because, so it seems to Said, they would have made Islam less Oriental and more similar to the West. Some Orientalists even seemed to be speaking for the Islamic orthodox community, against secular nationalism.[77]

As an example of a modern Orientalist view of Islam and Muslims, Said examines Louis Massignon[78] (1883–1962), a pivotal figure in awakening Western interest in Islamic studies. Said commends Massignon for his "overwhelming intelligence," and "the sheer genius and novelty" of his thought. Although Massignon sympathetically looked for a synthesis of the East and the West, he tended to polarize what he thought as two roughly and essentially opposed quantities, the Europe of modernity and the Orient of ancient tradition. Massignon was a relentless critic of colonialism[79] and very sympathetic towards Islam and Muslims, whom he nonetheless refused to see as heterogeneous people. The Oriental, for Massignon, was not capable of understanding or appreciating himself, and it was partly Europe's fault that the Oriental had "lost" his religion and philosophy. The responsibility of France was to defend the Mus-

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76 Ibid.: 259–262.

77 Ibid.: 260–263.

78 Among other subjects, Massignon studied Islamic martyrdom and mysticism; see Massignon & Kraus 1957 and Massignon 1997.

79 Massignon particularly disliked the British, whom he saw as expansionists with immoral economic policies and an out-dated political philosophy. However, the French, on the other hand not surprisingly were in Massignon's opinion more modern and were engaged in a quest to search the Orient for their lost spirituality and traditional values.

lims and their traditional culture, because they were on the verge of anarchy and collective suicide. Said emphasizes that no scholar, even a genius like Massignon, can resist the pressure of scholarly tradition. Although Massignon's texts were refined and sympathetic, they still repeated the ideas of French Orientalists.[80]

In Said's view, Orientalism faced new challenges after the Second World War. By the 1950s, most of the Orient had gained its independence from the West, but had to face new imperial powers, the Soviet Union and the United States. No longer was Orientalism faced with a passive, stagnant Orient, but an Orient that was politically armed. Hence, Orientalism followed three different paths. Some Orientalists pretended nothing had happened and stuck with the old Orientalist discourse. Others, who believed that nothing changes in the Orient but nevertheless saw the changes happening, had to interpret Oriental upheaval as arising from people who were not "real" Orientals. Only a minority of Orientalists dispensed with the traditional discourse and started to revise their disciplines. The Orientalist crisis revolved around outdated methods: Orientalists were still trying to study concepts like "Islam" without considering the material, political and sociological context. Colonialism and other worldly circumstances were still discarded in the analysis as insignificant factors that would only complicate the study. The cases where indigenous Oriental philosophers were studied were rare exceptions because "the Oriental mind" was thought to be unable to grasp abstract things. It was thought that Western political institutions could not be applied to Orientals; it was "pure Walt Disney" as the Orientalist H. A. R. Gibb stated in his lecture on the Arab mind in 1945. Or as Said laments,

> [w]hen some Orientals oppose racial discrimination while others practice it, you say 'they're all Orientals at bottom' and class interest, political circumstances, economic factors are totally irrelevant. [...] History, politics, and economics do not matter. Islam is Islam, the Orient is the Orient, and please take all your ideas about a left and a right wing, revolutions, and change back to Disneyland.[81]

Said summarizes the phenomena leading to modern or academic Orientalism. First there was the expansion of colonialism, considerably beyond Islamic lands, resulting in an increase in popular and scientific literature, missionary work and administration in foreign lands. European horizons were expanded but Europe remained at the center of things. Hence Eurocentrism prevailed. However, a more knowledgeable attitude towards the Other was gradually adopted. This was due to various experiences of travelers, explorers and historians who could compare "civilizations." During the Renaissance, historians inflexibly viewed the Orient as a mostly hostile area. However, gradually, the writers of the eighteenth

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80 Said 1995: 269–272.

81 Ibid.: 104–107. Also, on p. 290, Said quotes Morroe Berger, professor of sociology and Near Eastern studies at Princeton who stated in *MESA Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (Nov. 1967) the following: "The contemporary Middle East […] has only in small degree the kinds of traits that seem to be important in attracting scholarly attention." Said mentions Berger as "an instance of how a learned perspective can support the caricatures propagated in the popular culture."

century started to experience Orient's bizarre phenomena with relative detachment, and tried to have first-hand contact with the Oriental source material. This process was more or less intended to help Europeans know themselves better by comparing their ways with those of the Orient. At first studying the Other used simple comparison as a method, but in the late eighteenth century sympathetic identification took over, or as Said says,

> [w]hat today we call historicism is an eighteenth-century idea; Vico, Herder, and Hamann, among others, believed that all cultures were organically and internally coherent, bound together by a spirit, genius, Klima, or national idea which an outsider could penetrate only by an act of historical sympathy.[82]

The sympathetic interpretations advocated in philosophy, political theory and art saw some hidden kinship through the doctrinal walls between the West and the East. Popular Orientalism was indeed often sympathetic and in vogue before and after the beginning of the nineteenth century, but when academic Orientalism gathered momentum, this "free floating Orient" that gave color to the European imagination, was severely curtailed. The new approach of classification, "the whole impulse to classify nature and man into types" associated with Linnaeus and Buffon, among others, emerged. A penchant for typification and "reducing vast numbers of objects to a smaller number of orderable and describable types" could be seen in the works of Kant, Diderot and others, and in the science of nature, anthropology and other generalizing disciplines.[83] This character typification helped the observing scientist to designate things and, as Foucault says, provide "a controlled derivation[84]." The types belonged to a system or a network of related generalizations. Physiological and moral characteristics were conjoined, and later identified with a genetic type.[85]

In conclusion, the four elements – colonial expansion, historical confrontation, sympathy and classification – were the phenomena of eighteenth century thought that created a foundation on which modern Orientalism as an institution depended and which led to contemporary Orientalism. These elements, at least to some extent, freed the Orient from European religious scrutiny, and secularized the Orientalist perspective as Europe in general was itself in the process of secularization. Moreover, the secularization of eighteenth century European culture (and thus the emergence of modern Orientalism) depended on the following interconnected elements. There was the expansion of the Orient, geographically mostly further eastward and temporally going further back, loosening the Christian, or, more specifically, the Biblical framework used to interpret the Orient. The deepening of the historical approach, which was also

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82 Said 1995: 116–118.
83 Ibid.: 118–119.
84 Foucault 1970: 138 & 144 in Said 1995: 119.
85 Said 1995: 119.

no longer so Biblical[86], promoted the quest to understand Europe by grasping its historical roots and cultural frontiers.[87]

At the same time the European conception of the Self and identity started to become more flexible when the same elements of identification could be seen in other regions and cultures as well. The bipolar setting of believers versus barbarian hordes became less rigid. Moreover, the classification of humanity was broadened beyond the Christian/pagan dichotomy when race, color, origin, temperament and character were introduced and focused on. However, the elements of secularization did not mean the abandonment of the old religious patterns of human history and destiny *altogether*. As Said claims, they were "reconstituted, redeployed, redistributed in the secular frameworks." Although the discourse was now secular, the impulse of modern Orientalism was religious, and the old supernaturalism had been naturalized. "[T]his impulse in Orientalism resided in the Orientalist's conception of himself, of the Orient, and of his discipline."[88]

Constructing Orientalism

Said sees Orientalism, in a sense, as a commonly held archive of largely unanimous information. The archive is bound together with relatively similar effective ideas and values. These ideas have given the Orientalists information on, for example, the Oriental mentality which has been used to explain the behavior of Orientals. The most important use of the archive has been to give Europeans – and Orientals – a regular and organized albeit constrained view of the world of the Orient. Orientalism has constrained even the most imaginative writers and their texts on the Orient. Orientalism has been, after all, a political vision of reality encouraging statements of difference between Europe/the West/"us" and the Orient/the East/"them." If there has been any interaction between the visions of the two worlds, it has always been the Westerner's privilege. As Said claims, the Westerner has been able to "penetrate," "wrestle with," and "give shape and meaning" to the mysteries of the Orient. Orientalism's conceptions of Western strength and Eastern weakness have been intrinsic to the discourse – as to any discourse that divides the world into different groups coexisting in interrelated tension. Here Said comes to the most important intellectual question evoked by Orientalism:

> Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly[?] […] [Is there] any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into 'us' (Westerners) and 'them' (Orientals)[?] For such divisions are generalities whose use historically and actually has been to

86 Incidentally, even Mohammed could be regarded, neutrally, as a historical figure – not as the satanic imposter as he used to be seen as.
87 Said 1995: 119–120.
88 Ibid.: 120–121.

> press the importance of the distinction between some men and some other men, usually towards not especially admirable ends. When one uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the end points of analysis, research, public policy […], the result is usually to polarize the distinction – the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western – and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies.[89]

In short, Orientalism has tried to compartmentalize thought into seeing the West and the East as essentially different entities. Said gives an intriguing example of Orientalist thought amongst American academics by presenting Harold W. Glidden's views[90] on the Arab world. Said is astounded by Glidden's four-page summary of the hundred million people and thirteen hundred years of the "Arab World." Gliddens refers only to four texts but still aims to uncover "the inner workings of Arab behaviour," which are aberrant to us, but normal to them. Glidden, in Said's words, claims the following: Arabs stress conformity and inhabit a shame culture with prestige systems attracting followers and clients. Only conflict makes Arabs function, and their prestige is based on the domination of others, creating a culture that praises revenge. Absolute group solidarity and rivalry go hand in hand in Arab society. The end justifies the means. Arabs live naturally, but in anxiety due to suspicion and distrust. They are egoistic, and feud is a normal state of life for them, while raiding is one of the main supports of economy.[91] Interestingly, this example is in no way exceptional in the discourse of Orientalism, even in its contemporary[92] modes.

Undoubtedly, as Said claims, there have been fundamental misrepresentations of Islam in the West. But Said goes on, again, to redeem Orientalism as he ponders the question whether there can be true representations of *anything*. Perhaps *all* representations are, of necessity, entrenched in language, culture and political context and shaped by institutions. If this is a fact, as Said believes it is, then

> we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth,' which is itself a representation. What this must lead us to methodologically is to view representations […] as inhabiting a common field of play defined for them, not by some inherent common subject matter alone, but by some common history, tradition, universe of discourse. Within this field, which no single scholar can create but which each scholar receives and in which then finds a place for himself, the individual researcher makes his contribution. Such contributions […] are strategies of redisposing material within the field; even the scholar who unearths a once-lost manuscript produces the 'found' text in a context already prepared for it […]. Thus each individual contribution first causes changes within the field and then promotes a new stability,

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89 Ibid.: 41–46.

90 In the 2/1972 issue of *American Journal of Psychiatry* presented in Said 1995: 48.

91 Said 1995: 48–49.

92 Although one must admit that due to increasing emphasis on "political correctness" in relating to other cultures, religions and ethnic groups, "the edge" of academic and popular Orientalist rhetoric has dulled somewhat in the few decades since *Orientalism*. However, there are still astonishingly numerous scholarly and semi-scholarly (not to mention popular) texts that are deeply Orientalist, essentializing, compartmentalizing, stereotypifying "the Asians, "the Indians," "the Muslims" etc. Obviously, the West is also a target of such othering, whether it is the imagined "superficial American" or "immoral Westerners" in general.

> in the way that on a surface covered with twenty compasses the introduction of a twenty-first will cause all the others to quiver, then to settle into a new accommodating configuration.[93]

There is a sort of discursive consistency in Orientalist representations. They form a cultural praxis, an set of possible statements about the Orient and owe to specific historical, intellectual and economic configurations. When an Orientalist produces a representation of the Orient, he does use a more or less unique style and even consciously contests some other Orientalist's view. Nevertheless, he also tells the reader what the Orient is capable of or should be like, and provides the Orientalist discourse with reinforcing elements and responds to "cultural, professional, national, political, and economic requirements of the epoch." To Said, Orientalists seem to function as parts of some kind of a standardized statement-producing system. They disseminate their representations into the "large mass of discursive formations" which, intertwined, result in the (Foucauldian) archive. However, this is not to dehumanize Orientalists, warns Said, or to reduce them to victims of vulgar determinism. Said respects the ability of Orientalists (especially Massignon) to add dimensions of their own personal productive capacity to the institutional basis of Orientalist discourse.[94]

Apparently to provide a contrast with the much admired Massignon, Said goes on to present another Orientalist, H. A. R. Gibb[95] (1895–1971) and his thoughts on Islam. Said claims Gibb equated Islam to the whole of Muslim life: to Islamic orthodoxy, to the community of believers, to the law, values and order of Muslims, to jihadists and to communist agitators in Muslim countries. Even new commercial banks in Egypt and Syria were products of Islam, not to mention advances in the literacy rate, schools, journalism and Westernization – all facts of Islam to Gibbs. Said also finds it strange that Gibb never exhibits the effect of colonialism on modern Islamic resistance. Furthermore, Gibb disregards differences in political systems while examining "Islamic" government: whether they are republican, feudal or monarchic does not matter to Gibb, as long as they are Islamic. Thus, Gibb's approach to Islam is metaphysical[96]. At least, as Said remarks, Gibb cannot tell where in time and space Gibb's Islam is situated, although his Islam has clear and distinct meaning. In his *Modern Trends in Islam*[97] Gibb suggests, as traditional Orientalist do, that Orientalism has the ability to reconstruct and reformulate the Orient. The Orient cannot do so for itself. Ontologically, Gibb's Islam was a phenomenon *ahead* of the present day, or, as Said states,

> [w]hat Gibb wrote was in one sense temporally ahead of Islam, in that he allowed that at some point in the future Islam would be able to say what it could not say now.

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93 Said 1995: 272–273.
94 Ibid.: 273–274.
95 Gibb studied Arabic literature, and compiled an encyclopedia of Islam. He also examined the impact of "Western civilization" on Muslim culture. See e.g. Gibb 1957, 1960 and 1963.
96 Even so, Gibb conveyed his observations as if they were knowledge. Massignon, on the other hand, indulged in explicitly metaphysical speculations, Said clarifies.
97 1947 in Said 1995: 282.

> In another important sense, however, Gibb's writings on Islam predated the religion as a coherent body of 'living' beliefs, since his writings were able to get a hold of 'Islam' […] *before* their faith became a matter of worldly argument, practice, or debate.[98]

This gives Gibb's Islam a status that is more than or above the actual Islam. Gibb seems to imply that only the Western expert can understand Islam's phenomenologically reduced being. This goes well with the general Orientalist tendency since, from the beginning of the history of Orientalism, the Orient has rarely been allowed to speak for itself. The observations, texts and experiences of the Orient have been credible only after a Western expert has filtered and refined them in his work. Orientalists have rarely felt any discontinuity between Oriental phenomena and the interpretation of them in their texts. There has been no dislocation, because Oriental reality and the Orientalist text made out of it have been interchangeable, mutually reducible.[99]

98 Said 1995: 282–283.
99 Ibid.: 283.

3 THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF *ORIENTALISM*

Said's Theoretical Authorities

What Said is trying to show in his thesis in general is that society, worldly circumstances and cultural traditions constrain even the most eccentric perceptions of the world. Institutions like schools, libraries and governments stabilize our views, making both learned and imaginative writing captive to limited imagery, assumptions and intentions. Said's point is that even a "science" like Orientalism and its advances are less objective than we think. Thus, Orientalism is affected by a sort of economy that makes the discipline concentrating on the Orient a coherent subject matter. Orientalism has a corporative structure, the result of which has been a consensus on defining Orientalistically correct statements and texts. An Orientalist has drawn on this correctness in writing his theses, which for their part have added to the pressure of correctness, forming a sort of vicious circle or self-perpetuation of correct discourse on new writers and scholars. Hence, in Said's view,

> Orientalism can […] be regarded as a manner of regularized (or Orientalized) writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient. The Orient is taught, researched, administered, and pronounced upon in certain discrete ways. […] The Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire. […] [Orientalism's] objective discoveries […] are and always have been conditioned by the fact that its truths, like any truths delivered by language, are embodied in language […].[100]

Here Said goes on to quote Nietzsche's view of truth as "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms" that are enhanced and transposed poetically and rhetorically as a sum of human relations. This then in time becomes canonical and compelling, although it is basically an illusion whose origin

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100 Ibid.: 201–202.

people have forgotten.[101] This view of truth is rather nihilistic, and it must be emphasized that Said uses it only to draw attention to the way the Orient has existed in Western awareness as a word with a wide field of meanings springing up from it. The word has also had its connotations that have hardly referred to the "real" Orient but to the field surrounding the word.[102] Interestingly, Said has been vastly criticized[103] for this particular quotation of Nietzsche although the it seems to have been intended only as a polemical device, not as a statement of Said's own conviction. Nevertheless, one would not be exceedingly bold in claiming that the Saidian view of truth is, at least occasionally, close to Nietzsche's nihilism.

In constructing his theory of Orientalism, Said acknowledges his debt also to Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci. One might say that Said's combining of two distinctively different fields, the post-structuralist Foucault and the Marxist Gramsci, is over-challenging, but at least it is safe to say the combination was one of the reasons *Orientalism* became such a phenomenon.[104]

Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony is useful for Said's purposes because Gramsci sees political society reaching into civil society and the cultural areas within it to saturate them, like the academic realm, with "significance of direct concern" to them.[105] Although Gramsci's writings[106] were not necessarily intended to constitute a total philosophical system, his questioning is indeed philosophically significant. Gramsci analyzes the historically transient societal prerequisites that prevail when certain conceptions of reality form their concrete content. In Gramsci's philosophy, social context and historicity are the founding factors of all knowing. To ignore these factors is to cover up the organic relationship between truth and power. However, Gramsci is not claiming that conceptions (like the East and the West) are not reasonable even though they are conventional and historical constructions. They are rational creations and measured by practice. The artificiality and contractuality of conceptions do not necessarily imply anything negative or trivial. In influencing many minds they are elements of a most impressive historical reality – they are indeed "the truth" for many. Thus, in a way, even historical-cultural constructions remain "objectively real[107]," although they are not neutral conceptions of just anyone but stem from the ruling classes, claims Gramsci. Here we come to the most important concept of Gramsci's thought: hegemony. The accepted conceptions of the significant majority are hegemonic conceptions. For example, "the East" and "the West" are not only the

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101 Nietzsche 1954: 46–47 in Said 1995: 203.
102 Said 1995: 203.
103 See e.g. Savolainen 1993: 19; Clifford 1988: 262–263 and Ahmad 1994: 164–165.
104 See Chrisman & Patrick 1994: 6 and Inden 1992: 2.
105 Said 1978: 11 in Rajan 1986: 23.
106 Gramsci's most significant writings – thousands of pages of notes edited posthumously – were written in the period from 1929 to 1935 while he was imprisoned in Italy. See e.g. Gramsci 1971 or 1996.
107 Although one might justifiably question the use of "objectively" in Gramsci.

way of thinking of the European elite, but of a mass of people greatly exceeding them in number. For example, Japan is not the farthest East only for a European, but also for a Californian *and* for a Japanese person himself. In addition, the same Japanese person, because of the influence of English political culture, calls Egypt "the *Near* East."[108]

To Gramsci, human nature is not an entity or an element inside the person. It is a combination of material powers and the powers of the person. Thus to control material powers is the most important way to control personality. Also, as Gramsci emphasizes, philosophy cannot be separated from politics. Choosing a worldview or criticizing one is a political act. A critique, as a political act, requires tracing the earthly and worldly origin of scientific and commonsensical truths. Consequently, critique is directed at the truth-producing institutions and the practices of a society. But mere criticism is not enough for Gramsci. One has to contemplate and implement strategies of practical intervention. Gramsci's big question is: how to penetrate and change the truth-producing institutions and found new institutions and new practices? Here counter-hegemonic action comes into play, leading to the much needed politics of questioning and replacing existing "necessities" and "naturalities." However, it is necessary for a reader of Gramsci to remember that even a counter-hegemonic project does not possess the absolute truth. Gramsci acknowledges this and as a result emphasizes and re-emphasizes the value of good sound judgment and situation analysis. For Gramsci, the binarity of absolute truth and cynical nihilism is not the only option. Evaluation and re-evaluation, a dynamic way of being, and self-criticism are the ways of action of a counter-hegemonic movement.[109]

Dennis Porter contemplates Gramsci's influence on Said, and claims that something essential to the Gramscian concept of hegemony is ignored in *Orientalism*. After all, hegemony is a phenomenon that is in constant flux and has to be defended, changed and recreated because of pressures from within and without. This is the historic nature of hegemony in "an evolving sphere of superstructural conflict" – and it is missing in Said's interpretation of Orientalism.[110] This is a significant observation, as Said's *Orientalism* might indeed be seen as giving an image of a stagnant Orientalist discourse, unchanged from the times and society of Homer to Henry Kissinger's USA. However, as I have stated earlier, a close reader of Said might find a considerable amount of relevant evidence to justify at least a more moderate stand and discover the dynamism in the Orientalism Said describes[111].

In going further into Said's influences, it is fair to say that Michel Foucault "reinvented" Gramsci's perspective on truth and power. A discourse theory drawing on Foucault has many parallels with Gramscian thought, as both

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108 Lahtinen 1994: 13–14.

109 Ibid.: 14–16. One should be reminded that in *Orientalism* Said does not significantly explore potential or existing counter-hegemonic actions to Western Orientalism.

110 Porter 1994: 151–152.

111 E.g. Said's focus on the relationship between a changing and rebelling Orient and Orientalism.

Gramsci and Foucault uncover, in a persuasive way, the close relationship between truth and power. "Where there is truth, there lurks power," reminds Lahtinen[112], and like Foucault, Said does not separate knowledge from power[113].

Foucault's Power/Knowledge and Orientalism

Michel Foucault's analysis of knowledge and power is an important foundation of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said reveals a discourse of difference disguised as a neutral contrast of the Occident and the Orient. In its representations, the Orientalist discourse remolds the exotic and strange Orient into a manageable, controllable, and intelligible phenomenon that can be categorized, conceptualized and defined. Knowledge of the Orient subordinates it. The reality of the East has been endless in complexity, so Orientalism has had to reduce it to characters, constitutions and types of a definite order. Thus the Orientalist discourse has created a character typology that has produced contrasted pairs like "the rational Westerner" and "the irrational Oriental."[114]

Said believes the Foucauldian concept of discourse[115] is invaluable in identifying and studying the systematic discipline of Orientalism.

> [W]ithout examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism.[116]

Said establishes the unity and continuity of Western discourse on the Orient by using a convincing volume of written documents, parliamentary debates, official reports by colonial officers, scholarly texts, travel books, poetry and fiction. This approach seems to be useful, not only because it shows the unity of the vast Orientalist discourse, but also because it demystifies rigid distinctions of literary categories.[117]

Said goes on to describe situations that favor a textual attitude in Orientalist or any other discourse focusing on the Other. When humans are confronted

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112 Lahtinen 1994: 16.

113 On Said's Foucauldian treatment of knowledge/power, see e.g. Chrisman & Patrick 1994: 5–8 or Ludden 1994: 250–252. Incidentally, Ludden is not totally satisfied with Said's Foucauldian knowledge/power fusion, but would see analyzing Orientalism as more fruitful if knowledge and power were indeed separated. Thus the historicization of Orientalism would be more effective, and Orientalism would be found more diverse and vital than it is in Said's description. But, in Said's *Orientalism*, claims Ludden, the particulars *connecting* histories of imperialism and knowledge cannot be found.

114 Turner 1997: 21.

115 See Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2000) and *Discipline and Punish* (1979).

116 Said 1995: 3.

117 See e.g. Porter 1994: 153. It should be noted that in examining discourse Said, like Foucault, does not significantly distinguish between literary categories.

with something unknown and (thus) threatening that used to be distant, they apply their previous experiences of anything resembling what they are confronted with. For example, travel books alleviate the uncertainties of travel experiences. Interestingly, often the experiences of travelers do not match with their expectations of the country, that is, what they see and hear does not correspond with what their travel book said it would be like. Nevertheless, travel or other descriptive and informative literature on the Exotic does indeed hold great authority. It tells the reader what the country is, or even what kinds of emotional effects it produces. It is exceedingly interesting, as Said notes, that "people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes […]."[118]

Apart from the confrontation with essential strangeness, a second situation that favors the textual attitude is the success of an author. Said describes a simplified hypothetical situation where one reads a book about fierce lions. After encountering a fierce lion and thus confirming the writer's proposition, the reader is more encouraged to believe other books by the same author. If the author has also given advice on how to handle a fierce lion and his advice seems to work, he is impelled to expand his repertoire on the subject since he now seems to have more credibility among his readers. The writer might expound upon lion's fierceness in general, the origins of fierceness and so forth. As the focus of the text narrows from lions to lion's fierceness, it is possible that it will actually *increase* the fierceness of lion, and "force it to be fierce since that is what it is, and that is what in essence we know or can *only* know about it." Consequently, texts are attributed authority as the products of expertise. Academics, institutions and governmental organizations might draw on these texts of expertise, and thus increase their prestige. In a way, these texts can create knowledge, and, as Said says, even the reality they describe. This leads to conjoinment of knowledge and reality, and to a tradition – or a Foucauldian discourse – which in its material presence and weight of credibility acts as a source for other texts. These other texts then, in a way, grow out of it, and, eventually, themselves become part of the powerful discourse.[119]

Many readers of Said pay critical attention to Said's and his fellow (post-colonialist) theorists' *methods* as opposed to their *theses*. As Said's main influence is Foucault, a hostile critic of Said might blame him for a mere duplication of Foucault's project "to make Western man rigorously self-conscious about the furthest limits of his discourse," as Bhatnagar suggests. Nevertheless, in Bhatnagar's view, post-structuralist thinkers like Said are justifiably against any search for "a real origin" which is pure and essential. A genealogist rejecting metaphysics of such origin will find that there is no timeless or essential secret behind things – or that the only secret is that they have no essence. "What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity," claims Bhatnagar. His-

118 Said 1995: 93.
119 Ibid.: 93–94.

torical beginnings are "derisive and ironic, capable of undoing every infatuation." Thus, Foucault's point is against the search for origins because it is merely an essentialist project and militates against a proper sense of historicity.[120]

In Orientalism, the search for *the origin* tries to establish a canonical document which is authorized by scholarship. Certain narrative and representation implicate origins that give formal reassurance of the beginning, middle and end. Hence, Bhatnagar claims, Western identity is fabricated into coherence. "Western man" is thus posited as the beginning and the end of all knowledge which is grandly named Humanism. Bhatnagar quotes Foucault[121], to whom "[c]ontinuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject." In Bhatnagar's view Foucault's position, which opposes the dominant humanist tradition, is especially liberating for Said. He is not trying to speculate about some lost and pure origin that has existed before colonialism, and it is not necessary for him to set up a "real Orient" against fictive Orientalist texts.[122]

Said is not looking for a "real Orient" behind the Orientalist constructions, but focuses on the Orient as a Western discursive construct. In this light, criticism blaming Said for not giving alternatives to Orientalism loses its force. Said claims that Foucault's discourse differs from structuralist and deconstructionist approaches in its affirmative, progressive and energetic discoveries. Bhatnagar goes on to probe these discoveries, and describes Foucault's (and thus Said's) way of analyzing the relations of power and knowledge, that is, questioning the habitual ways of viewing the legitimate/illegitimate and its institutional models (e.g. the state):

> Foucault's intention is an analysis of power not from its universal and universalising origins but its origins in the other it represses and outlaws. The specific forms of resistance define and describe the specific configurations of power. To speak of power from the position of resistance to it, to valorize the perceptions of the resisting people or group is to take up a combative and subversive position against its influence. Consider for instance the flexible position it allows Said in the study of nineteenth-century philology. Said is able to violate the hermetically sealed space of philology and its claims of grandeur by recognising the power-relations hidden under its disinterested search for truth. […] The continuing prestige of a discipline like Orientalism or its parent-discipline nineteenth-century philology will not allow the decoding of its power-relations in the political language we speak. Said can describe the tyranny of colonial power only by gauging its productivity at the level where it is materialised temporally-spatially into a technology, and institution […].[123]

Said uses Foucault's original contribution to the materialist conception of discourse to argue about the development of certain institutional sites suitable for accommodating Orientalists. These sites require the Orientalists to systemize their practices and to dictate the schemata of the use of their acquired knowledge. Finally, these institutions prescribe – as Foucault has it – "the first law of what

120 Bhatnagar 1986: 3–5.
121 1972: 12 in Bhatnagar 1986: 5.
122 Bhatnagar 1986: 5–6.
123 Ibid.: 10–11.

can be said[124]." In Orientalism, the growth of institutional sites has led eventually to the habit of "infinite self-reference," as Said calls it. This has happened by the establishment of a mode of knowledge-production, including printing, translating, researching, and funding Orientalist material, and creating a sort of self-legislation of Orientalism.[125] Said also owes to Foucault his way of looking at language. Language gives permission and it "legislates and perpetuates discriminations of otherness and sameness" in a given society. Said only extends this idea of differences to imagined differences between societies.[126]

Michael Beard, a scholar of Arabic literature and language, presents an interesting heuristic parallel, in the experience of Virginia Woolf, to shed light on the Foucauldian Orientalism Said describes. Beard takes a look at Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*[127] and the problem of women writers who teach about women writers. In the novel, Woolf sets out for the British Museum Library to look for material for her lecture at a women's college. Woolf browses through the files to look for women under "W". Her subsequent consideration of the matter in a way foreshadows Foucault's concept of the archive. Beard reads Woolf and finds connections to Said:

> Rather than arbitrary knowledge the British Museum Library is discovered to preserve a particular shape into which information fits, and consequently the citations she finds to fill her notebook entitled 'women and poverty' distance or demean their subject: 'Conditions in the Middle Ages of, Habits in the Fiji Islands of, […] small size of brain of, profounder subconscious of, less hair on the body of, mental, moral and physical inferiority of […], Lord Birkenhead's opinion of […].'"[128]

The library Woolf describes presents no scope for seeing the female half of the world in any other way than through the compartmentalization laid down by male viewers. This asymmetry, to Beard, is analogous to those in the books of the library of Columbia University described by Said in *Orientalism* fifty years later. Only in this case the asymmetry exists between the world's divided halves, the Orient and the Occident. The whole problem lies in the role of the speaker: who speaks about what and for whom? Woolf noticed that it is not just doctors or biologists who feel authorized to speak as experts on women. It is men of all kinds whose only qualification is the mere fact that they are *not* women. When Woolf browsed through the letter M, she noticed that women do not write books about men.[129] This phenomenon has its counterpart in the Orientalist archive, because, as Said says, "no one is likely to imagine a field symmetrical to it called Occidentalism[130]."

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124 Foucault 1972: 100 in Bhatnagar 1986: 12–13.
125 However, Bhatnagar emphasizes the fact that knowledge, for Foucault, is never wholly reducible to the practice of power and, also, it is not the basis of power, although the two are highly intertwined.
126 Bhatnagar 1986: 12–13.
127 1957 in Beard 1979.
128 Woolf 1957: 28–29 in Beard 1979: 6.
129 Beard 1979: 6–7.
130 Said 1978: 50 in Beard 1979: 7.

Actually, there is a kind of Occidentalism, at least in today's Orient, comparable to some extent to Orientalism in the West[131]. In fact, if one were to apply one of Said's definitions of Orientalism and to the definition of Occidentalism, one could easily claim there indeed is Occidentalism in the Orient. Jus as Said defines Orientalism as "coming to terms with the *Orient* that is based on the *Orient's* special place in *European Western* experience[132]," one might contrastingly define Occidentalism as "coming to terms with the *Occident* that is based on the *Occident's* special place in *Asian Eastern* experience." Thus, in my view, it is safe to say different forms of Occidentalism have existed since there has been any interaction between "the East" and "the West." Obviously, the peoples of non-European or non-Western countries have "come to terms with the *Occident*" and have their discourse on the "white man," the "Europeans" or "Westerners." In my view, there are countless Occidentalisms (as there are Orientalisms), but what eventually distinguishes Said's Orientalism is, as Said claims, "the sheer knitted-togetherness" of the discourse. It also seems that Western Orientalism differs from non-European Occidentalism in its volume, coherence and hegemony – not to mention its ties to colonialism. Also, Said emphasizes the fact that there has been no westward movement of Eastern people as there have been the Westerners (individuals, institutions, administration etc.) going to the East, and the number of books written by Orientals about the West has been miniscule compared to the volume of Western literature about the East[133]. I will discuss Occidentalism in Chapter 4.

The Individual in Foucault and Said

One significant element separating Said from Foucault is the conception of the role of the individual within the discourse. Said believes in the power of an individual writer to act "upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism." Contrastingly, Foucault, in general, holds out little hope for the individual text or author. However, even though Said views the individual as being in a more powerful position than Foucault, he keeps open the possibility that the individual is significant perhaps only in the case of Orientalism.[134] The question a close reader of Said might ask is: why should Orientalism as a discourse be any different from other discourses in its significance for the effect of an individual writer? Said himself does occasionally seem to oscillate between his own view and the Foucauldian view of the in-

131 For examples of Occidentalism in the Far East and South Asia, see Korhonen 1996, Ning 1997 and Spencer 2003. For Occidentalism in Africa, see Nyamnjoh & Page 2002 and Thornton 2003.

132 This is Said's definition of Orientalism in Said 1995: 1. Emphasis added.

133 Said 1995: 204.

134 Ibid.: 23–24. Although Said seems very careful to state this possibility, it is not necessarily very prudent of him, at least when considering the fact that he does not elaborate on his statement.

dividual's effect on discourse. For example in examining Richard Burton[135] Said claims that the domination of Orientalism "overrules even the eccentricities of Burton's personal style." Despite this wavaring, Said eventually states that the purpose of his analyses is to "employ close textual readings whose goal is to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution."[136]

It is understandable that Said as a "liberal humanist" wants to believe in a self-conscious and self-controlling subject, whereas Foucault rejects the notion of a subject that has independence. In other words, Said does not want the "death of the subject" but tries to save the individual writer or scholar as a subject in control of himself at least to a certain extent. Foucault and other post-structuralists seem to have repositioned the individual more as sort of a prisoner of the discourse. In this light Said's theory drawing as it does on Foucault, is for many untenable.[137] James Clifford, who, with some reservation, applauds Said for the pioneering attempt to use Foucault systematically in an extended cultural analysis[138], also notices this discrepancy:

> Unlike Foucault, for whom authorial names function as mere labels for discursive statements, Said's authors may be accorded psychohistorical typicality and are often made through their texts to have representative Orientalist experiences. […] Said's descriptions of Orientalist discourse are frequently sidetracked by humanist fables of suppressed authenticity.[139]

Clifford goes on to examine Said's Foucauldian approaches, and concludes that Said implements a sort of extension to Foucault's analysis. Said includes the methods by which cultural order has been defined externally against the exotic "Other." Definitions, representations and textualizations of colonized peoples and areas in an imperialist context "play the same constitutive role as 'internal' representations." They also produce the same results: they discipline and confine physically and ideologically. The Orient Said analyzes exists solely *for* the Occident. What Said is trying to do in *Orientalism*, Clifford alleges, is to unveil the discourse and to demolish its oppressive system. "The archive" must be cleared of its received ideas and frozen imagery.[140] However, Clifford thinks Foucault cannot be easily imitated. Foucault's approach is not so much a methodological program as it is an experiment or a series of tactical interventions, whereas Said's use of Foucault has more moral underpinnings. As Said states, Foucault's criticism has enabled an understanding of culture as a body of disciplines connected through knowledge to power.

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135 Ibid.: 197. Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821–1890) was a British consul, explorer, translator, and Orientalist. He translated *The Arabian Nights* and *The Kama Sutra* and explored Africa. Once he traveled alone in disguise to Mecca.

136 Said 1995: 24.

137 Savolainen 1993: 12–18.

138 Clifford 1988: 264. Although Clifford applauds Said for being a pioneer, he sees Said's humanist perspective to be in disharmony with Foucauldian methods since Foucault was a radical critic of humanism.

139 Ibid.: 269.

140 Ibid.: 265.

> Culture as Said conceives it is little more than 'a massive body of self-congratulating ideas' and of 'disciplines' that the critic must unmask and oppose without claiming – by virtue of a system or sovereign method – to stand outside of 'history, subjectivity, or circumstance.' 'The critical consciousness […] having initially detached itself from the dominant culture' thereafter adopts 'a situated and responsible adversary position'.[141]

In Clifford's opinion, Foucault is more like a restless guerrilla who is fighting on behalf of the excluded, "against *all* totalizing, defining, essentializing alliances of knowledge and power." This approach is not easily seen as situated or seeking responsibility whereas Said's approach is obviously politically oppositional, writing back at imperial discourse of Orientalism on behalf of the muted Oriental who has been represented in a distorted way or whose self-representation has been denied. Despite this noble mission, it seems that Said has forgotten about the indigenous counter-discourse against Orientalism, or the "discursive alliances of knowledge and power produced by anticolonial and particularly nationalist movements."[142]

Clifford sees Said as using Foucauldian critical retrospection or, to use the more Nietzschean term, genealogy, to describe the lineages of Orientalist thought from Homeric Greece via the colonial nineteenth century to the present day. Said's aim[143] is a radical *de*-legitimation of the present in contrast to the *new* legitimation which is a usual aim of genealogy. Genealogy, constructively, "makes sense in the present by making sense selectively *out* of the past." The genealogist legitimates his judgments and inclusions/exclusions by convention or his own arrogated authority, hence making genealogy a very political historical mode. Clifford argues that Said's genealogy suffers from being too openly tendentious, which makes it ineffective, although Said is very open about his choices. In Clifford's view, Said is right to recognize a discourse that dichotomizes the East and the West, and essentializes the Other. The discourse *does* work in a systematic way with an element of colonization but, in Clifford's opinion, Said should not identify the discourse so closely with Orientalism because it has a far more general field of application.[144] It seems as if Clifford wonders why Orientalism to Said is such a different case in the world of othering, dichotomizing, bi-polarizing and dividing into "us" and "them."

Many others aslo hold Said's concept of discourse to be problematic. To concentrate on the textual rhetoric of colonialist discourse might have the effect of textualizing colonialism, and even making it a textual project. As Breckenridge and van der Veer see it, using the word "discourse" in this context makes it seem as if the texts provide evidence they do not contain in reality. Foucault[145] uses "discourse" presuming its association with modern state forms and institutional grids but Said seems to refer to a "transhistorical Orientalist discourse" originating in ancient Greece, and ends up essentializing the West.

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141 Said 1978: 709, 690 & 713 in Clifford 1988: 265.
142 Clifford 1988: 266.
143 Just like Foucault's aim in his *History of Sexuality* 1990 and *Madness and Civilization* 1971.
144 Clifford 1988: 266–268.
145 According to Ahmad 1991: 145–146 in Breckedridge & van der Veer 1994: 5.

Breckenridge and van der Veer claim that in studying Orientalism the challenge revolves around the discursive formation, which seems to have complicated implications and consequences that are not textual or discursive. The challenge can be met by a commitment to two kinds of critical analysis: the various colonial discourses and their interpretation *and* the kinds of "brute empirical realities" and new subjectivities produced by colonial discourses.[146]

Stuart Hall adds an interesting insight which Said has ignored in his analysis of the "othering" of colonized people and their experiences by Orientalist "dominant regimes of representation." In addition to being constructed as different and Other in the Western categories of knowledge, the colonized natives were forced by the "regimes" to see *themselves* as Other. In this view, Hall takes the whole phenomenon of positioning a subject or a people as the Other up one level. It is a very different thing, Hall claims, to subject a set of peoples to that Othering knowledge, "not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm." So, in Hall's view, as a reseult of the "critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation," Western discourse saw the Orientals as their Other, *and* made them see themselves as such. [147]

Evaluating Critique and Defense

Edward Said's theory of Orientalism is based on the presumption that human beings have a universal tendency to use discourse that dichotomizes the Other and Self and represents the Other by reducing him to imagined essential qualities. However, in Said's view, Orientalism as a discourse, differs from any other representational ingroup/outgroup divisions by being affiliated with a powerful hegemony, that is, colonialism carried over into modern "national interest" abroad. Orientalist discourse[148] has constructed narratives about competing units. This has helped to create either threatening or demeaning images of the Other and to create a feeling of unity among one's own imagined community and superiority towards the Other.[149]

This much as to Said's Orientalism has been almost unanimously agreed upon by scholars reading Said. There are, however, many issues in *Orientalism* that have produced wide discussion among postcolonial, postmodern, poststructural and any other post-paradigm contemporary writers. In extreme interpretations Said's approach has been viewed as hostile, unscientific, anti-Western propaganda, *or* as method that finally uncovers violent and power-hungry Western prejudice against non-Western peoples. In its moderate forms, criticism of *Orientalism* has concentrated on Said's assumed nihilism, his lack of

146 Breckedridge & van der Veer 1994: 6.
147 Hall 1994: 394–395.
148 As also Occidentalist discourse, I might add.
149 Korhonen 1996: 159.

alternatives to Orientalism, his monolithic view of Orientalist discourse, the limits of his material, his interpretation of Foucault etc. Then again, Said's moderate supporters have commended him for provoking self-reflection in disciplines focusing on non-European societies and making Europeans aware of their stereotypical thinking and the false hegemonic attitude towards the Other. It is no surprise that Said has received and is still receiving lots of attention either for or against, as Michael Beard notes,

> the personal commitments on which [Said's] research is founded become increasingly visible. […] Said is honest enough to forego the pretense of the detached, unaffected observer taking in impassionately the folly of others, and the obvious biographical facts are drawn into the picture […]. The problem is that readers are tempted to feel that once they have perceived the rage the rest of the book becomes transparent, disappears, and consequently the reviews have tended to speed up the interpretive act by plunging directly to the substructure and agreeing or disagreeing on that level.[150]

Said's critics have also blamed him for being an impressionist rather than rationalist and professional academic. Some have called him simply a bad historian. Some have just pulled rank on Said, and justified their criticism by their field-experience or years of service[151]. Nevertheless, *Orientalism* is a result of the more general crisis of representation in humanist scholarship. Orientalism, as a scientific discipline, has produced reduced, simplistic, essentialist and hostile images of the Other and has been unable to question its own "truths." Furthermore, often the function of Orientalism as a field of study seems to have been merely to produce criticism for use against its subject. Vehkavaara concurs with Said's view, that essentialism and political motivations have distorted "our" view of "them." The epistemological and ontological difference we have created between the West and the East has made it easy to continue thinking that *we* actually know better what it is like to be *them*. For Vehkavaara, the question of Orientalism is an epistemological one that all academic disciplines representing others must ask themselves.[152]

On the other hand, Basim Musallam criticizes Said because his project is simply too easy. Said's impassioned project to fight categories like "the East" and "the West" is a very noble one, and Said's strategy to show the consistency of Orientalism with Western power and imperial appetite is brilliant, but if, as Said himself states, all human societies are imperialist, racist and ethnocentrist towards other cultures, why attack only Europe? To Musallam, it seems that Said assumes the modern and advanced West should be able to view the rest of the world with a generosity that a dominant culture can afford. Considering other pioneering achievements of Western societies, the representation of the Other should be similarly highly developed. Said's stand is perfectly understandable, but the easiness of Said's critique dismays Musallam:

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150 Beard 1979: 2.
151 Ibid.
152 Vehkavaara 1994: 156–169. See also Savolainen 1993; Clifford 1988: 261 and Butterworth 1980: 176 on Said and the general crisis of representation in human sciences.

> [A]ll he has to do is quote the self-condemning statements of Orientalists about the [Oriental] cultures and people. The argument essentially is that no contemporary discipline could harbour such methods and ideas at its very center and be at the same time respectable.[153]

Moreover, Said is not producing any positive knowledge, only impugning of the skewed Orientalist discourse. A critique like Said's on Orientalism should, many think, produce an alternative.[154] While Musallam also agrees with Said that imperialism and Orientalism have been compatible partners, his view is that the former is not necessary for the latter to exist. Hostility towards non-Western cultures is much wider than an imperialist project and can exist without it. Thus, in the analysis, imperialism and Orientalism should be prudently kept separate.[155]

Richard Minear also maintains that colonialism is not a prerequisite of Orientalism. To support his claim, Minear presents nineteenth-century European views on Japan, a nation that evaded European domination. The Japanese were thought of as an inferior race without the capability to modernize themselves. Their virtues were that of a dying civilization: ancient values, aestheticism, cleanliness and kindness. The Japanese past was extolled and the present castigated. The only hopeful future for Japan was with the West. Western scholars studying Japan made the same kind of assumptions drawing on an Orientalist mentality as Said's Orientalists did in the case of the colonized countries. If Said claims that Orientalism is inseparable from colonialism, the case of Japan[156] calls into question the whole argument. Obviously, Japan could be handled as an exception, and we could assume that by the time the West came into contact with Japan, Orientalism (with ties to colonialism) had set the attitudinal modus operandi towards *any* non-Western nation. Or, we could concentrate less on the specific historical setting and see a certain Orientalist mode of thought in general occurring whenever a Western and non-Western group encounter each other[157]. This would deny Said's Orientalism its particularity. Or, as Minear seems to think, we could emphasize the affiliation between the pursuit of knowledge and a certain appropriation of the reality of the subject which produces aggressiveness and the reduction of the subject to the status of object. Perhaps the exceptional nature of the Orientalism Said depicted lies only in the fact that Orientalist ideas were put into practice by nations of superior military power. As Japan's case shows, power relations are probably not the *ultimate*

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153 Musallam 1979: 20.

154 See also Rassam 1980: 508; Joseph 1980: 948 and Clifford 1988: 260. Here it should be remembered that Said is very much aware of himself as not giving alternatives to Orientalism, because his aim is merely to describe a particular system, not to displace it. See, for example, Said 1995: 325.

155 Musallam 1979: 24. See also Clarke 1997: 27.

156 As, from an opposite angle, would the case of Germany, a nation with a strong Orientalist tradition but without any significant colonialism in the Orient. Obviously many countries without colonialist endeavors have had long traditions of Orientalist studies. See e.g. Aalto 1971 for Oriental studies in Finland.

157 See e.g. Bagchi 2003 who discusses how Said's hypothesis has been rather successfully tested on China and its historical construction of the Other. Bagchi also mentions how many other non-Western imperialist states seem to have had the same kind of Orientalist discourse relating to the peoples they have colonized.

reason – although they are a significant one – why we divide the world into "us" and "them" and, as Minear says, "weight the scales in favour of the home team."[158]

Ross Chambers points out that Said is just as open to blame for political bias as the Orientalists he attacks. There is a high risk of a vicious circle of accusation and counter-accusation of political motivation. If Orientalist representations have served Western political needs, then Said's project can be seen as serving the political purposes of the Orientals. The critics of *Orientalism* could, in turn, be seen as furthering the political ends of people hostile to Orientals, *ad infinitum*.[159] James Clifford also, sympathetically, notes that Said's *Orientalism* could be criticized for the same faults that he criticizes in the Orientalists: essentialism and stereotyping[160]. To Chambers, Said's most important question is the power/knowledge relationship[161]. Chambers asks – as Said does – whether there can be any scholarly humanistic discourse without relying on at least somewhat unquestioned authority. Further, can "the silent" – the mad, the poor, foreigners, criminals – ever be justifiably and truthfully represented:

> How can the silent achieve a voice of their own and represent themselves (it will still be a representation), when the only discourse available for speaking of the[m] is that of an academic discipline which alienates them?[162]

Many attacks on Said's *Orientalism* seem to draw on the misconception that Said is accusing Orientalists of complicity with colonialism[163]. Actually, Said does *not* claim that Orientalists explicitly worked for colonialism (although they sometimes did), but that the Orientalist *discourse* was intertwined with colonialism. Obviously, there were plenty of Orientalists who were anti-colonialist and very sympathetic towards the Orientals, which Said openly admits, but this does not seem to appease the critics of Said as they present lists of Orientalist statements that are or were pro-Orient to refute Said. David Kopf even brings in the Indian intelligentsia who have commended British Orientalists for bringing Hinduism up to date.[164] Hence, unfortunately and confusingly, it seems that numerous anti-Saidian scholars have misread – or not read – *Orientalism.*

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158 Minear 1980: 508–516.

159 Chambers 1980: 509. See also Clifford 1988: 256. It should be noted that Said admits the effect of his political/ethnic background very explicitly; see e.g. Said 1995: 338.

160 Clifford 1988. See also Kerr 1980: 544 and Beard 1979: 6.

161 See also Kapp 1980.

162 Chambers 1980: 511–512. See also Asad 1980: 648–649; Beckingham 1979: 562 and Smith 2003: 55. It should, however, be noted that "the Orient" has been "talking back" to Orientalism using counter-hegemonic discourses. Another interesting issue is the many indigenous nationalist movements taking advantage of Orientalist discourse and benefiting from it. It could be described as a sort of "judo move" that takes the power of dichotomizing Western Orientalism and turns it into a supportive element in indigenous nationalist discourse. I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

163 See e.g. Kopf 1980: 499–504 and Kopf 1992: 675–677; Broms 2003: 193–197; Warraq 2002 and Heehs 2003: 169.

164 Kopf 1980: 504.

Said reminds us that the West is hegemonic in the academies of the world and that Oriental academics cannot ignore it. However, Western academics *can* ignore Oriental scholarly work. For example, Arabs cannot significantly contribute to the study of Arabs (or other issues for that matter) on a global scale. As Said claims, they are encouraged to "sit at the feet of American Orientalists, and later to repeat to their local audiences the clichés […]." Such reproduction gives the Oriental scholar with Western training a sort of superiority over his own people. He is able to "manage" the Orientalist system, but for the Western scholar he remains a "native informant," Said claims boldly but, interestingly, without reflecting on his own ethnicity[165]. Said also notes that there are virtually no *Oriental* institutions to study the *Occident*, and further, there are no Oriental institutions to study the Orient, at least to the same extent that there are in the West. But for Said, these facts are not as significant as is the fact of *consumerism* in the Orient. To Said, the effects of the Western market system in the Orient bring with them Western ideologies, including Orientalism. Said goes on, rather banally, to describe the processes of "modernization," "Americanization" and the spread of capitalism in the Orient, and claims that the modern Orient is a participant in its own Orientalizing.[166] This, in my view, seems actually to be the case, at least in India. One might, however, criticize Said for not conceding to "Oriental people" the ability to judge for themselves and to define their own identities and values, and their own "Orient." After all, if the Orientals want to Orientalize and/or Americanize themselves, would it not be an act of patronizing Orientalism for a scholar like Said to claim that they do not know what they are doing or that what they are doing or accepting as an ideology is something wrong *for them*?

Although Said does not produce an alternative to Orientalist discourse, he claims that Orientalism can indeed be avoided, and scholars can rid themselves of "the old ideological straitjacket." This requires methodological self-consciousness which can invigorate even the investigations of traditional problems. The too smug, insulated and overly confident Orientalist premises can be opened up for reflective scrutiny. Direct sensitivity to the material and continual self-examination with respect to methodology and practice without false reliance on doctrinal preconceptions are of the utmost importance. Said considers his book a sort of warning against "the seductive degradation of knowledge, of any knowledge, anywhere, at any time." Unjustified hegemony of a discourse can be challenged by constantly developing the tools of contemporary academic studies studying human societal and cultural phenomena.[167]

However, there is also a more ethical critique of *Orientalism*. According to Ahmad, *Orientalism* has unjustifiably functioned to release the Third World from guilt, because Said's vision is a perfect tool with which to arouse sentimental and extreme Third World nationalism and anti-Westernism. Ahmad claims that the horrific deeds his fellow citizens (of India) have done to each

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165 Said himself – as "an Oriental" – studied and held an important academic position in the United States.
166 Said 1995: 323–325.
167 Ibid.: 326–328.

other are forgotten, and the history of colonization – whether it be by the British, the Moslems or the Aryans – is blamed for anything bad in the society. Some Saidian scholars of Indian origin seem to have acquired a sense of "primal and permanent innocence" which functions to comfort them in the problematic *status quo* of Indian society. According to Ahmad, *Orientalism* states several phenomena (e.g. communalism and caste) to be mere colonial constructions. Colonialism was also made out to be responsible not only for the cruelties committed by the colonialists but also for the cruelties committed by the native people of colonized countries. In any case, *Orientalism* unveiled "the truth" and "bad will" of Western knowledge and initiated the attitude that praised the authenticity, good faith, and liberation in "Third World Literature."[168]

In Coronil's view, Said's unresolved ambiguity is the fact that there is tension between whether Orientalist constructs are incomplete representations or misrepresentations reflecting the imbalance of power in colonialism. If one dismisses the possibility of drawing a complete point-to-point map of the Orient that corresponds with reality, then the fundamental problem becomes not the fact that there is a gap between reality and representation, but the fact that specific representations produce certain consequences. In other words, attention should be given to the effects of existing representations and to the development of more enabling ones.[169] If Orientalism is untenable, what can we offer to replace it, asks Turner. Contemporary postmodernist approaches tend to look at anything definite and universalistic with high suspicion. Also, it seems highly banal and even useless to recommend only careful scrutiny when it comes to our own sets of values in conducting research. Turner sees two significant dangers in criticizing Orientalism. Firstly, we might end up naively trusting the "native" representations because they have not been corrupted by Westernization. This excess of sympathy and anthropological charity towards the "wretched of the Earth" seems to the way of anthropologists. Secondly, if we discard Orientalism, there might be a possibility of indigenous conservatism that poses as progressive anti-Westernism. Non-Westerners might conclude that if Orientalism is unsuitable, then Westerners are not able to form a correct image of non-Westerners. Hence, the self-image of "the Orientals" has to be correct. Unfit Western Orientalism might be replaced with equally prejudiced "ethno-Orientalism" or Occidentalism.[170]

What, then, is the way out of the predicament of Orientalism? Are we bound to be imprisoned by our hegemonic discourses? If we fight one discourse, how can we avoid ending up within another that is equally skewed and detached from "reality?" One option is, of course, the endless nihilism of radical postmodernism where all representations are pointless because their correspondence with "reality" is not verifiable. This, however, would entail radical rethinking of the purposes of human studies altogether. The issues *Orientalism* has raised concern all social sciences dealing with representations, Oriental or

168 Ahmad 1994: 165–167.
169 Coronil 1996: 75.
170 Turner 1997: 104–109.

Occidental. Saidian critics have targeted especially the study of "non-Western" societies by "Western" scholars. How much does our image of "the East" or whatever Other, that seems so natural, affect our research? What about the popular images of the "ancient," "traditional," "collective," or "premodern" Orientals? How can scientists minimize their influence on the field? Can popular culture ever be free of them? Do we tend to notice just those phenomena that confirm our preconceived images of difference and disregard the similarities? How can we avoid over-emphasizing the strangeness and the difference of the Other? How can we refrain from reducing societies and cultures to imagined essences? Can social sciences or everyday perceptions even survive without typification, classification and labeling? Should they? Self-reflection on the part of the observer and the evaluation of "personal baggage" are tolerable aids, but is not self-reflection actually also self-*representation*? The least we can do is first of all to admit that we, as humans, are imperfect tools to study other humans. But it seems we are the best tools available.

4 OCCIDENTALISM

The West Imagining itself

The study of Occidentalism concentrates on how the West is imagined in popular and scientific discourse, in either the West or the East. Edward Said wants to emphasize that no Occidentalist discourse should be constructed to function as a counterforce to Orientalism. "The Orientals" gain nothing by constructing their own stereotypic "Orientals" or "Occidentals."[171] However, Said's warning seems to be given much too late, because discourse on "the West" has been used both in the East and the West for centuries. Occidentalism, the imagining of the West by Westerners and Easterners, is obviously as old as the interaction between the two "sides." Concepts like "the West" or "Western" and "the East" or "Eastern" are still being used in both scientific and popular discourse. According to Fernando Coronil, they classify and identify areas of the world. Although it is not quite clear what these concepts refer to, they are being used as if there were some distinctive reality corresponding with them. Such binary settings form and reify links in the paradigmatic chain of concepts in geography, history and the social sciences.[172]

Anthropology has traditionally researched the "non-Western Other." Thus anthropologists' images of the West have been essential in representing the non-Western Other. Often these conceptions of the West have been naïve and based on popular assumptions. It is dangerous to trust that our understanding of the West is unproblematic, as if the West was a natural entity. Our knowledge of the West is at best only partial and produced in dialectic opposition with knowledge of the Other. It should be emphasized that scientific Occidentalism is not a mere curiosity since to understand Orientalism and the problematics of studying the Other we have to take into account the Occidentalism of the researcher.[173] Anthropologists have often essentialized and simplified the

171 Said 1995: 328.
172 Coronil 1996: 52.
173 Gewertz & Errignton 1991: 82.

West and felt that they are studying something opposite to it. However, one should remember that the East and the West both in popular and scientific discourses are constructions composed of sporadic pieces of information drifting into our circle of experience. Fortunately the study of Occidentalism, the way we construct the representations of the West, has gained momentum in contemporary anthropology.[174]

The Occidentalism of anthropologists has not been a common or explicit theme in academic research before because, as Carrier says, usually anthropologists "look to the village, not over their shoulders, to the West." In addition, Occidentalism does not reveal itself as explicitly as so-called ethno-Occidentalism, meaning the conceptions of the West entertained by the non-Western people studied by the anthropologist. The Occidentalism of anthropologists comes into play when researchers are discussing the "penetration of Western culture" into the societies they study. Often these penetrations like wage work, missionary work and industrial projects, are seen as local manifestations of a rather unified West. Often anthropologists either explicitly or implicitly give negative value to these penetrations of Western phenomena, because they are seen as replacing a coherent and unified societal life with another equally coherent and unified societal life that comes from the West. Moreover, the classic texts of anthropology usually seem to tell a story about the differences between modern Western society and the societies not only in other places but in another time. This has led to essentialization of the West which, for its part, is an interesting phenomenon as a sort of culture within the discipline.[175]

Some Occidentalists have maintained that the concepts of "Western science" are not applicable to studying the societies of the East. For example, Zaheer Baber describes how some Indian scholars[176] have tried to replace what they take to be Eurocentric discourses and institutions in India. For example, the secularist policy of the state has been criticized as representing Western moral arrogance and foreign cultural ideology. In this view, secularism is seen as a Western phenomenon which, in penetrating the Indian public sphere denigrates true Indian society. Many Western scholars too have claimed that Western social science and its concepts are not adaptable to Indian society. For example, to McKim Marriot concepts like the individual, social structure, kinship, class, status, hierarchy, values, ideology and religion represent foreign ontology and epistemology which cannot be fitted into Indian reality. Thus they cannot be part of a sound analysis of Indian society. These concepts might be suitable for analyzing Western society, but they cannot be used to construct the way in which Hindu institutions view persons, claims Marriot.[177]

Jonathan Spencer divides Occidentalism into positivist and romantic Occidentalism, the former of which is seen in the works of Mauss, Dumont, Comte and many structuralists. In positivist Occidentalism, the purpose is to situate

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174 Carrier 2003: 7–9.
175 Ibid. 1992: 199.
176 E.g. T. N. Madan and Ashis Nandy.
177 According to Baber 2002: 748–750.

the differences between the East and the West on a sort of temporal timescale, a measuring device that has its roots in the evolutionism of the nineteenth century. "Our" and "their" incommensurable differences can thus be understood when "their" present is actually seen as "our" past. Sympathetically viewed, "they" are our little brothers and sisters struggling with a time lag. In contrast, the romantic Occidentalism, practiced by Boas, Mead, Benedict and Geertz, does not need a timescale to describe the differences. The East and the West and human groups in general are seen as parallel, different and equal, although in many respects incommensurate. This kind of Occidentalism has the dangers of relativism and cultural solipsism, warns Spencer.[178]

According to Spencer, there is much implicit Occidentalism in the contemporary academic disciplines. For example, the various dichotomies like traditional and modern, premodern and modern, rural and urban, Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft and so on implicitly presume that the West means particularly the *modern* and the *urban* West. Ironically, Spencer claims, the contemporary metanarrative that sets the premodern, modern and postmodern in a gradual continuum would have warmed the hearts of many Victorian scientists. There is also irony in the fact that the conception of the West shared by many anthropologists is based on literature and not on field observations, just like the conception of the East for which the Orientalists have been criticized.[179] According to Zaheer Baber, it is impossible to distinguish domestic from foreign, traditional from modern and pre-colonial from colonial when it comes to the everyday phenomena of Orientals and Occidentals. In a hybrid world nationalist and nativist pedagogies are not justified. They only reinforce the binary opposition between the First and the Third World.[180]

Fernando Coronil discusses the representational modalities in Occidentalism. He describes three significant ways in which the West (or the Self) has represented itself using the East. The first, the Hegelian way is the *dissolution* of the East (the Other) by the West (the Self). For this, a radically binary vision of the East and the West is needed. This opposition is diluted when the victorious West includes the non-Western peoples in itself. Hegel thought the mission of the West was to triumph over the inferior and backward non-Western peoples. He assumed he could categorize different continents in a hierarchy according to geography and depending on the closeness of the people to the "World Spirit." Hegel's Eurocentric view of the evolution of world history included the battle between the master and the slave. In the Hegelian imagery, which seems to be entrenched in Western popular culture, the interaction between the East and the West has been one-sided. Europe has been the actor and the maker of history whereas the non-European Other has been a passive prisoner of his own culture, without history and waiting for salvation from the West. Nevertheless, this one-sided dialog of the Self and the Other has been thought to develop the Self and make it more understanding. Thus the progress of the West goes from

178 Spencer 2003: 237–241.
179 Ibid. 238–240.
180 Baber 2002: 755–756.

violence through relativism to love. In the transaction the Other is hybridized or Europeanized. The West is also hybridized, or rather developed towards a more tolerant and victorious Westernism. In Hegelian Occidentalism Europeans need the Eastern Other to find the better Self.[181]

In the second mode of representation the East is *incorporated* into the West. The compulsive fixation to the idea of "Western progress" fades out the participation of non-Western peoples in building a modern world. Gradually the mantra-like slogan, the focus where "Western" means "modern" or "progressive" involves the idea that the East can only change by becoming immersed in the West. This view repeats the imagined differences between the East and the West, which has been a significant part of the imperialist ideology of European expansion. However, Eric Wolf[182] reminds us that the peoples and cultures of the world are not an atomistic whole, an aggregate of independent entities, although conventional social science might claim that to be the case. Cultures and societies have often been imagined as internally homogenous and externally distinctive. Thus world history might seem like a billiard table with societies as billiard balls bumping into each other and remaining internally intact. When names turn into things, wrong models of reality are created, warns Wolf. When the world is imagined in the aforementioned way and nations, societies and cultures are seen as tightly bounded, it is easy to classify the world as if into balls of different colors, and state, like Rudyard Kipling, that the East is the East and the West is the West and never the twain shall meet.

However, Coronil criticizes Wolf's vision in which the interaction between the macro and micro levels of society is equated with interaction between cause and effect. To Wolf the spread of Europe-centered capitalism to "the periphery" seems to mean the stepping into history of aboriginal peoples. In Wolf's analysis the interaction between Europe and the Other has meant that precapitalist societies have changed due to the effects of capitalist production. Wolf describes the fundamental asymmetry in the equation but seems to attribute agency only to Europe. Using the billiard table analogy, Herron[183] sees Wolf as representing Europe in the form of a giant steel ball rolling on the table and crashing into the thin paper balls of native societies. It seems as if Wolf is claiming that nothing can impede the steam engine of European capitalism in its surge around the world. However, Coronil wants to remind us that capitalism is a result of human action. Wolf's history of peoples without history seems to have turned into a story of history without people. In fact even the Europe Wolf imagines does not seem inhabited at all as Europe for Wolf is the metaphor for capitalism. Thus the story of capitalism as a self-expanding system becomes history.[184]

In the third mode of representation characteristic of Occidentalism non-Western peoples are seen as a *source of knowledge* to the West. They are no longer to be dissolved or incorporated. Such a representation still sets the West

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181 Coronil 1996: 57–61.
182 Europe and the People without History 1982: 6–7 in Coronil 1996: 61–62.
183 1991: 2 in Coronil 1996: 62.
184 Coronil 1996: 62–64.

against the East as opposites, but now the description of the radical differences of the Other is meant to shake up Western culture. Although it is rather positive that colonial modes of thinking are shaken up, this representation still reifies the bipolarity which is present also in the Self/Other imperial duality. Most Occidentalist representational acts assume a certain privileged center (the Occident, the First World, the Self) from which point differences are seen as Otherness. It does not matter whether the Other is dissoluted into the service of the Self, or incorporated into the Self or respected as a pedagogical opposite. It is significant that in all these modalities the Other is defined as a mirror image of the Self. If Occidentalism is a defect of imperialism, one of its main symptoms is the ongoing reproduction of the colonial Self/Other polarity that mystifies the present as much as the past and blurs the possibility of change.[185]

The Occidentalism of Orientals

Francis Nyamnjoh and Ben Page observe that Occidentalism and Orientalism have been studied mainly by focusing on the conceptions of the East or the West of Westerners. The Orient has remained in a passive role whereas the West has been the bearer of the gaze. Nyamnjoh and Page studied Cameroonian Occidentalism and found that, if establishing one's identity needs a contesting *alter ego*, the black Cameroonian Self is maintained by producing the Other out of the white-skinned European.[186] Thus constructing the imagined difference between Westerners and non-Westerners uses very tangible and visible materials. The racism of white people has traditionally drawn on phenotypical properties like skin color to construct racial theories or popular prejudices, and respectively "whiteness" has had its own symbolism for those whose skin color has been darker.

In the Cameroonian Occidentalist stereotype "white" means benevolent but money-centered. The land of the white people is the ultimate goal for many Cameroonians but the journey there is filled with struggle. White skin might be disgusting but it represents material comfort and power. A white man is a "wallet with legs." Whiteness means infinite opportunities or quick cash. When Cameroonian modernization is seen to have failed, whiteness brings an alternative and a promise of material abundance. Whiteness is associated with efficiency and creativity, but also with exploitation. According to a Cameroonian, a white-skinned person is virtuous only to another white-skinned person. The white body is weak and unhygienic. Behind white intentions there is always a hidden plan. Whites hate blacks. Whites have no sense of rhythm. They are mechanical and unnatural. For a Cameroonian it is contradictory that a weak white man can be so hegemonic. It means he has to be exceptionally cunning. White people dress badly, perhaps to cover up their wealth. The list of stereotypic depictions goes on, and what is interesting is the fact that although Cameroonians

185 Ibid.: 71–77.
186 Nyamnjoh & Page 2002: 609.

question the image of the West, they hope at the same time that it is true. Western white prestige has brought almost cultish consumerism to the Cameroonian elite, which frustrates the educated but unemployed Cameroonians who may turn to crime or escapism. Fantasies of the white are an essential part of the Cameroonian survival strategy.[187]

Sociologist Meltem Ahiska takes a more abstract approach to studying the imagery of the West by discussing the issues of modernization in a non-Western context. Ahiska's purpose is to show the historicity of the non-Western Other which is something the hegemony of the concept of "Western modernization" has tended to exclude. Ahiska describes how the metaphor of a train going over a wide gap between the past and the present is used in public discussion of modernization in Turkey. Ahiska notes how non-Western peoples seem to have estranged themselves from their present and want to project themselves into a utopian future or a golden age of the past. This has happened because they have the feeling of a certain ontological "time lag" of their society that stigmatizes non-Western modernity as backward. Ahiska brings up the metaphor of lateness used to describe non-Western modernization. History has its destination and the ones who have entered it late, are *always already* late.[188]

Often modernization theorists have viewed Westernization and/or modernization as a movement where Western values and techniques spread from a center of modernity to its "developing" peripheries. In this Eurocentric model, the complexity of modernity and its conceptual crisis has been ignored. The model is reduced to presenting a phenomenon which is solely European and with a linear timescale from traditional to modern. Synchronic comparisons are organized diachronically, producing a scale of progress. Hence "progress" is defined as a phenomenon in which some people's present is other people's future. Thus the linear timescale is also implicitly spatial. As a result a paradox is produced: the flow of time is stopped by the inertia of the location. The "essential location" of the non-West is stagnant and the non-West has been defined as the opposite of time and change. Ahiska describes how the historian Bernard Lewis recently analyzed Turkish modernization and suggested that Turkey n modernizing had to make significant choices "between the Middle East and the West." For Lewis, Turkey was not yet "there" (in the modern/West) because "catching up" with the modern world required more than borrowing or buying technology. Thus, claims Ahiska, modernization is not thought to contain internal dynamics in non-Western locations, but always seen as dependent on the critical choice between locations called the East and the West.[189]

Interestingly, the opponents and proponents of Turkish modernization agree on Turkish modernization being necessarily a copy of Western modernization. In other words, Turkish identity is seen in a context of imitation. This view upholds both the temporal and spatial difference between the model and the copy. Western modernization is seen as authentic, which means that Turk-

187 Ibid.: 611–633.
188 Ahiska 2003: 353–354.
189 Ibid.: 357–358.

ish modernization seems like an ahistorical and non-sociological phenomenon. Thus Ahiska claims that in Turkey the national modernization discourse is built through fantasy. The intricate relations with Western countries have been reduced to a signifier called "the West." At the same time the heterogeneous Turkish population has been termed the "nation" to represent the Orient with its "backward" Islamist and Arab influences. The Occidentalist fantasy has also identified a "lack" in the "Turkish people" and a "desire" to satisfy the yearning for modernization. The traditional Western Orientalist fantasy has also seen the same kind of "lack" in the Turkish people or in any other Oriental people for that matter.[190]

Ahiska contemplates the questions that theories of Orientalism and Occidentalism evoke in the end. It is assumed that Orientalism uses representations that are defined by historical and material power configurations but which, at the same time reveal a desire of the Western subject. The way "the Orientals" have responded to these Western representations brings up a complex field of subjectivity. What, after all, is the subjectivity of the Other? If the creation of the Orient means the dislocation of the West and if it means that something internal is represented and narrated as external, then what is the conception of the West by non-Western people representing or dislocating? In Ahiska's view Turkish Occidentalism does not mean some kind of internalized Orientalism or defensive reaction against the West. Instead, it means a special mechanism used by "the Orientals" to create their subject status and a certain "common sky for constructing different horizons." This Occidentalism differs from Orientalism in allowing more to the Other. In other words, it defines the West in a more positive way than Orientalism defines the East. Critical study of Occidentalism not only focuses on the ambivalent identities of non-Westerners, but also reveals the fact that the imagined "Western gaze" is a part of this identity. It also discusses how concepts like "center" and "periphery" or "model" and "copy" are already incorporated in the understanding of modernity.[191]

Ahiska claims that the term Occidentalism can be best understood to illustrate the configuration of policies and arrangements that are justified – or fought against – through the imagined idea of "the West." On the other hand, Occidentalism in Turkey expresses a projective identification with the threatening Western power, but then it also has to do with marking the internal and external boundaries of the people. Psychoanalytically speaking, in Turkish Occidentalism, what is unbearable inside the society is reflected back onto the outer world. On the other hand, threatening factors of the outer world are also internalized so that they can be better managed. That is why Occidentalism at the same time connotes something that the subject refuses and wants to be. For example, during the Ottoman Empire the West was simultaneously seen as a possibility and a threat. "Western civilization" was superior but, at the same time, morally despised.[192]

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190 Ibid.: 358–365.
191 Ibid.: 365.
192 Ibid.: 365–367.

Ussama Makdisi has studied Orientalism during the Ottoman Empire and discovered that "the Orient" is imagined as a *gradual* entity not in dichotomy with the West, although the Saidian Orientalism critique seems to claim otherwise. Thus, Asia is *more* East or *more* Other than Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe, the Balkans is seen as the *most* eastern area. The Ottoman Empire was something *in between* or on the borderline of the Orient and the Occident. The Empire was *no longer* Oriental and *not yet* European. It had Westernized but it was not Western. It was the beacon of the Orient, but no longer the Orient represented by the West. In Turkey Western representations of Ottoman indolence were rejected by emphasizing the level of progress of the Ottoman power compared with that of the Others who were the colonized peoples of the Empire. Ottomans, in a way, de-Orientalized or Occidentalized themselves by Orientalizing the rest of the Empire. As an example of this Orientalizing, Makdisi mentions the Arabs who, to Ottomans, represented something primitive, superstitious, inferior and religiously ambivalent.[193]

The main theme of European Orientalism has been the difference between the glorious past and the contemporary decadence of the Orientals. This has worked to emphasize the progress evident in the Occident. Makdisi discusses the Ottoman Archeologist Hamdi Bey (1842–1910) who lamented the decadent taste of the Damascoans. Islamic tradition and esthetics had given way to vulgar and blind imitation of European style. Nevertheless, "Western science" was to Bey something that should be fitted into the "native culture." The mission of the Ottoman modernizers was to save the culture from Westernization and from the Oriental peoples of the Ottoman Empire. The lazy majority of the Empire needed spiritual uplifting but, on the other hand, Ottoman uniqueness had to be defended against the West-imitating minority. The purpose of Bey's archeological and ethnographic expeditions was to civilize the "pleasantly old-fashioned but backward and often fanatic peripheries" of the Empire.[194]

Makdisi also discusses Halide Edib Adivar (1883–1964), a Turkish educator in the women's movement. She was sent to Syria to educate Arabs. According to Adivar, Turkey should help Arabs to develop a nationalist spirit and iddentity, and educate them to love their national culture. Turkey was a natural leader, and while the Arabs were corrupt and religiously almost hysterical the Turks had peaceful and neutral disposition. Adivar thought that Turkey was caught between the progressive West and the stagnant and fanatical Orient. Thus Arabs were to be educated, civilized and perhaps integrated into the more advanced Turkish people. Makdisi emphasizes that non-Western regimes can use the imagery of Orientalism or the sense of Otherness its discourse nourishes, simultaneously to fortify and to resist Westernization. Ottoman Orientalism tried to unite the Turks and the Arabs in a revived East. In Makdisi's view there are countless Orientalisms, or Orientalism is gradual just as "the East" is a

193 Makdisi 2002: 772–785.
194 Ibid.: 785–786.

relative category. However, all Orientalisms produce a dichotomy, and a static and essentialist opposition between the East and the West.[195]

Pekka Korhonen describes how the "Far East" (i.e. East Asia) and the "Far West" (i.e. Europe and North America) construct representations of each other as competing units. The Other is represented as threatening but also inferior. Hence a feeling of unity is invoked which helps one to bond with one's own imagined community and feel superior to the competitor. In the era of colonialism, Orientalist discourse respected subject societies mostly for their "ancient" high culture at the expense of the contemporary culture which was seen as degenerate. Volumes of books were written about the Orient in order to describe the same kind of Oriental mind: stagnant, mysterious, forever strange and changeless. Europe meant progress, civilization, pacifism, passionate living and political creativity whereas Asia meant inability to develop, backwardness, violence, fatalism and despotism. The myth of a liberal Europe lived strongly. Repressive and exploitative Europe only meant well towards the colonies.[196]

To Korhonen, Occidentalism means the mirror image of Orientalism, the way in which the East (or more specifically in Korhonen's approach, East Asia) perceives the West. In this kind of Occidentalism Europe is seen as stagnant and Asia as dynamic. Occidentalism would otherwise be symmetrical with Orientalism, except that it is not affiliated with colonial power, and it is more defensive than offensive. According to Korhonen the Occidentalism of the Far East is quite a new phenomenon. For example, in Japan it began in the 1960s.[197] In Japan, Europe is perceived as a "culture museum." Because of the novelty of this perspective, Occidentalism has not yet become part of the discourse of social scientists, but has remained mainly in the rhetoric of politicians and bureaucrats. The Occidentalism of the Far East has not posited Europe as the center of the West, because the continent is not viewed as sufficiently significant. The target of Occidentalism is the generalized West, whose most important manifestation is the USA, while Europe is left with the role of a supporting actor.[198]

The Occidentalism of the Far East constructs its narrative with the help of the public media. American action movies, soap operas, porn magazines and the news describing violence, crime and economic problems build up the East's image of the West. In this Occidentalism, the East is seen to have been stagnant before while Europe has progressed. Now the roles have been reversed. The East is predicted soon to surpass the West. In Far Eastern Occidentalism history has already left Europe behind. Korhonen gives the example of a Singaporean politician according to whom the West has "guns, drugs, violent crime, beggars, and indecent public behavior" and there is a "ring of fire" around Europe because of military conflicts. While the West is falling apart, the Far East is becoming more prosperous and peaceful. A they are contrasted in Occidentalism the

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195 Ibid.: 793–795.
196 Korhonen 1996: 159–160.
197 However, in my view, Occidentalism has existed in the East Korhonen has studied for centuries. I assume Korhonen means specifically the contemporary manifestations of Far East Occidentalism.
198 Korhonen 1996: 160–164.

immoral West cannot get ahead of virtuous Asia. Asians are thought to be hard-working and disciplined whereas the West is plagued by a bad work ethic. Collectivism, family values and traditions are the values of the East and they surpass the West's greedy consumerism and the excess of individualism that produces broken marriages, lonely children and old people, displacement, unemployment and insecurity. From the perspective of this kind of Occidentalism, the West's era of progress was only a short-term coincidence in world history.[199]

Discussion

According to Shaobo Xien the scholars of the former colonies of the West seem to cling to Orientalism and are not producing counter-hegemonic discourse. In other words, they do not want to respond to the "Orientalist gaze." Although I think Xien's view is rather exaggerated, he is, in my view, right to claim that the Occidentalism of the Orientals often produces as strong a Eurocentrism as Western Orientalism has done. The purpose of counter-hegemonic postcolonial research is to critically probe Eurocentric patterns of knowledge.[200] The literary scholar, Wang Ning, divides contemporary non-Western Occidentalism into two modes. First there is the Middle Eastern and Arab antagonism towards the Western hegemony manifested by the USA. This Occidentalism has distinct anticolonialist and counter-hegemonic features. The second mode of Occidentalism is noticeable in the former colonies of the British Empire, where decolonization is manifested through anglophobia in culture and language. Occidentalism can, obviously, also see the West in positive light. For example, in contemporary China many see Western material culture as superior to that of the East. For many Chinese people the West is glorified whereas for at least as many the West has always represented the enemy whose world is degenerating, although a mask of wealth hides its true nature.[201]

Bryan Turner, who has studied citizenship and social theory, claims that Edward Said's polemic has evoked an aggressive Eastern Occidentalism equivalent to Orientalism. This Occidentalism rejects anything associated with the West. Turner claims this means implicit abandonment of the heritage of modernity. It is the antimodernistic dimension of critical theory whose purpose is to domesticate or nativize knowledge of the Third World. The worst scenario is that Orientalism is being replaced by equally prejudiced Occidentalism.[202] Ian Buruma's vision of Eastern Occidentalism is gloomier. He describes how Jalal Al-e Ahmad, an influential Iranian intellectual launched the concept of "Westoxification" in the 1960s in order to describe the poisonous effect of Western civilization on other cultures. However, the concept of the West as some

199 Ibid.: 164–166.
200 Xie 1997: 14–17.
201 Ning 1997: 63–64.
202 Turner 1997.

kind of evil power doest not originate only in the East or Near East, but also has deep roots in Europe, although to define Occidentalism in historical terms is difficult. The phenomenon was part of the European countermovement against the Enlightenment but also a reaction against industrialization. This kind of evaluative Occidentalism is mutiny as much against cold, mechanical Western civilization as it is against rationalism, secularism and individualism, claims Buruma. European colonialism, much like contemporary global capitalism, provokes this kind of aggressive Occidentalism. Buruma seems to view non-Western Occidentalism very negatively – and perhaps rather politically. In his view Occidentalism can be spoken of when the rebellion against the West turns into a will to destruction, when the West is depicted as inhuman and when mutiny means murder.[203]

Coronil suggests that in studying Occidentalism we have access to a perspective that could help us understand the relative nature of representations of human groups. In analyzing these representations a genealogy of asymmetric power relations is unveiled. Interestingly, these representations try to disguise the historical connections of the power relations. Thus inequality is often represented as a cause of the internal and specific properties of bounded entities, although it is a result of historical facts caused by a network of people. The Western Occidentalism Coronil has studied is *not* reversed Orientalism, but a *prerequisite* of Orientalism, its dark side just as a mirror has one so that reflections can be shown. To call Occidentalism reversed Orientalism the relationship between Self and Other would have to be symmetrical. The way the Orient represents the Occident is *per se* an interesting theme of research and it can function as a good counterweight to the powerful Western representations of differences between the East and the West. Perhaps, according to Coronil, to call the Other's representations of the West Occidentalism could restore some power balance and relativize the setting. Nevertheless, to perceive Orientalism and Occidentalism as a binary couple could lead to the illusion that the two phenomena are the mirror-image of each other, as if the marriage of power and knowledge in Orientalism could be broken by putting Occidentalism in its place.[204]

It is not unique to Occidentalism as a Western self-image that it indirectly enables stereotypic representations of the non-Western societies. The ethnocentric hierarchization of cultural differences is indeed not a Western privilege. But what is unique about Western Occidentalism is that this discourse has intimate connection with the implementation of global hegemony, claims Coronil. As a system expressing the cultural and economic differences of the modern world Occidentalism is inseparably joined with global capitalism and the international asymmetries of power associated with it. In defining Occidentalism Coronil refers to a cluster of representational practices that contribute to the creation of a world view in which the world is divided into divergent units, and the world history has fragmented into pieces without interrelations. In this world differences have been turned into isolated, bounded units, the representations of

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203 Buruma 2004.
204 Coronil 1996: 56–57.

which have been naturalized. Hence, Occidentalism as the image of the West of the West, willingly or not, takes part in the reproduction of existing asymmetrical power relations.[205]

Coronil is surprised how the proponents of very different ideologies in the East and the West agree on the West being the source and locus of modernity. But if we expand our perspective and include the non-West with the West and consider their mutual historical formation, the "modern world" starts to look bigger and more complex. Modernity is indeed formed by universalizing and innovative impulses that constantly redefine geographical and cultural boundaries, and set the new against the old, and the Self against the Other. If the West takes part in creating its "flipside" and "the modern" is hard to imagine without its "traditional" counterpart, then the interest of the West in its Other can be seen to function as the founding stone of modernity itself, and not only as a side effect of incidental Western expansionism. Thus Coronil states that the Other represented by the West is a phenomenon specifically connected to modernity.[206] The Occident is indeed often essentialized as something modern whereas the Orient represents traditionality. Interestingly, the fact that bears endless re-emphasizing is that both Westerners and Easterners seem to think that the two form an essentially binary ontology.

According to Laclau[207] space is fundamentally static and time dynamic. The paradox is that the historicization of territories results from blurring their history. Territories are assumed to be the fixed natural places of local histories. Contrastingly, the territorialization of history happens by creating naturalized, non-historical territories. This suggest the image of the interrelated histories of peoples territorialized into limited spaces. Because these spaces seem to be the products of natural – not historical – causes, they serve to root the interrelated peoples in isolated territories and to disconnect them from the outside world. This is how an illusion is created: the different identities of different peoples in different territories are thought to be the result of independent histories, not the result of historical relations. Hence the histories of different spaces remain veiled and the historical relations between social agents are disconnected. Coronil even claims that history and geography have been, in a way, fetishized. The products of international social-historical relations seem to us to be the internal attributes of naturalized, localized and bounded units. These units can be seen as nations or supranational entities (the West, the Occident, the Third World, the East, the South) *or* as localized intranational subunits (the peasants, ethnic minorities, slum dwellers, the homeless). The typical signifiers (like area, culture, history or religion) of collective identities appear as autonomic entities. As identified by these signifiers the actually interrelated peoples seem to be living separate and divergent lives whose defining features seem to arise from the internal attributes of their histories, cultures and native lands. Through geographical fetishism, a location is naturalized and history territorialized. Hence

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205 Ibid.: 57.
206 Ibid.: 78.
207 Laclau 1990 in Coronil 1996: 77.

the West becomes an imperialist fetish, the home of the victors of history and the embodiment of their power, claims Coronil in a rather polemical tone.[208]

Coronil's view reminds one of Arjun Appadurai's discussion of the concept "native" in anthropology. In the idea of a "native" a sort of hierarchy is imagined as anthropologists practice "metonymic freezing" which is based on an assumption of the boundedness of cultures and the confinement of their people and their thought within these boundaries. The word "native" has, however, had positive connotations but it also seems to be a respectable but not unproblematic substitute for the more evaluative terms like "primitive." In anthropological thought a native is a person who is born in a certain place (that of the anthropologist's study) and thus *belongs* to it, but Appadurai asks,

> do we use the term *native* uniformly to refer to people who are born in certain places and, thus, belong to them? We do not. We have tended to use the word *native* for persons and groups who belong to those parts of the world that were, and are, distant from the metropolitan West. […] Proper natives are somehow assumed to represent their selves and their history, without distortion or residue.[209]

According to Appadurai, "the native" is thought of as something authentic, and we –Westerners – are too complex to be so[210]. Natives are thought to be somehow confined to the places they are from. They belong to those places, and, thus there is a sense of physical immobility. Natives are meant to stay in one place, to which the quintessentially mobile colonialists, explorers and finally anthropologists come. The outsiders, the seers and knowers are contrasted with the immobile natives who belong to a place. If the natives are able to move to another place, it is not really motion but flight or escape to another place that is equally confining. The natives do what their place permits them to do. They are confined to their adaptation to their environments. Even when a native moves (e.g. as a nomad), the movement is not free like ours, but confined to a limited spatial pattern over a wide terrain. The confinement of the native has moral and intellectual dimensions to us: the native is prisoner of his "mode of thought." According to Appadurai, a good example of this kind of thinking is Evans-Pritchard's[211] study of the Azande who seemed to be incapable of explaining their actions because their ideas were imprisoned in action. There is a connection between the idea of the confinement of ideology and confinement of place.[212] Obviously, the Westerner is never seem as confined by his place but more likely to be viewed as freed because of it.

Today many will admit that there are fewer and fewer native cultures left as the forces of development and nationalization are thought to push them to migrate and assimilate in new places. But were there *ever* natives? It seems when one takes a closer look that all peoples – even the most isolated groups – have experienced interaction and exchange with the outside and they have been

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208 Coronil 1996: 77–78. Cf. Appadurai 1988.
209 Appadurai 1998: 36–37.
210 "Our" authenticity is denoted by the label "folk."
211 Appadurai 1988: 37–38 quoting Evans-Pritchard 1937: 82–83.
212 Appadurai 1988: 38.

affected by "other worlds." Not one group has really been confined to a place or a mode of thought. "Natives, thus, are creatures of the anthropological imagination," claims Appadurai. It is a mystery this has come about, particularly when there has been such a vast field of evidence against the belief. "How have places turned into prisons containing natives?"[213]

In constructing a collective identity every society represents itself and other societies by drawing on its cultural traditions. To Coronil, Occidentalism is the hegemonic discourse of the West that is shared by both Westerners and Easterners, and it is distinguished from any other ethnocentric representational mode by its connection with the global hegemony of the West. However, Coronil reminds us that this hegemony is always only partial and it takes places in a transcultural process that also changes the West. Westernization, thus, does not mean the homogenization of the world's societies under capitalism but the reciprocal change depending on different historical circumstances. In this light capitalism is not identified with the West or with some radiating force emanating from the West to the periphery, but resembles a continuously changing world-wide network of relations. These relations are formed in different ways according to regional and national contexts.[214] Thus "the West" seems to be an entity that is very difficult to distinguish from "the Rest," and it seems as if there is no real justification for doing so either. Carrier reminds us of the threats of Occidentalism. If "the West," and "Western" are accepted without questioning, a conception of a "real West" and, further, a "real Westerner" is formed. Hence the non-Western Other, like any other representative of Otherness can be disciplined and brought into line, making Occidentalism a form of social control.[215]

What, in the end, is the ontology of the West? Is it part and parcel with Orientalism, forming an imaginary or a world-dividing ideology? Does the West exist? Or should the question be how does the West exist, for whom and why? Spencer describes how in Sri Lankan political debate Occidentalism is used to demarcate the "real Sri Lanka." Rationalism is seen as a Western vice. Spencer introduces an opponent of "Western rationalism" who claims that a rationalist can even kill his father and rationalize it. Anything can be rationalized and thus justified. The Sri Lankan anti-rationalist politicians believe that without Western rationalism, an access to some deeper and more authentic, real and non-Western "Sri Lankanness" can be gained.[216] It seems as if the West to Sri Lankans is a very real and distinctive entity, but how much is it imagined? How much do the Sri Lankans imagine a cold and rational West in contradiction to which one can define what one's own nation is *not*? The South Asian anthropologists Spencer describes do not question the existence of the West either. If there is no West, then what fills their domestic markets, their television and radio and sets their academic agendas, they ask. Spencer claims that in the end, in the primary encounter with the West, the elements that are crucial in

213 Ibid.: 39.
214 Coronil 1996: 78.
215 Carrier 2003: 9.
216 Spencer 2003: 236–250.

forming the imagery of the West are *not* formed in a discourse, epistemology and politics or between people. The West is actually encountered in the form of products: as objects of consumption and desire. In Spencer's view, the whole discussion of non-Western Occidentalism could be, with slight alteration, presented as case studies of the politics of consumption.[217]

In both Western and Eastern representations, the West, at its worst, is seen as immoral, estranged in its individualism, without spirituality, a competitive society living in luxury, grown rich by exploiting the East. The most positive representations show us a West that is a haven of innovative individualism and freedom, the source of progressiveness and enlightenment. The more neutral Occidentalisms equate the West with the modern and the scientific world-view. At any rate, the West is strongly imagined in the Andersonian sense and set in binary opposition with the East. The concepts of "the West," "Western" or "Westernization" have been too little questioned and there is too little awareness of it. The problem is not so much the fact that the West, in popular or scientific thought, is imagined. Moreover, to draw a better map of the West will always come short of the reality. So what is more important is to critically examine what kinds of ideological and power relations have affected "us" and "them" and led us to construct certain types of representation of the geographical locations and their peoples who together are called "the West."

217 Ibid.: 236–252.

5 ORIENTALISM AND INDIA

Introduction

In *Orientalism* Said only occasionally refers to Orientalist discourse on India. For example, he mentions William Jones (1746–1794), the founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, who, according to Said, with his vast knowledge of "Oriental peoples" was the undisputed founder of scholarly Orientalism. Jones wanted to know India better than anyone in Europe, and his aim was to rule, learn about the Orient and compare it with the Occident. Said finds it interesting that many of the early Orientalists concentrating on India were jurisprudents like Jones or doctors of medicine deeply involved with missionary work. Most Orientalists had the dual purpose of improving the quality of life of Indian people and advancing the arts and knowledge back at the heart of the Empire. In Said's view, the fact of the Empire was present in nearly every British nineteenth century writer's work concentrating on India. They all had definite views on race and imperialism. For example, John Stuart Mill claimed liberty and representative government could not be applied to India because Indians were civilizationally – if not racially – inferior. Said also claims that India was never a threat to Europe in the way Islamic Orient was. India was more vulnerable to European conquest and so the Indian Orient could be treated with "such proprietary hauteur," without the same sense of danger associated with the Islamic Orient.[218]

Said also describes romantic Orientalism, which sought to regenerate materialistic and mechanistic Europe with the knowledge of Indian culture, religion and spirituality. The biblical themes of death, rebirth and redemption were used in the project, but India *per se* was not considered as significant as the *use* of India to modern Europe. The Orientalists mastering Oriental languages were seen as spiritual heroes or knight-errants who were giving back to Europe its lost holy mission. Although the themes were implicitly Christian, the romantic project appeared secular in its post-Enlightenment ideology.[219] Dissatisfaction

218 Said 1995: 14 & 75–79.
219 Ibid.: 105–107.

with Judeo-Christian thought and the cold materialism of the Enlightenment made many Europeans seek for a lost spirit in the promised land of India, and, as Clarke describes,

> search for childlike innocence, a vision of wholeness, a yearning for the recovery of what the poets and philosophers of the period felt the age had lost, namely a oneness with humankind and a oneness with nature, and for a reunification of religion, philosophy, and art which had been sundered in the modern Western world[220].

Thus, there was a new twist to Orientalism, a metaphysical thirst which for the Romantics replaced the earlier politico-ethical need for Orientalism. Thus India began to be seen as "the realm of Spirit." Although nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Orientalism was rather explicitly racist, lauding the Indian caste system as a protector of racial purity while seeing Indians as a bastardized race and hence inferior to the "original" and "pure" Aryan race, the same Orientalists who formed racist theories looked to the East to criticize degenerate Europe.[221]

Interestingly, David Kopf, a well-known academic adversary of Edward Said, seems to seek justification for the Western Orientalist treatment of India by referring to how impressed Nehru was by the work of British Orientalists and how he used their knowledge to build up a nationalistic new India[222]. The fact that Orientalism is and has been grist for the mill for nationalism is not, in my view, a sufficient condition for Orientalism to be scientifically valid, no matter how politically effective the combination has been. However, Kopf's statement definitely hints at the rather interesting question of indigenous Orientalism, that is, the phenomenon where the Orient is as it were recycled or reimported to its source[223].

It is exceedingly interesting to notice how – especially romantic – Orientalist ideas of Indianness have been adapted to the self-identities of native Indians[224]. This seems to be partly due to the effect of the imported British educational system but also to the prestige that British ideas have held among the Indian upper classes and the academic elite. Also, a state in the process of formation needed an attractive common genealogy for its heterogeneous people to draw on. Thus, an appealing and unifying history had to be constructed. Imags of Vedic times as the golden age, spiritual India, caste-centricity and Hinduism as one religion (or superreligion or poetic universal life-philosophy) were, at least to some extent, Orientalist inventions and more or less as such largely accepted by educated Indians and/or reworked to serve Indian nationalism.

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220 Clarke 1997: 54–55.
221 Ibid.: 191–205.
222 Kopf 1980: 496.
223 Cf. Bharati 1970: 273 who describes the "pizza-effect" where Italian emigrants took pizza to America where it changed and became a popular dish and was later reexported to Italy as an indigenous traditional food. See also Narayan 1993: 478 for reimported Hinduism in India. Moreover, Indo-Orientalism is claimed to have held Indian culture and society to be irreducibly different from the modern West. Slowly this idea helped to establish the intellectual preconditions of Indian nationalism and enabled Indians to claim a kind of social autonomy within colonialism. See Kaviraj 2000: 141 according to Heehs 2003: 180.
224 See e.g. Heehs 2003.

When the Indian independence movement gathered momentum, Orientalist texts were used to evoke national self-identity. For example, the Bhagavad Gita was respected as the core or uniting holy text of India as a whole and the Hindu Renaissance used Orientalist literature to form modern Hinduism and – concurrently – India's nationhood.[225] According to Breckenridge and van der Veer, the subsequent internal Orientalism seems to have been the most problematic issue in postcolonial scholarship in India. Orientalist habits and categories still have such power that it is exceedingly difficult for either native Indians or foreign scholars to view India without reverting to the outdated discourse. Orientalist ideas of difference and division dating back to colonial times have affected – or perhaps, infected – the foundations of public life in India. In the postcolonial era,

> Orientalism without colonialism is a headless theoretical beast, that [is] much […] harder to identify and eradicate because it has become internalized in the practices of the postcolonial state, the theories of the postcolonial intelligentsia, and the political action of postcolonial mobs.[226]

Bhatnagar interprets Indo-Orientalism by applying the writings of Frantz Fanon writings[227], who saw in colonialism a triangular dialog, a permanent illusory confrontation involving the settler, the native and the native intellectual.

> In this realm versions of origins are offered and resisted in a continuing dialectic; thus Fanon likens the self-justifying ideological operation of colonialism to the mother 'who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts. The colonial mother protects her child from itself, from its ego, and from its physiology, its biology and its own unhappiness which is its very essence.'[228]

According to Bhatnagar, Fanon sees this relationship as an Oedipal tyranny in which the colonized people search for identity and continually return to "the terms of opposition set by the colonial mother." An impossible pure origin is something the reactionary forces of indigenous revivalism use and long for to obtain meaning for their contemporary being. Bhatnagar claims that this uncritical and politically suspect ideology is especially dangerous in the Indian context where the plural and secular identity has had to give way to a Hindu identity that has its imagined source in Vedic times.[229]

This essentialism – and the concept of a religiously/spiritually unique India that belongs with it – has become part of Indian nationalist politics, where all group differences are seen as dangerous separatisms. In contemporary India a political group such as a labor union has immense difficulty in constitutinng itself on the basis of shared interest without others regarding those interests as only a disguise for religious, caste or sectarian interests. "This essentialization

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225 Clarke 1997: 205.
226 Breckenridge & van der Veer 1994: 11.
227 Although Fanon did not write about India.
228 Bhatnagar 1986: 5 quotes Fanon 1967: 43.
229 Bhatnagar 1986: 5.

and somaticization of group differences" claim Breckenridge and van der Veer, "is probably the most damaging part of the orientalist bequest to postcolonial politics." Especially the reinforcement of Muslim-Hindu opposition has been a significant fundamental contribution of Orientalism in India. In Orientalist thinking the two groups were essentialized and this was later institutionalized in nationalist political representations.[230]

Orientalism has been accused of being intertwined with and even having supported British colonialism in India. Although there has been much debate about the subject, or more specifically about the intensity of the Orientalists' explicit involvement in and conscious support for colonialism, in my view it is obvious that, apart from the relationship between Orientalism and colonialism, Indian Brahmanic authority and Indo-Orientalism supported each other. One could even say that Brahmanic hegemonic discourse in a way de-Orientalized the Brahmans and Orientalized the non-Brahmanic peoples of India[231]. Brahmanism-informed Orientalism created an unchanged written canon to replace the various oral traditions in Hinduism. Moreover, certain scriptures became canonized by Orientalism, and spiritually inclined political leaders (or vice versa) made them fundamental scriptures of Modern Hinduism. Orientalism helped to create the concept of the decline of Hindu society by emphasizing the Aryan (Western) and Vedic past that was almost destroyed by foreign Muslim invasion. This view has led Hindu nationalists to construct a religiously, philosophically and morally glorious Hindu past and the foreignness of Muslims. It was, as van der Veer has it, a "combination of Hindu spirituality and nationalism, informed by orientalism." Today's Hindu nationalists demand that Christians and Muslims accept the "tolerance of Hinduism," shed their "foreignness" and submit to the inclusive, encompassing spirituality of Hinduism. Thus Orientalist discourse has helped to essentialize Hindu ideology as the foundation of the Indian world view. Muslims are seen either as outsiders or subsumed hierarchically, and Islam and Christianity have been seen as foreign and not culturally fit for India.[232] This, of course, is essentialism par excellence rendering religions unchanging entities belonging to the locus of their historical origin.

The Essential Ancientness of India

The linguistic, civilizational and racial characteristics of Orientals were an undisputed central theme in Orientalism at the peak of the imperialist era of Europe. Theories about the modern degeneration of cultures, theories about the progress

230 Breckenridge & van der Veer 1994: 12.

231 Cf. Makdisi 2002: 772–773 who describes the same kind of phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire where Ottomans de-Orientalized themselves and Orientalized the Arabs of the Empire.

232 van der Veer 1994: 25–41. See also Rajan 1986: 26–27 and Viswanathan 2003: 37.

of civilization and belief in the destiny of the white race justified colonialism and formed, as Said states,

> a peculiar amalgam of science, politics, and culture whose drift, almost without exception, was always to raise […] the European race to dominion over non-European portions of mankind.[233]

Darwinism was modified to support the view of contemporary Orientals as degenerate vestiges of a classical ancient greatness[234]. The white scholar could study ancient Oriental civilizations with his refined reconstructive scientific techniques and use "a vocabulary of sweeping generalities" to refer to "seemingly objective and agreed-upon distinctions" to describe the Orientals. Biological and sociobiological "truths" and Darwinist volumes concurred with the experienced abilities and inabilities of Orientals. Empirical data concerning the origins, development and character of Orientals seemed to give validity to the distinctions.[235]

At this point it should be remembered that one must avoid jumping to the conclusion that there was some kind of a general antipathy towards the Orient among European scholars. Though many explicitly believed in the inherent inferiority of Orientals to Europeans, a significant proportion of Orientalist scholars with strong sympathies, genuine interest and deep respect for Oriental cultures remained. There were many sympathetic Orientalists who also criticized the colonization of India. However there has been and still is a general tendency to equate India with "ancient tradition" and Europe with "modernity." In studying Indian society many Orientalists have thought that their mission is to safeguard India (a place assigned to an essentially ancient time) from the effects of Western decadent modernity. In the process romantic Orientalists have thought that with their help the West could "regain" something of the lost spirituality of Europe and also help rescue the residual wisdom of degenerate contemporary Indian society.[236]

As throughout the history of Western Orientalism the East has been praised for its ancient texts, the appraisal of the ancient has had the unfortunate implication of undermining the value of contemporary Oriental cultures[237]. Particularly the contemporary Indian peasant was seen as disconnected from the valuable ancient traditions. If there were any valuable knowledge left it was preserved by the "advanced castes." Hence, "simple folk wisdom" and "folk Hinduism" were not worthy of study to most Orientalists. If the Orientalists did study contemporary India, a distinctively different and significantly more fascinating subject of scholarly interest was the philosophical Brahmanic Hinduism that was thought to best reflect the ancient Vedic world-view.[238]

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233 Said 1995: 232–233.
234 Also, according to Heehs 2003: 177–180 many Orientalists tried to trace the achievements of Indian civilization back to ancient European predecessors.
235 Said 1995: 232–233.
236 Cf. Said 1995: 269–271.
237 See e.g. Clarke 1997: 191
238 Marshall 1970: 43 in Lele 1994: 58.

One should also remember that there were also many romantic Indians and Europeans who saw village India as the repository of some sort of valuable ancientness. For example, Swami Vivekananda is said to have declared that "the pulse of India" was felt in its villages, although the peasant's wisdom was seen as more emotional and devotional in its quality and the values of the "autonomous Indian village" lay in a collective way of life which had been lost elsewhere in the process of modernization. In contrast, wisdom of the Brahmanic kind had a more refined and analytic – although at the same time spiritual – quality to it. Interestingly, Axelrod and Fuerch, concurring with Ronald Inden's view, claim that the romanticized notion of the ancient autonomous Indian village consorted well with the colonial ideology that delegitimized the idea of an Indian nation on the grounds of its disunity. With a state full of self-sufficient village communities without a sense of nationhood, how could there be unified state rule by Indians? Furthermore, Indian villages were thought of as timeless entities and thus stuck forever in an unchanging past. Obviously, there were states in India before and during colonialism, but they were thought of as despotic and thus illegitimate. This framework of thought helped to justify Western colonialism in India.[239]

Sheldon Pollock contends that in a way British Orientalists, with the help of native informants emphasizing the hegemony of Brahmanic texts, created an Indian history and widely accepted view of contemporary Indian society. According to Pollock, Indian society was traditionalized and Sanskritized in an Orientalist way.[240] I would call this a Brahmanic crisis of Indian studies, a phenomenon where the elitist Brahmanic view, highly influential although it is the view of a minority is accepted as reflecting a sort of core Indianness and essential to Indian Hinduism. In reality Vedic literature and other so-called official holy texts of Hinduism are surprisingly unfamiliar to many Hindus, many of them not having even heard of them. For example, Maloney considers Brahmanic Hinduism and its relation to "folk" Hinduism, and notes that many concepts (like karma and dharma) that have been considered essential to Indian Hinduism have been either unknown or interpreted totally differently among representatives of the lower castes in India.[241]

Rosane Rocher also describes how contemporary Hinduism has been treated as falling away from ancient Vedic Hinduism. The "natural light" of Hinduism was thought to have been eclipsed by folk superstition and ritualism, which lacked the characteristics of ancient, pristine, philosophical book Hinduism. It was seen as an inauthentic religion that had reverted from the authentic ancient practices to repulsive polytheistic rituals. Surprisingly, even Christian scholars who saw themselves as representatives of the most rational faith could see many parallels between ancient deistic Hinduism and Christianity, but not with contemporary "vulgar" Hindu practices.[242] Obviously, this kind of glorification of the past of a people is not limited to Oriental societies. In Europe, for

239 Axelrod & Fuerch 1998: 459.
240 Pollock 1994: 96–97.
241 Maloney 1975.
242 Rocher 1994: 226–227.

example, peasant culture has been seen as reflecting a sort of simple and "natural" past. This kind of nostalgia seems to be common to all sorts of societies, cultures, subcultures and ideologies, even to academic disciplines drawing on an "authentic" past[243].

Although the Orient in general and India in particular have been thought to have degenerated from their ancient glory, there is also the simultaneous view of India as having remained essentially the same as always. The myth of a never-changing India is long-lived even in present-day depictions of India and has been adopted not only by Europeans but also by nationalist Indians who have also adopted many other Orientalist views. Even Prime Minister Nehru stated that India had been able to absorb external influences and remain essentially the same for ages. This theme of an unchanging yet assimiliating India has been repeated throughout the twentieth century in scholarly and popular literature in the West and in India. To buttress an image of this kind, it has been helpful to invoke naturalist and/or essentialist ideas of culture. According to Inden, without "natures," "essential" or "inherent" properties, "defining features," and "fundamental characteristics" that are almost de rigueur concepts of a naturalistically inspired social science discourse, it would be difficult to imagine an India that is still living by its ancient traditions.[244]

Explanations of India's stagnation have used many elements and described various focal points of the society to arrive at their conclusions. One such explanation has been influenced by Max Weber's views of caste and Indian society. Weber explained why in his view Indian civilization had not developed in such a way as to encourage rationally oriented business activity as the West had done.[245] Weber's India seemed to be essentially magico-religious whereas his Europe represented rationality. Weber even claimed that fields of science did not progress in India because Indians had concentrated on a religion that denigrated the empirical world. Weber's India was also synonymous with Hinduism, and Hinduism for its part was seen by Weber as an unproblematically monolithic single religion, an entity that gave India its essence.[246]

The more recent (and American) Weberian view has admitted that Indian civilization did exhibit rationality in the Weberian sense of systematic arrangement, but it still claims that what India did not possess was the *essence* of the arrangement, the "world-ordering rationality," Inden links with the Weberian perspective. This rationality is associated by Weberians with protestant Christianity, capitalism, cities and legal-bureaucratic forms of government. Weber's finding was that although there might be an industrious business man inside an Indian artisan, the unique caste system which is an essential product of Indian Brahmanic mind, resisted the unfolding of capitalism.[247] Weber's image of an

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243 See e.g. Anderson 1991 for nostalgia in nationalism or Jersild 2000 for nostalgia in religion.
244 Inden 1992: 16–17 & 426.
245 Weber 1958. See also Kantowsky (ed.) 1984. Weber's view seems to echo in the works of Louis Dumont (see the end of this chapter).
246 See e.g. Badrinath 1984: 46–57.
247 Inden 1992: 131–132.

"other-worldly" and holistically religious Indian society has still has a strong hold on both Indian and Western discourse on India.

Imagined India?

It is important to consider whether the contemporary academic adversaries of the Orientalists are, so to say, throwing the baby away with the bath water as they ignore valuable depictions of Indian history. A veteran Indologist, Wendy Doniger reminds us that the question about Orientalism (and colonialism) is not "whether [British colonialists] slept sound, but whether we Americans and Europeans engaged in the study of India can sleep sound." Before Said's *Orientalism* British Indologists were respected, admired and felt indebted to. Doniger claims that the anti-Orientalist critique taught us to think Orientalists had committed some sort of grave academic sin.

> We who had once studied the *Rig Veda* with awe […] came to react to the word 'Veda' as if someone had said 'fascism' (more precisely, 'right-wing militant Hinduism'); the word had changed its connotations, just as 'adult' had come to mean 'pornographic' (as in 'adult books and films, adult viewing').[248]

Doniger notes that the postcolonial critique is an intrinsic part of our thinking nowadays. In analyzing our texts about the Other we are told to look for the subtext and suspect that there is something hidden, something significant that has been censored because of its being self-serving and less respectable although more honest than the surface text. In the case of colonial India we have been taught to interpret the Orientalist/colonial surface text "we are bringing civilization to these savages" as bearing the more truthful subtext "we are using military power to make England wealthy by robbing India." However, there are various layers to any text and agenda, and it would be hasty to assume there is only self-interest under the surface. Perhaps, under all kinds of subtexts there might be a nobler self-perception of the Orientalist where guilt is recognized and, as Doniger suggests,

> perhaps, beneath that, there may be yet another layer, an admiration of India, a desire to learn from India, perhaps even a genuine if misguided desire to give India something in return.[249]

Doniger also questions whether the "Myth of India," the conception that Orientalists in a way created or imagined India, is itself a myth. She wonders if there was a black hole south of Nepal before British colonialist and Orientalists arrived there and created India. In Doniger's view, the anti-Orientalist "creationists" are even disrespectful of India "which was quite capable of inventing itself and went right on inventing itself for centuries before, during, and after British presence."

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248 Doniger 1999: 943–944.
249 Ibid.: 944.

Doniger admits that Indians did not imagine themselves as citizens of a nation, but surely they conceived themselves as people who lived their lives in a place that was different from others. Also, Doniger accepts the view that the British distorted and constrained the self-representations of Indians, but in her view the power of Orientalism was never so absolute that it could have entirely replaced Indian ways of representing themselves, and it surely did not wipe out their knowledge of their own history. Doniger insightfully notices how Orientalism and anti-Orientalism have both taught us the power of language and especially of the imagination because they have both disclaimed the agency of *Indian* imagination.[250]

In Heehs' view Saidian interpretation of Orientalism and the Orient is itself part of the Orientalist discourse *inside* the history of Orientalism. Heehs notices that Saidian treatments of Indian history and culture began to appear within a decade of the publication of *Orientalism*. One of the first was that of Ronald Inden whose stated aim was to "make possible studies of 'ancient' India that would restore the agency that those [Eurocentric] histories have stripped from its people and institutions." But there is a lamentable aspect to Inden's endeavor, claims Heehs concurring with Doniger, because by claiming that European Orientalists constructed Hinduism, the caste system etc. Inden tends to substract from the much sought-after "Indian agency," and give new life to Eurocentrism.[251] In other words, to blame Orientalism for "imagining an India" often means, for many, to grant unjustified and excessive power to Orientalism and to ignore the significance of Indian self-representations. In my view, this debate at its worst has had the unfortunate tendency to develop into a trench war where the obvious option of multiple coeval representations is ignored when scholars debate whether or not the Orientalists invented India. It seems as if a scholar is obliged to choose either one or the other and nothing in between or outside.

Obviously Orientalist discourse has been hegemonic among Western and Western-educated scholars, but there have been multiple coeval indigenous representations that have been relatively independent of Western representations or have even significantly affected Western views. Then again, it seems that many indigenous Indian self-presentations, especially in the rural parts of the country, have had virtually nothing to do with either Indian nationalist or European Indo-Orientalism. Even so, at the same time, a sort of national-level standardized representation spread via the mass media seems to have brought a more unified image of what being Indian means in contemporary India. Thus, it seems futile to argue whether Orientalists have imagined India. They certainly have, but so has anyone, even Indians themselves, and in numerous ways. The more interesting debate, in my opinion, is how much power Indo-Orientalist discourse has had in Europe and how influential it has been in India.

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250 Ibid.: 952. See also Heehs 2003: 173–175 for a similar note and cf. e.g. Pollock 1994: 96–97 for contrasting notes.

251 Heehs 2003: 175.

The imaginative geography of Orientalism has seen India as the locus of spiritual, degenerated, caste-centered, collectivist, holistically religious essences, that is in no way coeval[252] with the West. Indo-Orientalist discourse has equated the Indian present and past, and has imagined India in a timeless vacuum, an India that is essentially ancient and stagnant. If there has been change in India, it has been imagined to be a process of degeneration. With the help of romantic Orientalism Indian nationalism has performed a sort of Orientalist judo move to use the strength of Orientalism to serve its own purposes. Orientalist depictions of India have been turned around and used to construct a discourse in which the West has been seen as immoral, estranged in its individualism, and indulging in materialism without Spirit. In discourse combining imagery of the East and the West, the ancient wisdom of India, and especially Brahman-informed Hinduism, have been seen as treasures for the nation to draw on, and which "the soulless West" should emulate in order to rise from its decadence.

India's history is territorialized to exclude the so-called outside influences as not essentially Indian factors, or they have been seen as absorbed into the essentially changeless India. In between, the romantic bridge-builders have been trying to connect the West with the East and search for a synthesis that could combine "European rationality" and "Indian spirituality." In this view, Indians need the more down-to-earth European attitude and practicality whereas the material West should adopt the emotional attitude arising from Indian spirituality. Interestingly, most representations seem to reinforce the binary ontology between India and Europe. At any rate, India and the West are highly imagined in native Indian and Western representations. In Indo-Orientalism political power seems to have been tightly intertwined with either colonial or indigenous nationalist representations of India. Moreover, the emancipatory anti-Orientalist approaches have drawn on patronizing political ideology, a sort of academic charity or of imported intellectual guerilla tactics trying paradoxically to struggle for the agency of Indian self-representations on behalf of the Indians. What has been common to most approaches to the study of India is the fetishization of otherness, a compulsion to create a dichotomy between the West and India, whether it is expressed by Westerners or Indians.

The grand old man of Indology, Louis Dumont, claimed in *Homo Hierarchicus*[253] that in certain crucial aspects India is radically different from the West. In order to understand Indian society and culture one first has to first understand the essential hierarchicalism of the people, a value that Dumont contrasts to the egalitarianism in the modern West. Caste, to Dumont, is a religiously inspired system that manifests this hierarchy of groups distinguished in terms of purity and impurity. According to Dumont Western researchers with their egalitarian values have had problems understanding Indian society. Although Dumont's massive work is undoubtedly often incisive and, for many, groundbreaking, it can also be seen as speculative and dichotomizing. Dumont's focus

252 For denial of coevalness in anthropological discourse, see Fabian 1983.
253 Dumont 1980.

on purity/impurity in caste has its distinctive Brahmanic tone and he can be seen as building an essentialist gap between India and the West. For many, Dumont's work has been not so much ground-breaking as it has been the swan song of Indology. The traditional Indo-Orientalist equation "India = Hinduism = caste = hierarchy = purity/impurity" is being increasingly questioned and the great old divide between India and the West is beginning to seem exaggerated.[254]

254 See e.g. Appadurai 1986; Inden 1992: 76–79 & 125–126; Breckenridge & van der Veer 1994: 13 and van der Veer 1994: 24–31.

6 THE TAMIL VILLAGERS OF KUILAPALAYAM

The Tamil People

The Tamil Way of Life

The Tamils[255] are an ethnic group of about seventy million people with a common language mostly inhabiting South India (64 million), particularly the state of Tamil Nadu and the union territory of Pondicherry encircled by Tamil Nadu. There are also Tamils living in the neighboring states and abroad in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Britain and North America. Tamil is also the oldest written and presently the most widely spoken Dravidian[256] language. The language and script of modern Tamil are descended from the Tamil of at least two thousand years ago. Dravidian languages are not related to the Indo-Aryan languages (e.g. Hindi) of North India, and there is reason to believe that Dravidian-speaking people were the so-called native Indians inhabiting the Indian subcontinent (and the ancient Indus valley civilization) before the arrival of the nomadic Aryans. This does not, however, imply that present-day Tamilians are genetic ancestors of the people of the Indus civilization.[257] In popular Indian discourse Tamils are often considered to belong in the "Dravidian race," and they are thought to have been driven southwards by the migrating (or "invading") Aryans. Although there are no valid scientific grounds for this hypothesis, it seems to be significant for the construction of Tamil identity and for the general North/South divide of India[258]. Tamils have a high consciousness of the purity of their language, and thus

255 "Tamil" and "Tamilian" are used synonymously to refer to the ethnic group.

256 The other major Dravidian languages are Telugu (spoken mainly in Andhra Pradesh), Kannada (in Karnataka) and Malayam (Kerala). See Jones 1989: 152–153 and Trautmann 1996: 17–19.

257 See e.g. Trautmann 2002: 74–78.

258 E.g. Jawaharlal Nehru stated that the Pathans of the North West and the Tamils of the South are "two extreme examples" of the variety of India. Nehru 1961: 62–63.

there has been significant resistance to the incorporation of Sanskrit and Hindi words[259], not to speak of aversion to the recent Hindic Nationalism of India.

Politically, Tamil Nadu has been known for the Dravidian movement, which has aimed at reducing discrimination connected with caste, gender and religion. Most Tamils are Hindu, with significant minorities being Christian or Muslim. In the national context, Tamils have generally felt themselves distinct from the Hindic or Brahmanic[260] cultures of the North[261] and since the independence of India have attempted to gain autonomy or independence from India as a separate Dravidian Land. Recently, political claims for the independence of Tamil Nadu or the Dravidian Land have moderated.

Madurai, the cultural capital of Tamil Nadu, was founded during the Pandyan Kingdom as early as the sixth century B.C.E. From the first century until the fourteenth the South was ruled by the Cholas and the Pallavas, Chola dominion reaching as far as Central India, Orissa and parts of West Bengal and Ceylon. During the latter part of the era Tamils established themselves overseas in areas like Sumatra, Java and Malaya. In the fourteenth century Muslim rule extended to the South and finally the area was split into many parts, Tamil country falling under Nayak rule, which has been considered the most peaceful time in Tamil history. The Dutch arrived in Tamil country at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and were followed by the British East India Company which established present-day Chennai (formerly Madras). The French also expanded their sphere of influence in the South, but both the French and the Dutch were finally subdued by the British who consolidated South India into the Madras Presidency after warring with the Kingdom of Mysore. The British ruled all Tamil Nadu from 1801 to 1947. After independence the Madras Presidency became Madras State, comprising present-day Tamil Nadu and parts of the neighboring Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka. Subsequently the state was split up along linguistic lines. In 1968 Madras State was renamed Tamil Nadu, an act that can be considered symbolic resistance to the imposition of Hindi as a national language by the Central Government of India.[262] According to the 2001 Census, Tamil Nadu has a relatively high level of urbanization compared to in India in general, although most of the people still live in rural areas of the state[263].

A typical village in Tamil Nadu is nucleated and unwalled with well-defined streets separating castes, which have their own small temples for their respective deities in their section. Usually a village has also one larger main temple. The houses of the village range from one-room huts built of mud and thatch to larger two-storey tile or brick houses. In addition to the temples and mosques, the dominant farmer castes usually own most of the land and hire landless low-caste or casteless laborers (or "coolies") for fieldwork. There were

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259 Maloney 1999: 1125.
260 Brahmans are the highest *varna* or caste.
261 Ramaswamy 1993: 687.
262 See e.g. Ramaswamy 1993 and Maloney 1999. Hindi is not a compulsory subject in Tamil Nadu schools and, most students prefer studying English over Hindi.
263 *Census of India* 2001.

no casteless people living in Kuilapalayam, the village of this study. However, many casteless workers from other areas came to work in the village. In rural Tamil Nadu in general and especially in the area I studied, population pressure and price speculation had led tothe market value of land exceeding its productive value in many areas.

The farmers, the most common occupational group of a Tamil village, usually grow rice, millet, sorghum, pulses, coconuts, bananas and vegetables. Recently, cash crops like casuarina, cashew, sugarcane, cotton and peanuts had become valuable resources to augment a farmer's income. In my research area especially cashew was valued for being a relatively undemanding investment. Mango and tamarind trees were the most common fruit trees grown in the villages.

In a Tamil farming family the men usually do all the farm work other than transplanting and weeding which are done by the women who also milk the cows. In Tamil agricultural areas animal husbandry is primarily a complement to agriculture. Cattle are being used mainly for two purposes: for traction power for tilling the soil and drawing water from wells, and for manure (in dry cultivation) which has been important for its nutrients and moisturizing effect. The importance of cattle manure has increased with deforestation resulting in the loss of green manure. However, when I conducted research in the Kuilapalayam area a successful Aurovillian reforestation project had made the opposite effect.

Usually in rural Tamil Nadu, milk and meat are secondary products of cattle. Sheep and goats are used for meat, especially in the dry areas. The tools of trade, including ox carts, potter's wheels and so forth, are usually handled only by men, leaving domestic chores like cleaning and cooking to women. In a traditional farming family women do almost twice as much work as men. However, towards the turn of the millennium, because of increasing education and commercialization, paid work in various services and businesses became more common as has the employment of women as teachers, nurses and office employees.[264]

Usually a permanent farm servant has to work a full day every day for a month to get seventy-five kilograms of paddy. Often the salary is paid in cash also. Traditionally, the low-status farm-worker (which Athreya et al. call "servant") has been bound to his employer and has not been allowed to seek employment in other farms. However, there have been benefits in commitment to one single employer, including support for family occasions like weddings and getting low-interest or even zero-interest loans. The landlords have usually had a great deal of power over their employees. Earlier they were known even to carry out corporal punishment and have *Harijan*s – the casteless – in a kind of collective bondage. Even today, children might be given to landlords to pay off their fathers' debts or to act as a guarantee for a debt. They have usually worked as herdsmen and come from poor peasant or landless laborer house-

264 Maloney 1999: 1126–1127 and Athreya et al. 1990: 81 & 151–152.

holds. Their wages have usually been paid in meals and sometimes even in cash.[265]

According to Daniel, Tamils imagine their village to have a vulnerable frontier that can be penetrated by foreign entities, whether spirits or humans. The villagers are greatly concerned about the substance of the visitors and, especially, the effect of the foreign on to the substance of the village. Tamils believe that the person is constituted by the nature of the soil on which he lives, the interaction between his "qualities" and those of his village and fellow villagers, the food that he eats, and the life-stage he is at. All these factors have their own quality (*kunam*) that interacts with other qualities making the world a complex network of interacting qualities where the person has to find his optimal position in harmony with the constellation of the *kunams*. In addition, transactions between people and castes produce exchange of substances.[266]

Anthropologists have theorized at length on the Dravidian kinship system, which has preferred cross-cousin marriage. A network of kin alliances that have been established through intracaste marriage has served to link the households together. Patrilineality and patrilocality have been dominant elements in Tamil society, although patrilineality has not been as strong as it has been in North India and matrilateral links have usually remained strong.[267] Especially in my research area, matrilocality had become more popular because of the attractive employment prospects Auroville had to offer to Kuilapalayams. This issue will be discussed later on in the text. In Tamil culture, the ideal spouse for a male is his mother's brother's daughter, or, as was the case in my research area, even the male's sister's daughter. Marriages are usually arranged by the parents. Traditionally, the girl was ready for marriage after the ceremony of her first menstruation. However, especially recently, marriage has tended to be postponed for many years. The bride's family is expected to cover the expenses of the wedding and, in addition, to pay a relatively high dowry to the groom's family. According to Maloney[268], demands for dowry have vastly increased among the educated classes as, according to my observations, they have also done among the uneducated. A married couple are encouraged to build their own house near the husband's parents' home, but often they move into the parents' house. Divorce is difficult for the higher castes but easier for the lower ones although as I found still greatly deplored by the community. According to my observations[269], marriage is still emphasized as the "natural" way of living adult life, and being unmarried is considered close to being sick.

The significance of ritual pollution has decreased in the Tamil village. Migration to cities has affected most castes, perhaps most of all the Brahmans and landless laboring castes. English has gained high prestige over Tamil and it has a valued position as a business and administrative language. Hence English-medium education has become increasingly popular among Tamils. Although

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265 Athreya et al. 1990: 133–135.
266 Daniel 1987.
267 Maloney 1999: 1128.
268 Ibid.
269 Concurred in Daniel 1987: 192.

life is fairly peaceful in Tamil villages, there has been social tension, most commonly caused by violations of family and caste norms and disputes over land. When resources have been scarce, for example during a draught, caste conflicts have sometimes erupted over the right of different castes to use the village wells. Land-owning families are also often engaged in long litigation over land.[270]

Religion, Caste and Politics

South Indian Hinduism shows great diversity in both outward forms and philosophy. It is commonly – and wrongly – assumed, especially in Brahmanic thought[271], that Hinduism is unproblematically an umbrella term for all religious trends affiliated with it. On the local village and caste level there are significant differences, including, surprisingly, the fact that few Tamil villagers have any idea about the (Vedic) literary tradition of Hinduism. Most even fail to recognize the main texts by name – or even the name of the language they were written in. It is obvious that most Tamils do not accept the Brahmanic doctrines of Hinduism.[272] The Western refined view of Hinduism usually experiences its first shock when confronted with religious rituals in an Indian village.

Tamils seem to have somewhat ambivalent feelings towards Brahmanic concepts of Hinduism and the "Hindi imperialism" affiliated with it. The representatives of the Brahman caste are seen as "Aryans of the North," the Other for Tamils. There has been a tendency among the proponents of "book Hinduism" to view the religion of Indian villages and especially that of low caste people as a degenerate form of "real" Hinduism. This is a rather judgmental concept as the proponents of the "folk" Hinduism simply view Brahmanistic Hindus as other "folk." Maloney, for example does not want to accept the "orthodox" Hindu belief[273] that village religion is a mere distortion of a more correct and refined belief system.[274]

When Maloney studied the so-called Sanskritization[275] of the Tamils in the 1970s, he noticed there was more of a pull from the top than a push from the bottom. In other words, the "orthodox Hindus" have strenuously attempted to systemize the heterogeneous belief systems of India as a whole and have made them into a single hierarchical system of gods and castes. The Brahman religious elite has considered itself a model for the lower castes to emulate in creed, rituals and discourse, but the representatives of lower castes in villages have tended to view Brahmans merely as another ethnic group with their own beliefs and practices in religion.[276] In my experience also, Kuilapalayams did not view

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270 Maloney 1999: 1129.
271 Brahmanic thought resembles the Western popular and "official" Indian view of Hinduism.
272 See Maloney 1975: 169.
273 Which is also an Orientalist view, I might add.
274 See Maloney 1975: 170.
275 Sanskritization means the assimilation of "folk Hinduism" to northern, Brahmanic Hinduism.
276 Maloney 1975: 170.

Brahmans as somehow holier or better people. To the villagers Brahmans were the professionals who took care of the rituals in temples and conducted weddings. In Kuilapalayam, a predominantly *Vanniyar*[277] caste village, suggestions of Brahmanic caste hierarchy were reacted to with rather indifferent amusement. Nevertheless, Kuilapalayams were highly cognizant of other aspects of caste boundary. There was hierarchy downwards from the *Vanniyar*s. There were the *Dalit*s[278] or the untouchables, who were most definitely viewed as inferior people, at least by the more traditional villagers. The *Vanniyar*s were also significantly distinguished from the fisher *jati*[279] in the coastal villages. Loyalty to the *jati* usually overran loyalty to the native village. For example, an informant told me there had been a conflict between the fisher *jati* and the farmer *jati* in a seaside village not far from Kuilapalayam. Fishers and farmers from neighboring villages had arrived in the village to defend their own caste group.[280] However Kuilapalayam was an exceptional village in that there were hardly any other *jati*s than *Vanniyar*s present.

Hinduism has traditionally been viewed as an umbrella of belief systems. To buttress this view the doctrine of the reincarnation of gods (as well as people) has been significant, since different regional gods could be viewed as reincarnations of the main gods. Maloney noticed how most of the villagers he studied did not believe in reincarnation. In Maloney's view belief in reincarnation means there is a hierarchy where the Brahmans assume the highest rank, while the lower castes – for their sinful deeds in their previous lives – are relegated to the bottom. This kind of Brahmanic self-laudatory belief system is not very attractive to the lower castes. In my interviews with the villagers, belief in this kind of karmic reincarnation did not show up as a significant belief although religion was often discussed. According to Maloney's observations, the villagers might say that only those with *bhakti* (devotion) are born again, or that no one will born again, or that even the God Brahma does not know the truth about it.[281] However, there is an old belief that a deceased child will be reborn in the same household[282]. This sort of "heresy" has been observed in many cases all over India[283].

For most villagers karma means "sin" or "misfortune." Villagers rarely believe that karma is some kind of a law of action that determines one's incarnation. Many lower castes equate karma to trouble and sickness. For Brahmans

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277 *Vanniyar*s are generally thought to belong to the *Sudra varna* in the caste hierarchy. This is the lowest of the four general *varna*s if the casteless are excluded.

278 The Hindi word *Dalit* – the oppressed – has become the most common and politically correct word to denote the lowest strata of the caste system. "Scheduled caste" was a term coined by the Indian government, and it was commonly used in the media and administration. *Dalit* was not popularly used, at least among uneducated villagers in the Auroville area. The word "untouchable" or the Gandhian word "Harijan" were more popular in English. In Tamil, *Dalit*s were called by their *jati* (subcaste) name or, in more educated circles "Adi Dravidar" meaning the original Dravidians.

279 "Jati" can be roughly translated as "subcaste."

280 See also Vincentnathan 1996.

281 Maloney 1975.

282 Ibid. 1991: 1130.

283 Ibid. 1975: 171–174.

the concept is associated with morality and behavior. The middle castes associate karma with misfortune, independent of one's actions. For most villagers, karma does not follow one after death. There is, however, a general belief in the karmic causality of one's actions, but when asked to elaborate and give examples from the interviewee's own or other people's lives, there is withdrawal and hesitation. In Tamil Nadu the Saiva Siddhanta movement emphasizes love and service and is not preoccupied with sin and merit but with respect for other people. In the Brahmanic version of Hinduism sins are defined in terms of morality and piety. Desire is sinful and earthly things should not be craved. Killing animals and eating their meat is a sin. However, the middle castes define sin in terms of behavior towards others: a person is sinful is when he disobeys his parents, belittles someone, or is violent, malicious and untrustworthy. Above all lying is held to be a major sin. In general, almost everyone in a village eats meat and this is not considered a sin, or only a relatively mild one and acceptable due to circumstances. Casteless people do not seem to have any definition of sin significantly differing from that of the middle castes.[284]

South India has been known for deep religious devotionalism since medieval times. However, despite this, the level of irreligion or atheism is one of the highest among India's states. The reason might lie in the modern Tamil cultural revitalization and the general rejection of Brahmanic Hinduism with its hierarchies. Interestingly, yoga is considered a practice of the sophisticated, Northern, Brahman Hindus. Generally there is only mild respect for the Brahmans as a caste. Some Harijans might even think Brahmans are polluting in a Harijan area although this might be just a provocative stance. *Ganesh* (or *Pillayar* in Tamil) is the only mainstream Hindic god in Tamil villages. In the villages lesser gods and goddesses, most of them female than male, are venerated. *Amman*, or *Maryamman,* the female god, is a generalized mother-figure, although not to be confused with fertility symbolism. In addition to Ganesh, many villagers might admit that amongst mainstream deities *Kali* and *Siva* are worshipped. But usually the main Hindic deities are only worshipped during trips to big cities. In the village, the local deities are more respected. These deities are thought to be more responsive to local, sub-ethnic needs and better able to protect the land, which is their primary task. The function of the local goddesses is focused on family, caste and village whereas the male gods are revered on behalf of the whole Tamil area.[285] One could say the Sanskrit gods are not useful to villagers.[286]

Generally, politics is not separate from the household, honor, caste and kinship in an Indian village. Power and politics are not only public phenomena contrary to what the classical works of political anthropology, such as those of Evans-Pritchard and Fortes, have claimed. The Foucauldian view of power and politics emphasizes them as cultural categories that are negotiated and contested on a daily basis. The works of Davis, Dumont, Geertz and others have

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284 Ibid.: 175–178.
285 Ibid.: 178–183
286 Ibid.: 184. See also ibid. 1999 for Tamil religion, ceremonies and arts.

shown us that the Western separation of politics, religion and economy is questionable when studying the non-Western societies.[287] It might be added that this separation might be just as questionable in the study of Western societies also. Nevertheless, in Indian village life, political disputes have sometimes led to fights or even the destruction of property after an unsuccessful village meeting. Significant disputes are usually taken to court, although villagers rarely trust the legal procedures. For example, the police are seen as corrupt and inefficient. Nevertheless, as in Kuilapalayam, likewise in Indian villages in general there seems to be a vision of a more harmonious past. Villagers did not view political unrest as a normal state of affairs[288]. Usually there is a sense of past oneness, of early days when everyone was united.[289]

In a village studied by Tenhunen, party-leaders were thought of as responsible for keeping up the mutually supportive relationship among their followers. Morality, for the villagers meant the maintenance of these relationships, and the leaders were seen as beneficent patrons of their followers.[290] In Kuilapalayam, many frustrated village men who had been fired from an Aurovillian job obviously saw the situation as a significantly moral issue. Seemingly Aurovillian employers were seen as patrons of a kind, people who had responsibilities to their employees. When a villager was fired, drastic and violent measures could be taken to match the immorality of the employer in firing a villager. Although Tamil villages seem to be mostly peaceful, violence is not such a rare phenomenon, in public or in family households. In this way Tamil homes do not seem to differ from European ones.

The accusation of selfishness is a weapon dissatisfied individuals or groups can use on the occasions when more support is required from a person or a group, whether it be inside the family or for a political party[291]. In Kuilapalayam, accusations of selfishness were often heard when there was talk about Tamil Aurovillians or *Vellakara*s[292]. Many Tamil Aurovillians were seen as selfish, because they did not channel their new wealth to their relatives and families in the village. Obviously, it seemed from the village, Tamil Aurovillians had struck rich: they had better clothing, cell phones, sun glasses, motorbikes and so forth but their loyalty towards their families had diminished. They were also seen as selfish when they did not produce enough employment opportunities for their fellow villagers. Or, when they did arrange employment, it might be only for their relatives. Thus they were accused of nepotism. From Kuilapalayam, Auroville in general was seen in the village as having degenerated morally from an altruistic past to a selfish present. "Auroville is not helping anymore," lamented many of my interviewees.

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287 Tenhunen 2004: 3.
288 Cf. Daniel 1987: 203 who claims that evil and decadence are thought by Tamils to be natural and normal states of the world whereas goodness and virtue require hard work.
289 Cf. Tenhunen 2004.
290 Tenhunen 2004: 4 & 7.
291 Ibid.: 8.
292 *Vellakara* (masc.) or *Vellakachi* (fem.) means white-skinned person in Tamil.

Changing Kuilapalayam

The Old Days

The decade of Auroville's birth was an era of change also in the Tamil village. Peasants had to face new questions brought by modernization. Or, as Adams describes it,

> [b]efore about 1965, the average Indian peasant had only two real alternatives: he could shift crops in response to price changes, expected weather conditions, etc. and he could bring more labor and land into the traditional production process. […] Gradually, however, economic alternatives began to appear: to sell or buy land, to enter urban occupations, to break out of the village system of compensation in kind, to adopt new seeds, to buy a pump-set, to use co-operative credit. […] [A]fter 1961 when [community development] covered the rural areas these options increasingly included new methods of farming. It is here that the interesting questions arise: why sell (or buy) land; why leave the village for factory labor; why buy a pump-set; how much grain to sell, and how much to store; whether to use fertilizer, and how much; how far to trust advice from the government? It is in answering these questions that the degree and kind of economic responsiveness of the peasant become central.[293]

In the old days in Kuilapalayam, most of the year in the village life would be spent preparing for the growing season. The families grew their own food. Cash was scarce and people could not really save any money. If they did manage to save sometimes, they would share their savings with the extended family. People who owned and worked on their own land would rarely have cash. Most families would use the produce of their land themselves as this was such a significant part of their subsistence. If there were any extra money, it was invested in poultry or cattle which the children took care of. Usually when children reached the age of five they were gradually given different chores. Their parents would invest in cattle because the children were a valuable workforce. If one came into a bigger amount of extra money it would be invested in land[294]. The children would usually do more or less the same work as their parents did, namely farming. The families grew their own food. As most families could not afford to send their children to school the children would go as a group to the field and help their parents. A good deal of the work was looking after the livestock. When the children were starting to grow, the work started gradually. After turning five the children were given different tasks by their parents.[295]

Iniyan remembered that in the 1960s there was hardly any water in the village, just one well.[296] Then water pumps started to appear, first in a nearby Aurovillian community from where a connection was arranged for the village

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293 Adams 1970: 201.

294 Nowadays, Aravinth observed, the villagers had become so rich that they were investing more in land and houses. Aravinth 300503.

295 Rathinam 090603 and Moorthi 160803.

296 Kannan, an Aurovillian originating from Kuilapalayam also remembers the same. He told me there was one quite dried up well in the village and almost the whole village had to go as a group to extract water from it. Water could also be fetched from a tap near the coast. Kannan 200503.

and a collection was organized to raise money for the connection. Iniyan remembered how her husband put all his energy into arranging the water supply for the village in the early 1970s. Their house was also the first in the village with electricity. Apart from the shortage of water, Iniyan recalled that the villagers were lacking in cleanliness too.[297] The houses used to be thatched and few in number, recalled Periyasivam from his infant days. There were no roads, even walking was difficult, not to mention cycling. One could not drive to Kuilapalayam by car and there were no motorcycles or mopeds. Even the clothing was very different and simpler. Before, there were no fancy dresses or shirts. Now a regular family had a TV[298] and other electronic equipment.[299]

Perumal, a villager working in Auroville told me that in his childhood the village was "very backward," with "no facilities." After Auroville started the village also started to develop. Perumal's father was exceptionally educated, up to the ninth standard[300], so he knew the value of education and put his sons through English-medium schooling. Perumal was lucky, because few children got to go to school at that time. Another thing he wanted to mention was that in the old days the traditional village headmen were in charge of the village. Even the police had to ask them for permission to enter the village, claimed Perumal. Wrong-doers were punished by tying them down and whipping them in public. One was not even allowed to smoke in the street.[301]

When Moorthi was young in the 1960s, the highest educated person in the village had gone through fifth standard. Moorthi himself went to a school in Pondicherry. He and another boy were the first to do so. Moorthi used to help his father with the livestock after school. It was a very arduous life. They were the first ones to receive a higher education (over fifth standard). In those days no one could afford a bicycle, so they walked all ten kilometers to Pondicherry and back every day. According to Moorthi, the family had to survive on one rupee a day which would buy them three liters of rice. Now rice cost twenty rupees per liter and everyone even had a bicycle which would have been a luxury in the old days.[302]

As Kannan remembered it, in the old days the villagers had no dreams, hopes or plans. Life meant getting food. Almost every family was a farmer family. Everyone had to work and people did not care if they were landless or not, claimed Kannan. A laborer's wage was sufficient in kind or sometimes in cash. In the summer almost everyone was unemployed as there was nothing to do in the fields. Many villagers went to Pondicherry to work, mainly splitting wood, and often their wages were paid in rice. "Work was done not to seek after a dream but to survive," recalled Kannan. After Auroville was established there were drastic changes in the villages. People who used to be totally dependent

297 Iniyan 040703.
298 Bava 070703 also noted that thirty years ago there was no electricity or TV in the village. Now even the poorest families had access to "facilities" now.
299 Periyasivam 190703. See also Perumal 190603.
300 "Standard" is the Indian equivalent of Anglo-American "grade."
301 Perumal 190603.
302 Moorthi 160803.

on land started to get extra income. This was something remarkable as in India usually only educated people get a steady monthly job. And even if one did get a steady job in farming, he would not get as much pay as people in Auroville. Men and women who got work as gardeners and *amma*s[303] in Auroville experienced a great change.[304]

Before and for sometime after the beginning of Auroville village agriculture was based on many different crops, recalled Kannan. Nowadays there was virtually only one crop, cashew, because the workforce had been absorbed by Auroville. Cashew was the most popular crop grown in the area because the harvest season lasted only about two and a half months, which made harvesting affordable.[305] Aravinth also remarked that almost no one was willing to work on the land anymore, because so many were working in Auroville[306]. My interpreter estimated that eighty-five percent of the working population of Kuilapalayam was employed in Auroville, and half of them were also small land owners extracting extra income from seasonal cashew harvesting. According to my interpreter about a third of the Kuilapalayam working population was fully dependent on employment in Auroville, and only fifteen percent were engaged solely in agricultural or other non-Aurovillian work.

Like many other farmers in Kuilapalayam Aravinth had to deal with the recent rising cost of manpower in Kuilapalayam. People used to work for food and kind, he told me, but "now even to have someone cut a tree costs a hundred and twenty rupees a day." Thus, in Aravinth's opinion, the scarcity of labor was the most significant problem in the village. That is why land-owners had to grow crops like cashew that were not so labor-intensive. The whole area lived on cashew, but as Aravinth predicted, this could change in a few years because there had been a shortage of rain.[307] Kumar, a young Aurovillian from a farming family in the village predicted that growing cashew was bound to get more difficult in future years as it drained the soil. Kumar himself went to harvest cashew to help his relatives and augment his Aurovillian salary every year and got about a hundred and twenty rupees a day.[308]

Kannan had noticed that one could find workers more easily for seasonal than permanent agricultural work. In Kannan's opinion, if there had been no Auroville, the cash crop would still have been peanut (in case of good rain), and the farmers would have grown ragi and varagu for food. Recently villagers who were totally dependent on landless farmers, "coolies," had been having difficulties in hiring people who had got used to Auroville wages. An *amma* working

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303 *Amma* means mother or aunt but it was also a euphemism for a cleaning lady in Tamil. The word was also used by the English-speaking population of Auroville.

304 Kannan 200503.

305 Ibid.

306 Aravinth 300503.

307 Ibid. Devanathan also remarked that the men working on the cashew harvest got paid eighty rupees per day, the women fifty and everyone got three meals a day. Devanathan 020703. Incidentally, according to my colleague Ms. Meier, this gender inequality in salary was also practiced in some places in Auroville. This inequality was justified by the claim that Aurovillian employers wanted to be culturally sensitive and not to upset the men of the village by giving village women equal pay.

308 Kumar 100603.

inside a house in Auroville might have been paid the same for working for a village farmer, but the work would have been significantly heavier. The work in Auroville was neat and indoors, "the workers come home fresh," remarked Kannan, but "the workers in the field come home totally exhausted." Those who could not find any work in Auroville or could not have a steady job (mostly women and children) still had to work as coolies in the village. Now almost everyone preferred working in Auroville to working in the village.[309]

Iniyan also told me that after Auroville started no one wanted to work in the fields anymore. The multi-culture of grain changed into the cashew mono-culture cash crop in the 1980s also because according to Iniyan there was not enough rain and everyone "wanted an easy life."[310] An Aurovillian farmer, Peter, told me that one of the reasons for the change was the fact that the Indian government started to subsidize cashew for export. This was because India had to start taking care of its IMF and World Bank loans and create exports. A farmer started to make four to five times more money from cashew than millet.[311]

Kumar told me that for a young person he had seen huge and rapid change in his environment. He believed, for example, that in a few years the Kuilapalayam-Edayanchavadi road that went through Auroville would be all commercialized and filled with shops and kiosks. Commercialization was increasing because of Auroville. It was only a matter of time when the villagers really woke up to the idea. This development could have been avoided if the Aurovillians had been more moderate with their own commercial and infrastructural development. Now Auroville was developing fast and the village followed, claimed Kumar.[312]

Economic Growth and Culture Change

Aravinth was worried about the continuity of Tamil culture in the village. "The culture," which seemed to connote religious festivals, was gradually being ignored. This view was reiterated in many interviews in Kuilapalayam. While I was visiting a temple festival in Kuilapalayam, a young Tamil Aurovillian told me that this particular festival was different now as people were not willing to spend as much on the fireworks and other materials traditionally used to celebrate the festivities. He also thought that the next generation to take over the responsibilities was not going to take the job seriously. It could even be that the traditions would come to an end as the younger generations did not see any significance of the festivals. Traditions were in jeopardy as the young had started to question them. Moreover, many Tamil Aurovillians had become very rich in a short time. The first Tamil Aurovillian generation in the 1970s was poor, but many of them had subsequently struck it rich. Getting rich often meant forgetting

309 Ibid.
310 Iniyan 040703.
311 Peter 100803. Now India is the world's largest producer of processed cashew kernels.
312 Kumar 100603.

one's village roots[313]. I also observed a kind of cultural resignation on the part of Tamil Aurovillians. Many seemed to enjoy their relative privacy in Auroville. For example, I noticed that during village festivals only a few Tamil Aurovillians attended. Often Auroville was seen as a force that estranged people from their native village after they had joined the community. When I asked Aravinth about his thought on the future of Auroville-village relations, he told me he was not worried about Auroville as any kind of threat to the village. In the end, the villagers had the power to bring down Auroville if they wanted[314]. In my interpreter's opinion, Aravinth was an atypical villager because he did not blame anyone for the problems in the village but remained neutral.[315]

Bava told me that village girls had become braver and were not so shy in front of boys anymore. They could even display their affection publicly. This, she thought, was because of Auroville's example. Clothing, speech and general behavior had changed also. The lifestyle of Auroville was very attractive to young villagers, she explained. For example, many people wore jeans now. Bava also had jeans but she did not wear them, because her father did not like it. Her sister wore jeans, but Bava did not like her wearing them.[316] Cultural change was an intriguing and popular subject in the village. Many villagers and Aurovillians alike told me that Kuilapalayam had become a "rough village": it was ruder, more selfish and more modern than other villages.[317] It was also said that the people of the village were wealthier, more violent, more disrespectful and ungrateful compared to the people of remote villages. The reason according to many was economic growth. Rathinam, a land-owning farmer of the upper middle class, told me about how the economic change was reflected also in the village festivities. In Kuilapalayam, the festivities had become a lot more elaborate, and every service that was required to plan and arrange the festival had to be paid for.[318] Even the owner of the idol-carrying bullock cart or tractor had to be paid, he exclaimed. In Kuilapalayam money was now wasted on anything, claimed Rathinam.[319] It seemed as if conspicuousness of the festivals had reached its zenith. The new wealth was reflected in the ritual consumption as-

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313 Cf. Nedumaaran, a Tamil Aurovillian who told me he had no contact with the village anymore but he felt that the connection between Tamil Aurovillians and their villages should be stronger. There was a deep divide between Auroville and the villages. Nedumaaran 270304.

314 This was repeated in other interviews, by Aurovillians and villagers alike.

315 Aravinth 300503.

316 Bava 070703.

317 E.g. Perumal 190603, Kannan 200503, Franz 270503, Basim 150703 and Rathinam 090603. It should be noted, though, that my colleague, Ms. Meier from University of Copenhagen worked in another part of Auroville and noted that Aurovillians who were closer to another Tamil village held Kuilapalayam to be a gentler village. Then again, Devi, a village woman married off to a remote villager told me her new village was very quiet and peaceful compared to Kuilapalayam. Devi 040703.

318 There were five streets, and the residents of every street took care of certain expenditure on a festival. Before, the whole village would share all the cost evenly. Nowadays, there were streets of different degrees of wealth, poor and rich. Before, the minimum contribution (e.g. a thousand rupees.) of a street was negotiated. In general, everything used to be simpler, for example there used to be less lighting. Today's five-day festival was held in one day in the old days.

319 Rathinam 090603.

sociated with the festivals but the younger generations had become estranged from the rituals and perhaps wanted to spend their earnings on other things rather than collective traditions.

Devanathan, a young man from a wealthy land-owning family, thought Auroville was changing the whole village culture. The Westerners were admired. However, if he had joined Auroville, his family would not have approved of it. Maybe some other more lower to middle-class family might have been more permissive of it and maybe even encouraged it. Nevertheless, there was no doubt in Devanathan's mind that Auroville had improved the standard of living in the village. When I asked him if there was anything he would change in Auroville if he had the power, he replied that he did not know Auroville well enough to recommend any change there. When I asked him what kinds of effects Kuilapalayam and Auroville had on each other, he told me it was not necessary to think about it because to him Auroville was separate and the village was separate. As I was not satisfied with the answer, I then asked Devanathan to think what he thought Kuilapalayam would have been like if there had been no Auroville. After some thought, Devanathan told me that without Auroville those who used to have the most wealth would now still be the wealthiest in the village. What Devanathan was clearly referring to was the emergence of the new rich class in the village. It seemed that Devanathan had more respect for the wealth of his own family, the wealth that had been around for generations.[320]

When I asked Devanathan if he had any connection with Auroville in his daily business, he replied that Auroville did not *impede* his business. He did, however, know of one village artisan who used to have a business relation with an Auroville boutique. Suddenly the artisan could not sell his jewelry to the boutique longer because some Aurovillian had started manufacturing the same kind of jewelry and selling it to the boutique. Devanathan knew many other cases where Aurovillians had ousted village producers because of favoritism, although he admitted that some of the cases might have been only rumors.[321] The North Indian Manprasad who lived close to the village in Auroville told me that there was a lot of public land around Auroville, and that local politicians were encouraging people to squat it. Thus Harijan colonies were being built on public land. The problem for many Aurovillians was the fact that the squatters had set up businesses and were copying Aurovillian products and selling them to tourists cheaper than Aurovillian outlets. In Manprasad's opinion it was an economic shake-up, but a good thing as such: if Aurovillians said Auroville could not own the place, then they could not own it.[322]

In Kannan's opinion, economic progress had affected the social structure of the village. The young in particular had changed and they did not respect their elders anymore. Now the young had money, so should they be respectful?

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320 Devanathan 020703

321 Ibid.

322 Manprasad 210503. Manprasad seemed to refer to the slogan of Aurovillian philosophy which stated that "Auroville belonged to no one in particular but to humanity as a whole."

The young villagers had even taken up drinking, and this was done openly, not even covertly, Kannan bewailed.[323] Moorthi had also noted a change in the youth of the village. When Moorthi was young, children had to work hard. Families who demanded work from their children raised trouble-free children. The youngsters who were now being raised without parental control or care would perhaps start stealing or even robbing people. In the old days a child had to do many things under parental control. Moorthi's father beat him if he made mistakes. However, only certain youngsters caused problems today. Before, people had so much to do that there was no leisure time. Youngsters of today did not want to work. Maybe someone had lost his job in Auroville because of not doing it properly. Then what usually happened was that the youth gathered a mob and went to beat up the employer. That is why many Aurovillian businesses hired from outside Kuilapalayam nowadays. Moorthi was not happy with the situation, because Auroville should have been hiring from Kuilapalayam.[324]

Perumal had also noted drastic change in the village. He told me villagers did not respect rules anymore, probably because of Auroville and the increase in wealth. Now there was money and luxury in the village, Perumal told me. In the village the young were heading in the wrong direction – everybody was their own master. Few youngsters studied anymore, claimed Perumal. There were political problems and bipolarization. Even a couple of murders had happened recently.[325] It seemed that for many the change had caused ambivalent feelings. Economic growth was welcomed but the loosening of social control associated with the change caused anxiety, at least for the elder villagers.

The change in women came up also in many interviews in Kuilapalayam. Kannan noted that the life of village women had changed a lot in the past few decades, at least compared to other, more remote villages. The women had even started riding mopeds[326], which was a sign of wealth.

> Culturally there's a big change. I mean women started driving mopeds. That happens only in cities! But in villages like Kuilapalayam, Kottakarai, Edayanchavadi, allow this. And people do not… I mean women are not shy anymore to do that. It has become very common now. I don't think this will happen further, just ten kilometers further. They would look like "Wow, this lady drives a moped!" […] They might think that people driving moped are rich and they are socially well developed people. They have seen women driving mopeds only on TV and cinema.[327]

There had been change in general dress also. The clothing was "modern" now, because people could afford it. Also, now it was *allowed*. Before, modern clothes were shunned. Women had also started to earn, behave more freely and be aware of their rights. Usually a woman was celebrated in the village if she brought money with her. But if in addition she brought other changes with her, the men did

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323 Kannan 200503.
324 Moorthi 160803.
325 Perumal 190603.
326 Women riding mopeds was mentioned also by other Tamils, e.g. Periyasivam 190703, Perumal 190603 and Kavitha 070803.
327 Kannan 200503.

not like it.[328] The Auroville reforestation project had also had unforeseen positive side effects which benefited especially the village women. The village women used to be obliged to spend time collecting the daily firewood as the area was such a wasteland but when the Auroville forests grew the women could easily get a lot of firewood. In addition they now had a lot more free time that could be used for various things including working in Auroville. Hence, many village women were gradually employed in household work in Aurovillian homes and in Auroville handicraft businesses.[329]

In Kannan's view change was inevitable in the village but without Auroville it would have taken longer. For example, unlike the men in remote villages the men of Kuilapalayam could wear shorts; in the villages fifteen or twenty kilometers away the men still wore *lungi*s[330] or long pants[331]. There had also been a change in attitude towards strangers. Kannan remembered that in the early days villagers were more unselfish and ready to help strangers. The villagers used to be more helpful. Now people thought that if, for example, an Aurovillian needed help, he had to pay for it. Now villagers were more money-oriented. In Kannan's view, Tamil people were usually very willing to help each other, but not Aurovillians anymore. However, Kannan reminded me that this could have been due to general modernization, not just to Auroville's effect in particular.[332] In Kumar's view the social network used to be a lot more significant in the village, and so did the *jati*s.[333] Kannan also emphasized the decreased significance of *jati*s. Kannan was a *Vanniyar*, of the farmer caste. To him it was a high caste among farmers. Of course, the highest caste was the Brahmans, but "today money makes the caste," remarked Kannan. Money meant a lot and gave status, but in Kannan's view, whenever the villagers felt emotional about something, the significance of caste was highlighted. But at least for Kannan caste meant nothing. Otherwise he would not have married someone from a different caste.[334]

Kumar remembered that there used to be a stronger sense of community in the village. Now everyone was thinking: "Why should I do as someone else says? Why don't I do what I want to do?" Those who had been able to join Auroville, grew cashew and had some other businesses on the side. Making money had replaced communality, Kumar claimed.[335] And money was made by working in Auroville and growing cashew. Those who owned enough land could also sell it to Auroville. Kannan told me how in the early days Aurovillians bought huge areas of land from the villages. At that time, there was no thought of villagers *losing* their land. Now there was such feeling, and sometimes it caused antipathy towards Auroville. Land used to be the only resource

328 Ibid. and Kavitha 070803.
329 See e.g. Manprasad 210503 and Basim 150703.
330 A two-meter length of cloth worn by men over their waist.
331 It should be noted, however, that traditional dress was still widely used in Kuilapalayam too.
332 Kannan 200503.
333 Kumar 080503.
334 Kannan 200503.
335 Kumar 080503.

in the past, but in the early days the villagers practically gave it away happily to get jobs in Auroville.[336]

Ambika, a North Indian development worker, also expressed her views on the change in caste ideology. For a long time she did not even know her caste, which was somewhere between Brahmans and *Kshatrya*s[337]. According to Ambika, the only distinctive castes nowadays were the Brahmans, the *Dalit*s and the business caste. Moreover, today language proficiency was affecting caste thinking. An urban person with an educated background and language proficiency enjoyed many liberties which functioned as a factor equal to caste. If Ambika were a village woman only speaking Tamil she would not have been able to dress the way she did – in a quite Western way, as she described it. English was a major status factor in contemporary India.[338] Interestingly, I might add, none of the Brahmans or higher caste Indians I met in Auroville claimed they believed in caste ideology. Most of the Aurovillian *Vanniyar*s also told me they felt indifferent about caste ideology. Ezhumalai, a *Vanniyar* of village origin, told me he was not a religious person as he *liked every caste* and could employ even *Dalit*s in his business unit.[339] This would imply a caste-centric view of Hinduism such as has been common in Indo-Orientalism. None of the village Tamils I interviewed linked caste and religion, although caste rarely came up in their interviews.

In Kannan's opinion the socioeconomic impact of Auroville had been a good thing for the villages, but the villagers had not yet understood the meaning of Auroville. Actually, not all the Aurovillians had understood it either, he observed. Aurovillians had not been able to explain themselves to the villagers. The villagers usually learned by experiencing and observing, Kannan told me. They learned how to dress and eat like an Aurovillian, and they would have learned to *live* like an Aurovillian if they had had an example. The material side of Auroville was easy to imitate. The spiritual side was harder. Kannan recalled how the Mother, the founder of Auroville, had said villagers were quick to imitate. In Kannan's view harmful things had been absorbed already, especially among the young[340]. Moreover, Auroville had perhaps taken in the wrong kind of villagers. What kind of villagers Kannan meant he did not elaborate on. However, it seems he meant they were less spiritual and more business-oriented. There had been disturbances in the village for which Tamil Aurovillians had been blamed. Kannan lamented that even the Western Aurovillians had not adopted the ideal of Auroville any more than Tamils had. There were people among both the Westerners and the Tamils who had not understood

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336 Kannan 200503. A few decades ago uncultivated dry land in Tamil Nadu was considered almost worthless. Hence, when the first Aurovillians started to buy land from the villagers, many were amazed by how much *Vellakara*s were willing to pay for it.

337 Kshatryas form the second highest *varna* in the Brahmanic hierarchy.

338 Ambika 050603.

339 Ezhumalai 130503.

340 Or, as Arivalagi told me, the problem with the youth of the village today is the thwarted concept of Western liberty, as it was thought to entail irresponsibility. Arivalagi 060903.

Auroville. Anyway, to decide who is justified in living in Auroville was a hard task.[341]

Nevertheless, Auroville and Kuilapalayam were economically interdependent and their recent histories were strongly intertwined. Auroville needed Kuilapalayam labor and Kuilapalayam needed the work. This interface *per se* was generally unproblematic in the relationship between the two groups. However, the interface included many other influences and contrasting values and significances besides economic ones. Kuilapalayam had changed a lot in thirty years from a mud hut village to a dynamic, rapidly modernizing semi-urban and relatively flourishing area on the Indian scale. This was partly due to the effect of the strange but affluent community alongside.

341 Kannan 200503.

7 THE COMMUNITY OF AUROVILLE

The Birth and Growth of Auroville

The Mother, the matron of Sri Aurobindo Ashram of Pondicherry, had dreamed of establishing a community like Auroville since the 1910s. She had a vision of a place where people could live freely as citizens of the world under one sole authority, that of "the Supreme Truth." In this community the whole capacity of the human mind was to be used to conquer human sufferings and problems. Eventually, a detailed plan of Auroville was presented at a Sri Aurobindo Society (SAS) conference in 1964. In 1968 the ambitious township experiment was finally inaugurated in a grand international ceremony on a barren plateau near Pondicherry. SAS was given the organizational responsibility of the town planning of the community. The project was inundated with supportive messages from around the world, including a declaration of support and a grant from UNESCO. Already in 1967 a small colony called Promesse was established to accommodate the pioneering Aurovillians.[342]

Auroville was meant to be a universal township where "unity in diversity" was to be realized. People were to live in peace and harmony without any political, religious or ethnic disputes. The official ground rules of Auroville declared that the community did not actually belong to anyone but to humanity as a whole, and to live in Auroville one must be a "willing servitor of Divine Consciousness." Endless education, progress and youthfulness were encouraged, and Aurovillians were to use the findings of both spiritual and material research to "create a bridge between the past and the future."[343] Auroville was a true child of its age. The youth of the Western world were in rebellion against conventional ways of life, and "the spiritual East" seemed to offer something more than "the materialistic West." For the youth of the 1960s it was important

342 Sullivan 1994: 23–40 and Purushotham 1990: 36–40.
343 *Ideals of Auroville* 1999: 7; G. 1997: 8 and *Auroville Introduction* 1997.

to find intensive experiences, new identities and ways of achieving unity which conventional society could not produce.[344]

The Mother's idea of a totally new human being with a totally new way of living attracted many Westerners who wanted to change the world. The central government of India was also attracted to Auroville, since the community had roots in the philosophy of the great freedom-fighter Sri Aurobindo. Besides, the purpose of Auroville was similar to the official spiritual purpose of India: unity in diversity. Thus, Auroville seemed like an attempt to implement the ideals of the federal state. While many spiritual communities in India aspired towards withdrawal from the world, the purpose of Auroville was the opposite. Following Sri Aurobindo's view of life, the spirituality of Aurovillians was meant to be implemented in both inner- and outer-worldly action, not in withdrawal. Auroville was to be the place where a new kind of human-being – a more divine man – was to emerge and spread all over the world. Moreover, there was to be no politics in the new community, although some kind of flexible organizational structure was thought to be inevitable in the beginning.[345]

Auroville was to be socially, politically and economically, thus in every way different from any other existing societies and manifest a synthesis of different cultures. The forms and characters of the world's cultures were to be available for any Aurovillian to become familiar with. For this purpose cultural pavilions representing different nations were planned to function as somehow living museums presenting valuable and essential aspects of those nations. Marriage was thought of as an old-fashioned or even childish institution. Thus the structure of the conventional family was to be altered. "Divine anarchy" was to be the political structure of Auroville where spiritually conscious humans were to organize themselves spontaneously without any stated rules or laws. In the economy self-sufficiency was sought after with the help of all community members and without a conventional wage system. Work was not to be valued for the money earned but as a mode of yoga and as a way of expressing oneself. Private ownership was to be abandoned and religions of any kind were forbidden[346]. The final end of Auroville was nothing less than the superman, the representative of a new spiritual human race.[347] The basic principles of the community were stated in the *Auroville Charter*[348] written by the Mother.

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344 See e.g. Mills 1973.

345 Purushotham 1990: 1–2; Lorenzo 1993: 245–248 and Sullivan 1990: 50.

346 I am, however, tempted to argue that Aurovillian beliefs constructed a distinctive emergent or neo religion. For discussion of religiosity in Auroville, see Minor 1999; Meier 2004 and Jouhki 2002.

347 Purushotham 1990: 32–35; *Mother on Auroville* 1993: 78*; Ideals of Auroville* 1999: 16 and *Joining Auroville* s.a.

348 The Charter of Auroville presents four basic principles of Auroville:
1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be the willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.
2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.

After its much celebrated inauguration, Auroville was ready to be built. The conditions were harsh as there was virtually no existing infrastructure. There was a shortage of water and the soil was severely eroded and dry due to deforestation. There were the twenty-five Tamil villages around the Auroville area, most of the population living below the poverty line. The physical beginning of the community was far away from utopia, but the pioneers were enthusiastic, enjoyed their ascetic lifestyle and slowly started to develop the infrastructure of the community. For example, a small health clinic was opened for Aurovillians and villagers, small communities were established on different corners of the vast plateau, wells were dug and water pipes drawn. Land was purchased, embanked, fenced and cultivated. Historically, Tamil dry land has had very little or no monetary value whatsoever[349]. It meant that the pioneers could expand their territory inexpensively. However, the way Auroville dealt with the land deals created social tensions in the village. Many villagers sold their land for a fraction of what they would have got a few years later. Although Auroville only acted within the present market situation, many villagers felt cheated. Nevertheless, numerous local villagers were hired in Auroville to help in construction, cleaning, cooking and cultivation and most of them were happy to be employed.

By the end of 1969 there were fourteen residential buildings in Auroville and the community had started to produce some of its own food. The SAS, vigorously discharging its responsibility for Auroville's planning and organization, started an advertising campaign that did not shun elements of science-fiction: the City of the Future was being built. The national and European media spread the word of Auroville and impelling busloads of passionate European youths and Indian Aurobindoans to find themselves and manifest human unity in Auroville. More small communities were built for the newcomers and their children. The first school of Auroville was established in 1971, the same year as the construction of Matrimandir[350], the soul of Auroville, started. Reforestation, perhaps symbolizing the regeneration of human life, started off with great gusto. However, the material development of the City of the Future was not as vigorous as the SAS had hoped for. Aurovillians were more interested, perhaps more realistically in revitalizing the land. In any case, satisfying the basic everyday needs of the community took a lot of the energy of the pioneers. For the SAS the situation was rather embarrassing.[351]

Although Auroville developed materially, no significant collective consciousness emerged as the members of the community implemented their indi-

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3. Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realisations.

4. Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity. WWW3.

349 Athreya et al. 1990: 98–105.

350 Matrimandir means the Temple of Mother. The ball-shaped structure with a meditation chamber inside and gardens and lakes outside is intended to be the center of future Auroville.

351 Purushotham 1990: 22–24 & 45–53; Sulllivan 1994: 77–78 and G. 1997: 13.

vidual plans for the ideal life, scattered across the plateau. There was surprisingly little communication between the small communities. No coordinating body was established to monitor the overall development of the community. This was partly due to the charisma of the Mother, from whom individual Aurovillians sought advice and approval for their projects. The Mother's word was law, and her word was often quoted and referred to in decision-making back in Auroville. In any case, the general belief in Auroville and its purpose was strong and, despite the ascetic circumstances, the idealist Aurovillians were sure the City of Dawn would be built soon. After the first six years there were fifteen small communities with a total of 322 Aurovillians living in Auroville. The villagers regarded the Aurovillians – the North Indians and *Vellakara*s – with mixed emotions. Some were very hopeful and thought Auroville would increase the quality of life of the villages and some thought the White Man had returned to rule them again. Nevertheless, everyone knew big changes were ahead.[352]

When the 95-year-old Mother died[353] in 1973, she left behind her a power vacuum. Indeed, the Mother of Auroville had left the community to survive on its own, causing a severe collective emotional shock. The shock was also organizational, since without the unchallenged sympathetic authority of the Mother anti-Aurovillian formations of the SAS could gain more political influence. Officially Auroville was owned by the society, and thus its financing was in the hands of "outsiders" against whose conventional and formal way of management Aurovillians had already protested. Negative feelings were mutual as many Aurobindoans were disappointed at the public image of Auroville produced by the somewhat eccentric, not necessarily conventionally spiritual-seeming and not so clean-cut pioneers. The evident differences between ideals of the two sides soon started to escalate. To the society, Aurovillians, at their worst, represented Western chaos with free sex, drugs, indelicate behavior and humanity on a lower level. Aurovillians were seen as quarrelsome, anti-communal foreigners with false perceptions of Aurobindo's philosophy. To many Aurovillians, the distant SAS people represented conventional authority, aggrandizement, unjustified rules and standards, rigid hierarchies, moralism, petrified socioeconomic views and even fascism, racism and fanaticism – everything that Auroville was created to overcome.[354]

Finally in 1975 the Aurovillians pleaded for autonomy, which was rejected by the SAS who had started to reduce their financing of Auroville. The dispute got publicity in the media, which seemed to support the SAS against the defiant Aurovillians. Many attempts to solve the controversy in dialog fell through, and eventually the SAS took the matter to court. The next five years were filled with mutual hostility that at times escalated into violence. Dozens of reported of-

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352 Lorenzo 1993: 247 & 344–345; Purushotham 1990: 55–57 and *The Auroville Adventure* 1998: 25.

353 Or: "left her body," as the Aurovillian euphemism had it. Many Aurovillians thought the Mother still existed on another plane from where she could observe and help Aurovillians.

354 Purushotham 1990: 61–63 and Lorenzo 1993: 345–413.

fenses were put on file and some Aurovillians were even jailed temporarily. The SAS stopped virtually all funding to Auroville, so almost all projects that did not have individual funding from Aurovillians had to be put on hold. The subsistence of Aurovillians was meager and to make matters worse, Auroville was internally torn apart too. There was a minority group called the Neutrals who were to some extent sympathetic to the SAS or tried to remain impartial in the matter. Most of the more radical majority, or the Radicals, of Auroville could not accept such impartiality and worked to isolate the Neutrals. Human unity and Auroville seemed to be very far apart from each other. In the end the Supreme Court of India ruled in favor of an autonomous Auroville. The central government separated Auroville from the SAS and by the terms of the Auroville Emergency Provision Act of 1980 appointed itself to be temporarily in control of the community. In Auroville the Act was received with mixed emotions. On the positive side the community was rid of the SAS, but then once again subjected to another outside ruler. Some Aurovillians viewed the solution as a footboard, some as a straightjacket for the development of the community. Nevertheless, Auroville was now safe to continue its development towards the City of the Future and human unity.[355]

In 1984 the Sri Aurobindo International Institute of Educational Research was founded to develop the education, research and town planning of the community. In addition to material research, the institute concentrated on studying the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Also in the same year Auroville started providing high school level education for the community's youth. Relations between Auroville and the surrounding villages started to become more focused when various work and education possibilities were organized for the villagers. In addition, the Auroville Village Action Group (henceforth AVAG) was established to plan and implement development cooperation with the villages and The Centre for Indian Studies was founded to obtain and spread knowledge of India's traditions and cultures. During the 1980s the population of Auroville doubled from four to eight hundred. In the same period small industries grew and various business units were established. The community started to produce fabrics, jewelry, art, leather products and even computer technology for its own use and for outside markets. By the end of the decade Aurovillian business units employed about eight hundred villagers and seventy Aurovillians. Research on renewable energy like solar and wind power, and biogas was invested in. Reforestation projects were continued and the landscape slowly started to turn greener.[356]

The decade after the war with the SAS was a time of progress. The infrastructure was improved from a rather basic hut community into a relatively modernized area. In 1988 the Central government of India passed another law on Auroville, the Auroville Foundation Act. Now the Government appointed itself in permanent management of Auroville. The Act appointed a governing

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355 Purushotham 1990: 67–72; Lorenzo 1993: 279, 395 & 416; Jouhki 2002: 85–87; Shraddhavan 3/99 and Luc 120399.

356 *The Auroville Adventure* 1998: 6 & 70; Purushotham 1990: 81–86 and Jouhki 2002: 88.

board, a residents' assembly and an international advisory council as the decision-making system in the community. The Indian Parliament was to significantly sponsor Auroville with a sum decided yearly. Parliament also reserved the right to dismantle the Auroville Foundation and thus the community itself if necessary. The Act was welcomed by those Aurovillians whose opinion prioritized Auroville's material development. Obviously, such an Act was not in line with Auroville's philosophy of government, the Divine Anarchy, but many Aurovillians believed that the young community should have all the material and legal help possible to first to grow and then later start orienting towards a more fluid form of government. Some Aurovillians thought the Act was a step back from Auroville's ideals, surrender to the conventional Establishment. The Mother had stated "No rules in Auroville," but obviously the need for rules and regulations grew as the community and its organizational structure increased.[357]

By the turn of the millennium Auroville had grown rapidly into a flourishing, attractive community. Almost two thousand people from over thirty countries resided in Auroville, working in their shops, restaurants, fields, factories, organizations and arts. Most of them were there to stay; some had come for an indefinite period and some for a sabbatical of a few years. Auroville had managed to attract a large educated workforce from Europe: engineers, architects, teachers etc. had come to build the community, enjoy the exotic environment and study their inner spirituality. Most of the physical manpower came from the surrounding villages: the cleaners, cooks, gardeners, drivers, waiters and so on. The economy of Auroville rested in individual hands as private sources of income were the most significant form of finance for the community. There was a Central Fund of Auroville to which all business units and individuals had to "contribute[358]" monthly and which redistributed the money for the public service of the community. Although Auroville had developed rapidly, self-sufficiency had eluded the Aurovillian economy. This was due to the tremendous dependence on outside labor, and the relatively small scale of Auroville's industrial and food production.[359]

By the late 1990s, Auroville's material subsistence had long since disappeared as a significant problem for the community. Auroville had attracted wealthy Westerners with relatively strong liquidity and ability to employ surprisingly cheap Tamil labor, a combination that had made the community's economy a rather powerful one. Instead of subsistence, Auroville's main problems now seemed to circle around the structure and planning of the community and around the philosophy of Auroville and its spiritual authorities. One of Auroville's aims has been to build a city with a definite town plan. For this the

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357 Lorenzo 1993: 325; Purushotham 1990: 93–98; G. 1997: 2 & 21–22 and Jouhki 2002: 89–92.

358 In Auroville the word "contribution" was used instead of "tax."

359 Alain & Tim 1998: 2; *The Auroville Adventure* 1998: 58–59 and Jouhki 2002: 92–93.

community needed land[360], and most of the land needed was owned by Tamil villagers and outside real-estate dealers. Not surprisingly, the price of land had soared as the owners had seen the future value of the land. Thus, the Auroville of the starting millennium was a patchwork of parcels of land.

Arjun, an Aurovillian town-developer of North Indian background had worked for Auroville since the beginning of the community and had spent much time on the delicate issue of the mutual development of Auroville and the villages. He told me that in the beginning, villagers welcomed the opportunity to progress economically via Auroville. In those days, the village land was totally worthless. The farmers got only one meager crop a year. So the land owners were very happy to get at least something for their land. And "crazy people" from all over the world were ready to pay for it! But when the land slowly started to regenerate, the villagers understood their land had value. Those who had managed to keep their land started to raise the prices as Auroville grew.[361]

The next step was natural: land speculation in a context where rich people were willing to buy a great deal of land. By now the prices had increased a hundred or two hundred fold. Moreover, because of Auroville villagers had new employment opportunities, and those who got work in Auroville got wealthier, but also caused envy in the village. Those educated in Auroville changed in the international atmosphere and drifted away from village culture. This led to social problems in the village. At the same time greed was the dominant factor, the town-developer claimed. "And where there is greed, the politician will soon appear," he continued. In the beginning, to achieve co-operation, Auroville *gave* a lot to the villages in the material sense. The villagers were very poor, and Aurovillians came from better economic surroundings with fancy belongings which attracted the villagers. Many Aurovillians simply gave away their things, an act of charity understandable in the context of the Christian background. "But charity only produces dependence," explained Arjun. This was realized too late, about fifteen years ago. The donations created the supposition of that there was a right to get things from Auroville.[362]

In addition to education and hygiene instruction, encouraging cottage industries had proved to be beneficial for the villages and the relationship between Auroville and the village, as European and American tourists could afford to buy products from villages. In this area the skills of villagers had been updated and fashion issues had been taught to them. It had turned out to be a successful venture giving the village artisans income and creating a bond between Auroville and the villagers. One of the problems in the relationship was the fact that AVAG, the unit responsible for development co-operation, had modern ideas which appeared harmful in villages. From the early years on, the issues of caste, gender, children's education and hygiene had worried Aurovillians. AVAG was born, and had modest success but also failings. European de-

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360 According to the Aurovillian website, in 2005 Auroville owned less than half of the planned community area. As land prices had soared (500% in the last decade) the remaining land (ca. 9 km^2) would have cost over sixteen million euros. WWW4.

361 Arjun 220503.

362 Ibid.

mocracy and women's rights faced a great deal of opposition in a rigid, uneducated village community. In Arjun's view, there was a thing called "native understanding," but "uneducatedness makes everything modern appear as harmful."[363]

Aurovillian development co-operation with the villages had happened only on the material level. In Arjun's view, the villages should have been admitted in the overall planning of the region. Otherwise the growth of the villages could have a harmful effect on Auroville. Arjun described how at the moment Auroville was moving into a development policy that encouraged villagers to make their own development plans in harmony with and with the assistance of Auroville. But villagers could not be asked to co-operate on the basis of Auroville's ideal foundation. Auroville's ideals were not the villager's ideals.[364] However, the land issue was even more complex. In addition to the whole area of Auroville not being owned by Auroville but being scattered with patches of land of belonging to Auroville there was the ambitious Galaxy Plan, which was thought by many as highly unrealistic and exceedingly high-priced to implement.[365] However, these problems of the future seemed rather insignificant to many Aurovillians enjoying the free and relaxed atmosphere of the community.

The Motivation of Aurovillians

The Children of the Sixties and Tamil Aurovillians

By 2003 Auroville had been attracting various kinds of people from many countries for 35 years. In the 1960s and '70s new Aurovillians were mostly young explorers who sought to broaded their minds and follow a more liberal, tolerant and untraditional lifestyle beyond the conventional norms of society. Hippie culture seemed to fit very well with these ideals emphasizing cultural understanding and human unity. Most Western Aurovillians had experienced detachment from what they thought were Western, mainstream, bourgeois and materialistic values. Rebellion, psychedelic experiences, harmony with nature and humankind were seen as more valuable. Many regarded the East as a source of wisdoms that could not be experienced in the West. Especially "mystic India" seemed to give answers to significant questions concerning the meaning of life. For many, just to do something totally different was a sufficient motivation.[366]

Many Aurovillians had not heard about Auroville when they arrived in India, in the 1960s and '70s. They were primarily interested in what was offered by Indian religions and the spirituality associated with them. Many of these

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363 Ibid.
364 Ibid. This issue will be discussed later in more detail.
365 Jouhki 2002: 93. According to the Galaxy Plan, Auroville was to have been built in the form of a spiral galaxy that had different sections for leisure, accommodation, industry, farming, etc.
366 Ibid.: 95–98.

seekers ended up frustrated with the religious side of India. Eventually, they found Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and/or the unconventional lifestyle of Auroville to offer something more tangible than the mere introverted spirituality that many Westerners associated with India. In addition to the people who came by more organized paths to Auroville, some travelers just happened to come across Auroville or the Mother's ashram in the nearby city of Pondicherry and were so impressed by their atmosphere and purpose that they decided to stay permanently. Meeting the charismatic Mother was for many an earth-shattering experience that changed their lives. Only a few visitors (and future Aurovillians) had no specific purpose in their travels and merely wanted to spend their time in different surroundings.[367] Many of these wanderers had by thirty years later become respected pioneers of Auroville.

Around the turn of the millennium the motivation of Aurovillians was somewhat different. Although most Aurovillians stated that Aurovillian ideals and the philosophies of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were their primary inspiration, the variety, freedom and recreational atmosphere of the community seemed to add to their motivation. Indeed, as India for a Westerner is a relatively inexpensive nation to live in, one could materially enjoy his life easily in Auroville. Thus many Western Aurovillians or visitors to Auroville regarded their stay as a getaway from their stressing jobs in the West and wanted to spend a year or two in a more laissez-faire and relaxed environment.[368] Most Aurovillians, however, still regarded spiritual growth and work for human unity as their main motivation in living in Auroville.

As it did for Westerners, Auroville seemed to offer a potentially better material quality of life also to people from the surrounding villages. A job in Auroville was highly valued in the villages both for the pay and, for some, the prestige. However, due to the villagers' relatively low standard of living, they experienced relatively higher resistance from Auroville's side in their attempts to join Auroville. In other words, while it was effortless for a wealthy Westerner to join Auroville this was not the case for than for an indigent villager. Many thought this was in conflict with the only requirement the Mother had stated. According to her, those applying for the membership only had to have good will. However, according to my observations, the applicant's origin (the West/India) was not such a significant issue compared to the wealth of the applicant. In other words, there was no ethnic discrimination in the entry policy of Auroville. Ideally, a wealthy Indian had just as much oppostunity to join Auroville as a wealthy European if other circumstances in their background (devotion to Aurovillian ideals, education, language proficiency etc.) were equal. Nevertheless, it seems that at least in 1999 there was a slight difference between expressions of Indian and European motivation. At least many Indian nationals emphasized that in their decision to join Auroville the fact that the community was such a peaceful place compared to their earlier place of residence meant a

367 Ibid.: 98–100.
368 Ibid.: 100–103.

great deal.[369] This, however, might have been merely a difference in rhetoric, not in attitude.

Throughout the history of Auroville a significant and relatively unchanging factor in Aurovillian motivation has been mystic guidance. Many have arrived in Auroville informed and consciously seeking to start a new life based on rational and earthly decision-making. For some, Auroville was at first only one tourist attraction among many others in India, but after they had stayed in Auroville for a short period of time, they had been so impressed by various aspects of the community that they had decided to stay. Some enjoyed Auroville as their part-time refuge from Europe. They worked regularly in the West and then returned to Auroville for a brief or extended period to enjoy the fruits of their labor and the leisure and peace of Auroville. Nevertheless, surprisingly many displayed belief in mystic guidance in their path to Auroville. Although Aurovillians might have made rather earthly decisions to join Auroville or had "just ended up" in the community, many explained their decisions as influenced by some kind of higher force.

Many Aurovillians felt chosen or drawn by mystic guidance. This higher force was also felt in other events in Auroville: in hardships and successes or even in rather mundane decisions. These events were interpreted as either educative or blessing. A misfortune could have been a lesson from the deceased Mother who was still living in another dimension. Also a success or a stroke of fortune could have been interpreted as a gift from her. Some even believed that anyone who had ever visited Auroville had done so due to the purpose of a higher force. Some had experienced mysterious signs awake or asleep and interpreted them as confirmation that they must join Auroville. Some had experienced peculiar coincidences[370] that reinforced their attraction to and belief in Auroville. The element of higher force, whilst it has featured in Aurovillian narratives throughout the history of Auroville, was later accompanied by more secular or perhaps rational forms of decision-making. It seems that in the early days of Auroville people were more willing to trust their guidance and their imagined destiny more intuitively than later on in the 1990s.[371]

At any rate, Auroville was a community whose members emphasized the spiritual side of their lifestyle. This spirituality was not, however, that evident to the villagers who lived close by. Some thought Auroville was just a tourist resort or a white business area. Some observed the effects of a Western lifestyle on the youth of the village or the Tamil Aurovillians and felt it was shattering the foundations of their culture. However, many villagers were interested in the different way of life of Aurovillians and wanted to join the community, and this was often accompanied by the desire to improve their economic status.

According to my observations, Kuilapalayams could be roughly divided into four different categories according to their sociocultural proximity to Auroville. The closest group was the acculturated Tamil Aurovillians. They had

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369 Ibid.: 103–104.

370 E.g. visiting Auroville and ending up staying in the community because their car had broken down.

371 Jouhki 2002: 106–109.

a long history in Auroville and had more or less succeeded economically and in terms of status. They had familiarized themselves with a "Western way" of thinking. They had wealth, education, language skills and rather weak connections with their native village. They understood and could explicate the ideals of Auroville in a refined way. The second closest group to Auroville was the Tamil Aurovillians who had satisfactory fluency in English, worked in a relatively low position, had some knowledge of Aurovillian ideals, and had strong connections with their native village. The third closest group to Auroville was the "workers" of Auroville, the Tamil villagers who were employed full time, part time or sporadically in Auroville. They had no idea or only a faint idea of what Auroville was about and their knowledge of English was rather poor. They had a nascent exposure to "Western culture" which for many meant prestige. The farthest group in this simplified model was the villagers who had no work or relatives in Auroville. They had no knowledge of the purpose of Auroville and they were affected by the community indirectly by the trickle-down effect, images and experiences of and stories about Tamil Aurovillians, and by visual exposure (*Vellakara*s on motorbikes, fancy buildings etc.) to the community.

Perhaps those who were the least critical of Auroville were the Tamils of the second category, those with low status jobs in and membership of Auroville. The Tamils of the first category were so conscious of Aurovillian ideals and had sufficient experience of the practical side of the community that they could criticize Auroville, especially the Western Aurovillian lifestyle, and, what is most important, they could produce counter-hegemonic discourse against the Western Aurovillian critique of "the Tamil issue[372]." Those of the second category, however, were usually so satisfied by their improved standard of living and their acceptance into the community, perhaps after years of waiting, that criticism of Auroville was unlikely to occur to them. They had everything to gain, even if it meant reproducing the Tamil working class of Auroville. The Tamils of the third category might have shrunk from the strange ways of their Western masters and envy their riches, but they were mostly satisfied with their work. The fourth group were either indifferent to or slightly cautious or suspicious of Auroville. For them Auroville just *was*. For them, Auroville was obviously a significant factor, a strong and strange entity which could be interpreted only through observing its effect on their fellow villagers whether they be the "workers" or Aurovillians.

Ideological and Economic Divisions

It is rather difficult to classify Aurovillians according to their different motivations without crude generalizations. However, at the beginning of 1990s Lorenzo divided Western Aurovillians into two types. One included American university-educated humanists impressed by the multicultural atmosphere of

372 The "Tamil issue" means the widespread conception of Tamil villagers joining Auroville for economic reasons. See Chapter 9.

Auroville. They were the proponents of an ecological world-view and interested in environmental issues, organic farming, reforestation and erosion control in Auroville. The other type included Europeans who were either artists inspired by the liberal atmosphere of Auroville or professional town planners who had come to Auroville to build the model city of the future. Both the American and Europeans were familiar with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, Lorenzo observed.[373]

Aurovillians themselves were prone to typify themselves into administrative and spiritual groups. The stereotype of an Aurovillian administrator was a bureaucrat trying to develop the material structure of the community by organizing different projects and meetings with other administrators. He was a proponent of the philosophical side of the community but his *modus operandi* was based on strict planning and he concentrated on the material side of the city. He was rational and concrete in his thought. The spiritualist, however, was more withdrawn. Perhaps he was a kind of lifestyle yogi who emphasized the Divine Anarchy side of the community. He thought the community was best developed by progressing within, in spirit. Material planning was perhaps irrelevant to him as he concentrated on his *Karma Yoga* by cultivating his piece of land or painting the visions he had experienced in his dreams.[374]

There was also a temporal typification into old-timers or pioneering Aurovillians and modern or more recent Aurovillians. The pioneers were the rugged settlers of Auroville who had built the basis of the community. They had always been more inclined to live simply – even ascetically – and they were seen as "more tuned" with the Aurovillian golden age[375]. Many of the pioneers had valuable social capital as they had personally met the Mother, struggled with the Society and eventually made Auroville flourish materially. Perhaps they were thought of as having more faith or even stubbornness in pursuing the ideals to be realized in Auroville. The modern Aurovillians, meanwhile, were the people who had arrived in Auroville in the 1990s. They were well-off, well educated and perhaps not so rigid in their idealism. They were seen as more prone to emphasize the economic side of the community and they felt that the old-timers were old-fashioned in their way of living and thinking. The modern Aurovillians tended to be less interested in the villagers and less willing to have contact with them.[376]

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373 Lorenzo 1993: 150–154.

374 Jouhki 2002: 117. See also Meier 2004: 76–78 where she typifies Aurovillians as "hardcores" and "softcores." The hardcores are seen as more religiously orthodox and somehow spiritual technocrats while the softcores are more new age communitarian people.

375 Although many thought the beginning was the golden age of Auroville, for many, it was not so golden after all. See e.g. Ganeshkumar 030703, Shirley 210503, Peter 100803 and Govindan 221098.

376 Jouhki 2002: 117–118. Vallikai also told me that for the last ten years one has been able to join Auroville without the need to be in contact with the villagers. These Aurovillians have less understanding of Tamil culture. Also, some pioneering Aurovillians have tried and then retreated from their contacts with the surrounding Tamil culture. Vallikai 250503.

One Aurovillian classification of the residents of the community distinguished between the ecologically oriented, the town-planners, the refugees and the "real" idealists. It is a rather apt distinction, although the definition of the "real" idealists might be a bit biased. A South American Aurovillian described this typification as follows:

> [W]e have these *ecological minded* people who only think of planting trees, and strongly believe that [building the city] is something really harmful […] so they work against the city. Th[e]n we have *urban planner[s] and architects* who [...] want to develop a city. Then we unfortunately have a lot of *refugees:* refugees from [...] the hippie time, the refusal of society [...] with [...] heavier or lighter drugs and now they claim ecology to hide their need for privacy so that the drugs don't come too much to the open. We have lots of Russian refugees, or other European[,] even Korean who don't want bureaucracy, or authority, or cold climate, or work or whatever[.] Then we have *genuine idealists* who have dedicated all their li[v]es to this place and ideal, and who quietly do their share of work [...] for those who do not want to [work][,] and I believe these are the people through whom Auroville is built and keeps [living] in spite of many difficulties[.][377]

These typifications are only indicative and as such not fully justified or accurate, but they do convey an image of how the diversified population of Auroville might be portrayed according to their different motivations. Sometimes the typifications were based on ethnicity and thus gave way to some sort of ethnocentrism. For example, some Tamil Aurovillians might have seen the Western Aurovillians as rich heirs of colonialism whereas some Western Aurovillians saw Tamil Aurovillians as opportunist representatives of an outdated mode of thought and living. However, such views seemed to be rather marginal in Auroville.[378]

To some extent, the Aurovillian social atmosphere encouraged individualism in its members. Unlike other utopian communities, Aurovillians formed a very heterogeneous community whose members had various kinds of motivation. In many utopian communities this sort of diversity would be impossible, as a successful utopian community is usually based on relative homogeneity in ideals. At least in Aurovillian public discourse, heterogeneity was seen as a collective virtue of the community. Although there was a common philosophy, pluralism was encouraged even though it caused some problems, especially in decision-making. The Mother, as the founder of Auroville, was said to have stated that the only criterion for joining Auroville was for the applicant to have good will. In practice, however, it was expected that the applicant should know at least something about the thoughts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But as a Tamil youth told me, sometimes "cold cash" was enough. When the applicant had enough material resources for his own maintenance and he was not going to be a financial burden to the community, his spiritual shortcomings were ignored.[379]

It seems that in the 1990s more middle-class Westerners enjoying their sabbatical years and retirement started to join Auroville. At the same time there

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377 Jouhki 2000: 86.
378 Ibid. 2002: 118.
379 Ibid.: 118–119.

were many more financially challenged applicants attracted to the community, mainly workers from the surrounding villages. In their motivation the potential increase in socioeconomic status played at least as strong a part as it did in Westerners' motivation. However, the opportunity for economically challenged applicants to join Auroville decreased significantly during the 1990s. There was, for example, a different entry policy for villagers, the so-called waiting list which meant that an applicant from a village had to go through interviews with the Entry Group[380] *before* he could apply to become an applicant[381]. This kind of procedure was not applied to Western financially challenged applicants, officially due to the significantly smaller number of them.[382]

In 1999 Auroville employed about three times as many villagers as the actual population of the community. The villagers worked in construction, sanitation, gardening, cooking, guarding and so on. Many of them seemed to aspire to become members of Auroville, but only a fraction of them had any chance of it. The economic filtering of the applicants was a practical device, but against the philosophy of the community. Of this discrepancy most Aurovillians were well aware. For many, good financial status had replaced good will as the membership criterion. In the early days the community attracted pioneering seekers and spiritual rebels who fought against the power of money and strove for human unity. They came to Auroville to work hard for the City of Future, and they had to be content with low-level infrastructure and ascetic living. Food supplies were mostly shared at common meals, and, at least rhetorically, villagers were thought of as "brothers in spirit." In the Auroville of thirty-five years later many community members resided in large houses that were fenced in and they had cheap village labor to do their chores. The monetary system was not giving way to a collective moneyless economy. On the contrary, capital was accumulated to make even more efficient use of the wealth. Neocolonialism is a term many frustrated Aurovillians used to describe the situation in their community. Auroville was getting wealthier and consuming more, but mostly not without a guilty conscience. The economic divide between (Western) Aurovillians and villagers (and Tamil Aurovillians) was something Tamils criticized Auroville for, and which led Aurovillians to be self-critical.[383]

In any case, Auroville was a prosperous economy compared to, and mostly with the help of, its Tamil neighbors. In thirty years the community had developed immensely, at least its initial material circumstances. The economy, however, was an issue that always remained topical in Auroville as Aurovil-

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380 The Entry Group managed all the applications to join Auroville and decided on whether or not the candidate was a suitable Aurovillian after a two-year probationary period. In a group interview, the Entry Group members explained to me that the villagers were interviewed even before they could leave their official application for newcomership. They had to wait longer in the process, because Westerners took priority. Westerners had their limited visas, and they did not have the financial capabilities to wait for a long time. For villagers, waiting was not a financial problem, so thus they were treated differently. Entry Group 170903.

381 Ibid.

382 Jouhki 2002: 119.

383 Ibid.: 120–121.

lians were trying to find a common direction for its economy. At the same time there was concern as to whether or not economic growth and the increase consumption were compatible with the philosophy of the community. Many considered a monetary economy a necessary evil or a necessary comfort whereas others would have liked, gradually or at one stroke, to transfer to a moneyless collective economy. The philosophy of the community is always as flexible as its members. Hence no significant pressure towards a moneyless economy came about in Auroville.[384]

Still, modesty was a general value in Auroville, and thus many believed that rapid economic growth and consumerism – or at least luxury – did not cohere with spiritual growth. Aurovillians might have worried about living contrary to the Mother's moneyless ideals, but it seems also that the Indian ideal of ascetic holiness was influencing Aurovillian ideals. By the end of 1990s, a third of Aurovillians were Indian nationals and many Western Aurovillians respected Indian religions and their life-philosophies, a fact that puts pressure on individual and collective behavior. However, one was inclined to observe that the community was turning more and more towards the values of the conventional global market economy.[385]

The First Aurovillians

The Significance of Labor

Dependence on an external labor force in Auroville was an issue that had been current for a long time. This is not surprising considering the fact that Auroville was supposed to be self-sufficient in economy and labor. Some Aurovillians demanded puritan self-sufficiency while many regarded the situation as a splendid opportunity for development co-operation for the villages. Most Aurovillians were rather ambivalent towards the situation. There seemed to be exploitation to some extent, and yet the situation seemed to benefit both parties: the employer could, relatively cheaply, relax about the monotonous and arduous issues of everyday household or business management and the employee got paid for relatively undemanding work.[386] The issue, however, was not so problematic from the point of view of Aurovillians not doing manual labor, as it was when the villagers as the dominant worker group were in question. As a matter of fact, the population of manual workers in Auroville was so overwhelmingly Tamil that in the Aurovillian mode of speaking the word *worker* was used synonymously with *Tamil* worker. There was no doubt about the point of reference when an Aurovillian newspaper[387] told its readers to "inform your workers" about a public festi-

384 Ibid.: 136.
385 Ibid.: 137–138.
386 Ibid.: 140.
387 *News & Notes* 17/2004: 11.

val. Every reader knew without elaboration that it meant "inform your *Tamil* workers[388]." The reality was that most workers from the village did not have enough education for anything other than positions of manual labor. However, there was a new generation of villagers in their early twenties who had been relatively well educated, although they also seemed to have problems in acquiring positions that matched their competence. Some villagers told me this was due to the bad reputation of village workers. Hence, Aurovillians preferred hiring from the city, a policy often lamented in the village.

The history of large scale village work in Auroville began with the construction of the Matrimandir in the early 1970s. It was a task which the small working population of Auroville could not manage on its own. From that point on the labor force from the village produced a significant asset for the growing community, making the distribution of work a major issue of public debate in Auroville. For Aurovillians, the division between the Tamil working class and the Western managerial class developed rather naturally as the population of Auroville became on average more educated.[389] Or, as a highly educated American Aurovillian told me,

> it's kind of natural that for example people come here with management skills, and they take those jobs because it doesn't make sense for them to dig ditches. We can hire people to dig ditches if we need that. I'm not saying that we don't need to look at it. We do need to look at it. [...] You can see how it happens, you go "OK, I'm gonna share an *amma* [a cleaning woman] with someone. Then I don't have to come home to this totally crapped out house," you know? So this is how you get into these things, and then... it's just... you get used to it. And I think that's how it all happens. And also when the culture is very, you know, people live on this... It's the standard thing. [...] Auroville does dump a bunch of wealth into this surrounding.[390]

A seminar on the employment issue was held in Auroville in 1996. Some equated the Aurovillian employment policy to colonialist attitudes and some thought the situation reminded them of the USA of the mid-twentieth century where the affluent white population abused poor colored people. A redeeming view was also expressed: there was no work-related racism in Auroville because no community could be racist simply because of employing from the surrounding area. If Auroville was located in America, American people would be employed.[391] But, one might suppose, if Auroville had indeed existed in a Western country the employment situation might have been totally different. If in the Auroville of Tamil Nadu an *amma* or a gardener could be hired for a monthly fifty euros maximum, in an Auroville located in Europe his/her salary would have been at least twenty

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388 This reminded me of a rather amusing informal chat with a young Tamil waiter in a restaurant near Auroville. He asked me if I had hired an *amma* to do the cleaning around my house. I told him I had not as I was doing the cleaning myself. Then I told him that in my country very few people could afford *amma*s to clean their houses. This had a staggering effect on the young waiter as he tried to imagine what it would be like to see a white lady cleaning the floor.

389 Jouhki 2002: 141.

390 Judy 260799.

391 Ibid.: 142–146 and *Auroville Today* 85/1996: 3.

times that. Needless to say, in that case, a community like Auroville would have had to rely upon its own working force.

It seems that Aurovillians engaged in agricultural work have always had the most straightforward relationship with the villagers. In the early days of the community Aurovillian farmers were respected by villagers as hard-working colleagues. Aurovillians thought this was because villagers could understand planting trees and crops better than the concept of the community. *Vellakara*s were doing something familiar to them. However, land issues had also created conflicts between Aurovillians and villagers. Villagers used efficient but dangerous methods like DDT-pesticides and Aurovillians experimented with softer and organic pest control. Obviously DDT-use led to better and cheaper crops whereas organic farming required more resources. Aurovillians tried to educate villagers on the drawbacks of DDT, but the villagers were confused because the government was doing the opposite and encouraging farmers to use DDT.[392] A village farmer lamented in an Aurovillian newspaper that

> the Aurovil[l]ians want us to stop using pesticides. But they give us a better yield; and the government people, who are also educated, are telling us to keep spraying. The big problem is that Auroville tells everybody all over the world that we are doing wrong. So foreigners may stop buying Indian cashews and make it difficult for us. If Auroville really wants us to change, it has to provide us with alternatives, not make things more difficult for us.[393]

Then there was the old issue of Aurovillian farmers planting trees too close to the border. It took Aurovillians a long time to understand that for villagers planting too close to the border was the same as invading the neighbor's soil. Aurovillian trees shadowed village farming land or Aurovillians planted trees that grew long and absorbent roots that consume nutrients from the villagers' soil. For the villagers this was a form of stealing. For Aurovillians it was merely efficient use of their land. Thus Aurovillians were often perplexed when villagers came to Aurovillian land and cut down hostile Aurovillian trees. Often Aurovillians interpreted this act as some strange form of general hostility towards Auroville. Moreover, in the early days of Auroville the pioneering community members bought lots of land and fenced it in. To the herding villagers this was a rather hostile and selfish act as village herds were customarily grazed wherever there were wild-growing edible plants.[394]

Aurovillian Manprasad had moved to Auroville from North India and had lived in the community almost since the beginning. He had strong connections with the surrounding villages and he employed many villagers in his workshop. He described how, generally, there were two castes in the area: the *Vanniyar*s (the farmers) and *Harijans* (the casteless, divided into two subcastes). When Auroville started the *Vanniyar*s were suspicious and too proud to socialize with Aurovillians[395]. They smashed Auroville fences to let their goats feed.

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392 Jouhki 2002: 145.
393 *The Auroville Adventure* 1998: 26.
394 See e.g. Ezhumalai 130503, Kannan 200503 and Anushiya 270603.
395 Cf. Vincentnathan 1996 who studied *Vanniyar*s and their experiences of proudness.

The Harijans, on the other hand, quickly started to learn English and come to terms with Auroville succesfully. The farmers started to sell off their land to and look for work in Auroville. But their sense of superiority caused them occasional problems. Besides, they did not understand about money, because there was not much around in the village at that time. So they quickly squandered their money and ended up as landless, poor and frustrated people, Manprasad explained. Some of them took jobs like that of a watchman that required the use of force, as a Harijan could not be a guard. Some joined Auroville and some founded businesses. The rest got frustrated. According to Manprasad, Aurovillians called them arrogant, but Manprasad liked to use the word "self-respect" instead. Caste distinctions were still strong today and changing only slowly. A Harijan at Manprasad's workshop could get beaten up if Manprasad was not around. In Auroville and for Aurovillians caste did not mean anything, but events in the village were reflected in Auroville. People of caste were annoyed about casteless people improving their socioeconomic status, Manprasad had observed. Auroville was said to help casteless people. At least it *should* have been doing so, stated Manprasad.[396]

The Inevitable Class Division?

The Mother was believed to have made a philosophically significant statement declaring the villagers to be "the first Aurovillians." However, Aurovillian interpretations of this statement varied[397]. According to the most positive interpretation, people from the surrounding villages should have been automatically accepted into the community as Aurovillians. They were the hosts of Auroville, the natives of the area, and, according to the Mother, their character was endowed with special spiritual leanings. Thus they should have been taken into the community. The more moderate interpretations did not demand membership for the villagers but more respect and attention for them from Auroville's side. The most negative views on villagers put them in an *essentially* lower position compared to the spiritually inclined Aurovillians. To people of that attitude, firstness by no means meant superiority or even equality. Villagers were seen as intellectually, morally and spiritually poorer people, or "vital" beings, as an Aurovillian euphemism had it. They lived by incoherent emotions; they were opportunists and tried to exploit Aurovillian economic progress. Their real nature was to serve. However, most people's views on the villages were more prudent. The villagers might have been looked at with slight suspicion, but their imagined *carpe diem* -lifestyle was respected. Being "first Aurovillians" meant being respected as neighbors or hosts of the experiment.[398]

The next lengthy quote is from an interview with an American Aurovillian whom I asked what being "first Aurovillians" actually meant.

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396 Manprasad 210503.

397 Interestingly, I never heard villagers referring to this statement of the Mother. Perhaps knowledge of it had not spread outside Auroville.

398 Jouhki 2002: 147–148. See also e.g. Jacob 090803, Eva 130803 and Jacques 090503.

> Lisa: I don't think it means that they... that everybody that comes from the villages can automatically apply and get accepted. I think what she meant was that in their hearts they have a spirit that is closer to the spirit of Auroville than many Westerners who come. I don't think that she meant it as being literally an organizational input. I think she meant that the average village person is more tuned with nature and with Divine than many people who come from the West with not so much in touch with their spiritual side of their life.
>
> J.J.: So it should be easier for them to become Aurovillians, because they're more tuned?
>
> Lisa: Well [laughs], it would be... it could be that way. Because they come very often with a freshness, and openness, and joy, and you feel this. There's this spontaneity to their way of being. It's very beautiful, very light. That's of course, the very qualities we need. But there's also... in fact that they along with anybody else that wants to come has to understand what is Auroville, and what it is that we'd like to do here. And that sometimes takes – sometimes people from the village come, very often they're young, young children even, kids of nine or ten years old will leave their families, and cross the road because they're attracted to this lifestyle they see. They see peace, they see quiet at night. Very often the villages are noisy, people are quarrelling, their fathers are drunk, their mothers get beat up. Seventy-five percent of the men in Kuilapalayam village are alcoholic.
>
> J.J.: Seventy-five?
>
> Lisa: Seventy-five percent of the men they are alcoholic, so there is a very high rate of alcoholism. Children very often grow up in very distorted family life, and they see people here trying, men and women, trying to live peacefully together. Of course they are very attracted to that. So, they come. Sometimes very sweetly... it's... and then we have to figure out ok, where're we going to put these people. 'Cause sometimes they come with nothing, no money... little education, little formal training in doing something, and being useful. So how can they be useful? How can they fit in? Where do they fit in? Just like anybody else they have to find their place in Auroville. And one of the ways […] is the New Creation school. […] [T]hrough that school they are acclimatized to Auroville, and Auroville life, and then they have to find their place in Auroville. […]
>
> So it's not that there are no Indians in Auroville [laughs]. There's one out of every three... is Indian. But it means that many unskilled, uneducated, simple, sweet, kind, open-hearted people are here, and they have a place. Of course they have a place, but what do we do with them in terms of housing, in terms of improving their level of education. What skills do they bring? How can they be useful? Not just what Auroville can give to them, but what can they also give to Auroville. It's an important question. We ask that of everybody, not just Tamil villagers.[399]

The fact is that in Auroville a strong class division had emerged: there was the relatively poor manual labor class originating from the villages and there was the well-off Western upper class. As always when there is such a division, there is pressure from the poorer side on the more well-off side. In the early days, when Auroville was relatively much more modest in economic terms, villagers were even encouraged by Auroville to join the community. Joining was almost bureaucracy-free as Auroville was inclined to increase its population in number and diversity. By the turn of the millennium, however, for a villager the hope of joining Auroville often seemed utopian.[400] Moreover, many newcomers to Auroville felt unfamiliar with or even scared by the villagers. A Dutch Aurovillian woman

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399 Lisa 220799.

400 Jouhki 2002: 148–149.

who had lived over twenty years in the community described her relation to the surrounding Tamil culture in the local newspaper:

> How much do I know about this country, about the state in which I am living? After all these years, I still can't manage to speak the local language properly and trying to read signs in Tamil is impossible. […] I feel comfortable […] in the protected environment provided by our community. […] But as soon as I venture beyond the boundaries of our community, I am confronted with India – the noise, the dirt, the different expressions of the various religions, the men people, all the sacred or simply numerous animals, the foreign sounds.[401]

In some ways Auroville was a bubble in India, as some Aurovillians described their community. Some Aurovillians said their way of living resembled that of a middle-class suburban area whereas others proclaimed Auroville to be the hope of India and the whole world.[402] However, surprisingly few foreign Aurovillians spoke the language of the state. Indeed, very few had even learned elementary expressions in Tamil. Only a handful of agricultural entrepreneurs and some of the young people raised in the area could speak fluent Tamil. The language issue was a surprisingly minor subject in the otherwise very conscious community. Tamil was claimed to be such a difficult language – which it surely was for many – but what kind of message did this convey to the villagers? Many Aurovillians, after living thirty years in Tamil Nadu, had not taken enough interest to learn even a few basic sentences in the native tongue. Some Tamils felt the Westerners' ignorance of the Tamil language to be disrespectful of them. Others who worked in Auroville did not mind as they wanted to learn English, which had high prestige in Tamil Nadu.

An unfortunate phenomenon strengthening the "Aurovillian bubble" was the increase in crime. Auroville's comparatively high affluence had attracted criminals from the surrounding areas. There had been an increase in burglaries, thefts and even muggings, assaults and a few murders by local or remote villagers in Auroville. Some assaults might have been due to the surprisingly liberal way of dressing followed by Aurovillians. As village women were covered with thick *saris* and were expected to behave with chastity, Western Aurovillian women conveyed a wholly different message to the villagers. Western women riding motorbikes while wearing tank tops and shorts with their hair loose may have been a provokative spectacle. To maintain an image of a highly spiritual community is rather difficult when the community members present themselves as obscene people[403]. Or, as an ex-ashramite from Western India explained,

> [t] he way people in Auroville live. The way young people in Auroville move about within Auroville and in the city. It's very attractive, you know, […] you go on a Bullet [= a make of motorbike] for example, and naturally you draw attention. And then the way some Aurovillians dress. I mean, they're virtually naked in the sense that –

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401 *Auroville Today* 91/1996: 4.

402 Jouhki 2002: 160.

403 See e.g. Balasingam 220799 whose parents were very much against their son moving from the village to Auroville as the community was perceived as a place of "immoral Westerners."

> particularly the women, white women. This is sort of cultural shock to the Indian villager. And naturally the sexuality is aroused, and when this sexuality, for example, does not find an outlet, then there's frustration.
>
> And again the factor of money. The villager is poor anyway, so when he sees certain Aurovillians who do nothing. They do maybe stipulated number of hours of work in the community, which is five hours. But for the living, the way villagers slog, Aurovillians don't slog, but they get a band of demands, they get their maintenance, they can manage to have dinner, you know, in these flashy kind of restaurants. So naturally the villager feels a little... cheated. He should not be. If he were an enlightened person, he might not have felt so. But he is not an enlightened person. So you have hostility.[404]

There was indeed some hostility towards Aurovillians in the village. Some of it was due to the different way of dressing of the Westerners, some of it to land disputes, but often frustration erupted when villagers employed in Auroville felt mistreated by their Western employers. Employment in Auroville held such significance for the villagers that almost every interview in the village led to the issue, often without my encouragement. Whereas Auroville for most Aurovillians meant spirituality and a new way of living, for most villagers it meant employment. This is not to say that villagers did not value other aspects of Auroville. Many were indeed interested in the experiment and its multicultural atmosphere and many Tamil applicants to the community were as adventurous as the Westerners but the intangible emic values of Auroville were not conveyed to most villagers. To them, Auroville was very tangible indeed. It was a Western place of business and as such a resource of employment. Aurovillians – the *Vellakaras* – came from the West and although the origin of the community seemed hard to understand, the effects of the West could be observed in the villagers who had joined the community. In the next chapter I will discuss the Occidentalism of Kuilapalayams in more detail.

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404 Jouhki 2002 160–161. See also *Auroville Today* 166/2002: 8 where the Aurovillian way of dressing is discussed. It is mentioned that even though villagers have got used to the Western way of dressing, they might still be shocked to see lightly dressed Western women. In this respect Tamil Aurovillian women feel ashamed for their community sisters. Also Ezhumalai bewailed how many Tamil youths today wanted to go out and be with girls and boys together "as if they were from another country." Ezhumalai 130503.

8 AUROVILLE IN THE EYES OF TAMIL VILLAGERS

Discourse Emphasizing Work

Auroville Means Employment

In my interviews with the villagers and Tamil Aurovillians originating from Kuilapalayam, whenever Auroville was spoken about, the issue of employment came up. All of the interviewees in the village either had worked or presently worked in Auroville, or had a family member or a friend working in Auroville. Experiences of employment were highly intertwined with images of the community, and it seemed that the individual's opinion of Auroville strongly depended on whether or not the person or members of his family had been employed by Auroville and whether or not the employment had been successful in terms of duration, sustainability, compensation and work load. The more Auroville employed people from the village the more it helped the village and raised its moral standing heightened its morality in the eyes of the villagers.

Aravinth reflected the effect of Auroville on his village. Interestingly, he was one of the few villagers I interviewed who discussed *Western* Aurovillians and knew how they usually financed their stay in Auroville, which was by working in Europe. Most of my village interviewees considered Auroville in terms of the Tamil Aurovillians. Aravinth remembered that when the first Aurovillians came to the area villagers thought the British had returned. They even organized a demonstration against Auroville, but Aurovillians managed to convince them that Auroville was there to help. Aravinth told me that nowadays no one thought Auroville was there to help the villagers any more. Contemporary Auroville was for Aurovillians and their own businesses only. Some earned good money in the West and could live luxuriously in Auroville, Aravinth had observed. The villagers were not given enough employment opportunities in Auroville. However, he said it was also the villagers' fault as they often did not have the necessary abilities. No one was focusing on their studies and

no one was trying to get employed in a government office any more[405]. According to Aravinth, young villagers just got their elementary education and then attached themselves to Western culture, which they looked up to. Young people were looking for an easy life, not education.[406]

In the early days of Auroville it was thought in the community that it should balance its population by having more Tamil members. Thus there was a policy to encourage village families to join Auroville. Many villagers and Tamil Aurovillians were eager to contrast the recent and rather tight entry policy to the policy of the earlier time.[407]. The staff of the Entry Group explained that the filtering process used to be a lot simpler because Auroville was not a very attractive place. Nowadays both Tamils and non-Tamils felt attracted by the flourishing community and thus the applicants needed to be heavily filtered.[408] Muthu, a young man from the village, told me how he had worked in Auroville for almost a decade, but eventually he had got fired because he was replaced by an Aurovillian. Now he worked in Auroville only sporadically. He liked Auroville and strongly aspired to become Aurovillian, but he was rather frustrated at the limited chances of joining the community. He was simply too late, as the filter for applicants to join Auroville had tightened.[409]

Muthu told me Auroville was "not helping the villages," and although my interpreter, a friend of Muthu, listed things Auroville had done for the villages, he still denied it. He seemed to acknowledge Auroville's help but his frustration about not being able to join Auroville was so strong that he had to say something negative about Auroville. Muthu was also frustrated with his Tamil Aurovillian friends, who talked a lot about helping him but had not done anything concrete about his employment.[410] Contrary to Muthu's view, Bava thought that Auroville was indeed helping the villages. Auroville was helping by supporting the women's groups, providing water facilities and education, especially for women. Auroville had changed Kuilapalayam by giving opportunities to work and learn English. The workers of Auroville now knew the importance of English. However, she complained that Tamil Aurovillians wanted to control the interaction of villagers with Auroville.[411]

The Aurovillian employment policy was also discussed by Balasingam, a Tamil Aurovillian teacher who was worried that Auroville was becoming like one of the multinational companies in India, commercialized and extracting cheap labor from the villages. The relationship between Auroville and the villages was, according to Balasingam, clear-cut: "You work for me, I pay you, finish. This is what happens in India in the multinational companies." Balasingam also worried about the tendency of village parents to take their children out of the school after seventh standard and have them work in Auroville for a

405 In India government jobs were highly valued.
406 Aravinth 300503.
407 See e.g. Ramappan 020899, Velavan 260603, Devanesan 100703 and Ganeshkumar 030703.
408 Entry Group 170903.
409 Muthu 190703.
410 Ibid.
411 Bava 070703. Many other villagers and Tamil Aurovillians had noted the same issue.

meager salary.[412] However, most villagers seemed to be content with working in Auroville. Aurovillian work was relatively light and sometimes even well-paid compared to work in the village. Hence it was difficult (or relatively expensive) for land-owners to hire people to work in their fields. Although Aravinth depended n the workforce of his village, he also empathetically complained that villagers were not sufficiently employed in Auroville. Aravinth's wife in fact had got a job in a large Aurovillian company and, though Aravinth did not like it, because of their poor economic situation it was a necessity. Aravinth himself had also worked in Auroville as a mason, but to him it seemed that Auroville was not interested in skilled labor.[413]

Iniyan was the proud mother of Kumar, a young man who had just joined Auroville. She was employed in Auroville, and her son was respected by Westerners. Iniyan herself worked as a part-time *amma* for twenty rupees[414] per hour. She explained that the salary was no bigger than in the village, but the working environment was nicer. Iniyan also told me that some villagers had criticized her for working in Auroville. They thought Auroville was a lazy place.[415] Many Aurovillian Tamils were also subjected to the same kind of criticism. It seemed that accusing people of laziness was rather a common phenomenon in the area as many Western Aurovillians also accused Aurovillian and village Tamils of it. For example, a European Aurovillian man with Tamil villager subordinates under him lamented that Tamils demonstrated hardly any initiative in their work. Every morning they had to be told what to do. Otherwise they just sat around and did nothing. In addition, he told me, Tamils could not think ahead a few days in advance. Only this hour or this day was significant to them. "That's their culture," explained the European.[416] Another European Aurovillian foreman told me villagers worked just hard enough not to get fired. However, Western Aurovillians were not viewed as too industrious either as many Tamil Aurovillians accused Western Aurovillians of idleness. Westerners could work for a few months in Europe and live easily for the rest of the year in Auroville. Many Tamil Aurovillians, on the other hand, told me how busy their life had become after joining Auroville.

Thus, Western Aurovillians imagined themselves to be the most industrious group, Tamil Aurovillians thought they worked harder than their relaxing Western neighbors, and the villagers seemed to think work in the village was definitely harder than the leisure or light work in Auroville. Finally, Iniyan and many other older villagers criticized the youth of the village, many of whom were well educated but did nothing other than loiter around in the village[417]. Naturally, Western Aurovillian youth were accused of the same thing by the older members of the community.

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412 Balasingam 220799.
413 Ibid.
414 20 rupees equals ca. 0,3 euros (2003 exchange rate).
415 Iniyan 040703.
416 Rykaard 150503.
417 Iniyan 040703.

Employment in Auroville was valued also for being a potential way to membership of the community. As many villagers had observed, the workload of Aurovillians was significantly lighter and the compensation higher than that of a non-member villager working in Auroville. Besides, for many villagers Aurovillian schools that accepted village children were a path to getting employed in Auroville or even being accepted as Aurovillians. Most of the influential Tamil Aurovillians had gone to Aurovillian schools in the 1970s and had almost automatically been accepted as Aurovillians. Now, for many village youths, the process was the same but being accepted as Aurovillian had become highly improbable unlike in the early days of Auroville.

In the early 1970s, Karthik and his sister went to an Aurovillian school. Karthik recalled that his sister did not even learn proper Tamil and wore only Western clothes. A French Aurovillian family wanted to take her to France with them, but Karthik's traditionalist father rejected their offer and wanted to raise her as a traditional Tamil girl. The land of the Westerners perhaps seemed to him to mean too much foreign influence. However, Karthik saw Auroville and Kuilapalayam as intertwined entities. Actually Kuilapalayam, to Karthik, was a part of Auroville, "like an eye in the body." At the time of the interview Karthik had a small business establishment in Kuilapalayam but he had also contemplated rejoining Auroville[418]. However, he had doubts about his subsistence in Auroville. Karthik thought that financially it had been more secure to live in Auroville in the old days. If Karthik had had the power to change Auroville, he would have filtered out those Aurovillians who had joined without suitable principles. He would also have had Aurovillians' work monitored better. It seemed that Karthik did not approve of the light daily workload of Aurovillians. Karthik also commented on the power of money in contemporary Auroville. Aurovillians of today wanted only money, and money was their major interest. Karthik seemed to aim his criticism especially at *Tamil* Aurovillians.[419]

Kavitha, a Tamil Aurovillian working in village development told me how Auroville bought a lot of land from the villagers in the beginning. In those days the caste system was strong and class divisions deep. Auroville, on the other hand, welcomed all kinds of people regardless of caste. All were equal – or at least more equal than people in India in general. The people who toiled in the villages could move from low-paid seasonal work on the land to Auroville, where the work was more guaranteed and easier. The concept of "Aurovillian light work" spread, as did the reputation of Aurovillians treating their workers well. For example, in the village, a worker had to eat outside but in Auroville he could eat inside the house. Moreover, the traditional dependence of the poor on the rich people of the village began to disappear. According to Kavitha, in the past rich people were respected like gods, but not in Auroville. A new rich class was formed of those who worked in Auroville. Their socioeconomic status rose quickly, which had not been possible for anyone working in the village.[420]

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418 Karthik was not sure if he was a member of Auroville or not.
419 Karthik 190703.
420 Kavitha 070803.

When Auroville was established, Aravan, a villager farmer now in his seventies, was afraid like many other villagers that the British had invaded their lands again and that they would lose their lands to the occupier. He had never wanted to join Auroville although he did work for the SAS to help with purchasing land for Auroville in the 1970s. In the early days, Aravan had no idea what Auroville was about and what it was going to be like in the future. That is why he did not want to join the community. To me, it seemed as if Aravan might have considered joining if he had known how affluent the community was to be in the future, although he did state that Aurovillians were simply "too strange people" to live with. But Aravan's son was working in a good position in Auroville and he seemed to be very content. When I asked him if he would have liked his son to become a farmer like himself, my interpreter seemed to consider it a rather stupid question. He told me that Aravan obviously did not want his son to become a farmer.[421] Aurovillian jobs seemed to be a lot more lucrative than working in farming.

Periyasivam was a man in his late twenties from a wealthy farming family. He had graduated in economics a few years back but had not managed to find suitable employment because recently the supply of qualified workers had grown fast. He had worked as an accountant in Auroville for a year, but then he was replaced by an Aurovillian. Periyasivam used to have no interest in joining Auroville but did now because he was unemployed. Apart from that he did not really like Auroville or Aurovillians. Periyasivam was one of the few villagers who referred to the philosophical background of Auroville: no one in Auroville was following the Mother's advice[422]. Now everyone was after money, ever increasingly. Everyone was pretending and there was a lot of politics. However, there were some good Aurovillians – in Periyasivam's estimate thirty percent of them. Surprisingly, when I asked Periyasivam why some villagers did not like Auroville, he gave me a very specific answer: it was because Auroville had built public toilets but did not maintain them.[423] The Auroville Health Center had indeed built many public toilets in the villages and it was rather expensive to maintain them, as parts like lamps and water pumps were stolen and an *amma* had to be hired to clean them. However, I doubt if the public toilets were in fact a very significant reason for villagers to dislike Auroville.

Many villagers knew that in the early days the Aurovillians had promised to employ every villager selling their land to Auroville. By the turn of the millennium the commitment was largely being ignored in Auroville. Periyasivam lamented the employment policy of Auroville. A month before the interview he had sold land to Auroville to get money to build his house. Many villagers sold their land to Auroville but still Auroville was employing not from the village

421 Aravan 090603.

422 Few villagers knew much about the charismatic pair behind Auroville's philosophy. For example, when I asked Rathinam what he thought about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, he told me villagers did not really understand them. Many thought they were a married couple. In the 1970s when the Mother was alive, unlike Aurovillians the villagers could not go meet her in the ashram in Pondicherry. Rathinam 090603.

423 Periyasivam 190703.

but from outside. Thus many villagers, even the educated people, had to go to Pondicherry or elsewhere to work. So how could one cooperate with Auroville, Periyasivam asked? He seemed to feel very frustrated about being unemployed. He even told me that he had such negative feelings about not being employed in Auroville that if he was not feeling well and foreigners came to his village he would pick a fight. Besides, Periyasivam saw it as unfair that none of the advantaged Aurovillians had education but newcomers were required to have education. However, a positive thing about Auroville, in Periyasivam's opinion, was the fact that some poor villagers did get employment in Auroville.[424]

Employment Changing the Village Life

Moorthi, a respected civil servant in his late fifties, was born into a an affluent Kuilapalayam family. In addition to the government job, he had a position in both local official and traditional politics. He had previously worked in Auroville for almost ten years. Then he was appointed to his present post which required an impeccable reputation and trustworthiness. In the early days, Moorthi told me, sending one's son or daughter to join Auroville was considered downright shameful. Here my interpreter added that once one joined Auroville there was usually no coming back to the village. It was shameful to abandon one's family. If one's children left home, other villagers might think the parents were not taking proper care of the children. Nowadays, the situation was different. One could work outside the household, go and study in the city, and so on. In the old days leaving was a significant issue as extended families used to be more cohesive and every pair of hands was needed for work in the fields or around the house.[425]

In Moorthi's view, Auroville had immensely affected village life. Because of the community villagers became more aware of things, and the village was not so village-like[426] anymore. As a political figure, Moorthi had to deal with problems between villagers and Aurovillians. Usually the issues were work-related: a villager might have been dismissed from an Auroville job, or else perhaps not been given a job. Sometimes villagers had stolen from Auroville. Both sides had made mistakes, and Moorthi often worked as a negotiator between the two sides.[427]

The situation with youth of the village seemed problematic to Moorthi as it did to many other elderly villagers. In the old days young people had to work hard within the family household. Today the trouble-makers were the children whose families did not control or care for them. Perhaps they had jobs in Auroville and did not perform properly. Then they got dismissed. Then the frustrated youths gathered a mob and maybe went to beat up the employer. Hence, many Auroville businesses hired their workforce from outside the village now. Moorthi was not content with the situation, as he thought Auroville should

424 Ibid.
425 Moorthi 160803.
426 Here "village-like" was used in a derogatory sense.
427 Moorthi 160803.

have been hiring from Kuilapalayam. In general, Moorthi thought there was not enough co-operation between Auroville and the village. This was not solely the fault of Auroville. Mostly it was because of friction between personalities. Moorthi tended to think collectively: if Auroville and Kuilapalayam had worked together they could have achieved almost anything, he exclaimed. Problems between individuals were not that important. Both sides should have come half way. One could not progress without the other.[428]

Vishnu, a freshly graduated electronics engineer was unemployed at the time of the interview. As a child he went to school in Auroville, but then continued through the government's educational system. At the time of the interview he was in the process of applying to become a newcomer in Auroville.[429] In Auroville, this meant two years of probationary living in Auroville after which the applicant was evaluated by the Entry Group which decided on whether or not to grant the applicant official membership of the community. The application procedures, however, were different for villagers. While Westerners were usually directly accepted as newcomers, villagers were expected to apply to join a waiting-list that included all the accepted villagers aspiring to become newcomers. This, according to the staff of the Entry Group, was because villagers had more time whereas Westerners usually had limited visas and thus had to be dealt with with less delay[430].

Vishnu lived in an Aurovillian community although he spent most of his time in Kuilapalayam. The Entry Group had told him that he would have to have a steady job before he could apply. Vishnu reckoned he would have to wait for a couple of years before he could be accepted as a newcomer. He wanted to become Aurovillian because the community seemed such a peaceful and quiet place where one could enjoy life. He could have moved to the city and got a high-salary job, but he did not like the hurried life and crowds of the city. Moreover, his dream was to have an opportunity to go abroad to study more. Maybe some day he could find a sponsor as his sister did when she went to Australia. Vishnu's vision of his future ten years hence included a good position at work with a minimum of three thousand rupees monthly salary and a love marriage with a Tamil woman.[431]

Incidentally, the so-called love marriage as opposed to the traditional arranged marriage had become more common in the villages around Auroville, especially among Tamil Aurovillians. However, a vast majority of village Tamil Aurovillian marriages were still arranged, as this was considered the responsible way of starting a family. Love marriage – although favored by many of the younger generation – seemed to be viewed by traditional villagers as impulsive, unplanned and bringing dishonor to the family. The increasing popularity of love marriages was partly due to Auroville's example and partly to general cultural change in India. Often in contemporary Tamil cinema love marriages were portrayed as a more romantic option by comparison to arranged marriages. Be-

428 Ibid.
429 Vishnu 100703.
430 Entry Group 170903.
431 Vishnu 100703.

fore, the situation of a widow in Tamil society had been a poor one but recently it had improved.

Iniyan's childhood was rather harsh. She was orphaned at an early age and later on married to a widower. The newlywed couple moved to a village near the coast in the early 1970s. In those days she heard many stories about the *Vellakara*s and the couple even came to take a look at the area and the fancy houses. None of the villagers dared to ask Aurovillians why they had come to stay in the area.[432] Interestingly, all the interviewees with whom I talked about the coming of the Aurovillians told me they had never asked Aurovillians why they had come to settle in the area. In my view, the villagers felt that asking their reasons was the same as questioning their motives. For example, when I asked Rathinam whether the villagers asked the pioneering Aurovillians why they had set up their community, he told me it was not possible because Auroville were not only white people but also "Northern" SAS people. No one could question them because they had a lot of power. They were able to solve all problems and work efficiently. Instead of asking for reasons, villagers tried to get employment in Auroville. Instead of "rebelling," they wanted to benefit, Rathinam told me.[433]

Iniyan continued that although Aurovillians were rather secluded, some Aurovillians did come to the village to talk about Auroville and to negotiate the purchase of land. When I asked her if the family had ever thought of joining Auroville, she told me an interesting reason for not having joined the community.

> I never thought of joining Auroville. I did take my children to see Auroville sometimes. At that time we were a very happy family. So there was no reason to join Auroville.[434]

When Iniyan's husband died, the family suffered immensely. Eventually Iniyan was employed in Auroville, as was the case with many other village widows. Without employment in Auroville she would have had to work hard in the fields. At the time of the interview Iniyan was still working under the same Aurovillian employer. When I asked whether she now thought of joining Auroville, she told me, perhaps diplomatically, that it was an interesting idea, but unfortunately she had such domestic responsibilities that she was not in a position to join Auroville. However, Iniyan did commend Auroville for affecting the village in a positive way: without Auroville and the employment opportunities it gave to the villagers Kuilapalayam would not have been such a developed village.[435] Most villagers who discussed Auroville's effect on their village commended Auroville for the employment and the trickle-down effect. Mani, a teacher working in Auroville told me Auroville provided a good opportunity for the poor Tamil villagers to interact with Western people. Uneducated vil-

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432 Iniyan 040703.
433 Rathinam 090603.
434 Iniyan 040703.
435 Ibid.

lage youths could also learn different vocational skills in Auroville. Some of them had started small craft units and improved their economic status.[436]

Aravan told me that everything in the village had changed because of Auroville. Auroville speeded up development. All the new things in the world came to Auroville first and then to Kuilapalayam. As an example of the change Aravan mentioned clothing: villagers used to wear *dhoti*s and *lungi*s, and women red *sari*s, but nowadays even old farmers could wear shorts in the fields. The diet had also changed. However, Aravan wanted to note that even if there had been no Auroville, there would still have been Pondicherry, a city that had also affected village life. Auroville only accelerated the general change. Aravan seemed to have a rather positive image of Auroville, although he did estimate that only a minority of Aurovillians were there for the ideal of Auroville. The rest were there only to make money. He also disapproved of the nepotism of Tamil Aurovillians as they organized employment only for their relatives in the village.[437]

Gnanaoli was a freshly graduated computer engineer. He had always lived in Kuilapalayam and gone to school in Pondicherry. Gnanaoli thought Auroville had had an immense effect on his village, especially in terms of employment and education. If it had not been for Auroville, Kuilapalayam would have been much less developed. Now, as a village, Kuilapalayam was very different from others, more advanced and more educated. Gnanaoli had never felt the need to join Auroville, perhaps because of his good financial situation.[438] It should be emphasized that only a proportion of Tamil villagers wanted to join Auroville. This was contrary to the beliefs of many Aurovillians who thought all the villagers were eager to join Auroville. Some Aurovillians who thought positively about the villagers even suggested that the remaining 48,000 of Auroville's population could have been easily obtained by accepting the villagers of the Auroville Bioregion as members of the community. However, many villagers were satisfied with having a job in Auroville. Many did not even want to be employed by Auroville. However, I also noticed that many villagers who maintained that they did not want to join Auroville actually meant that they did not want to go through the humiliatingly long entry process. Chinnadurai was one of the villagers who did not want to apply for membership.

> I'm not interested. If Auroville is open for everybody, then I will try. If Auroville will call everybody and say come and join us, then I think I will try. But now you put application, you wait and try to find a job and… […] We think that for foreigners the [process of joining is very fast]. For local people it's taking a long time. So why would I want to [try to join] if it goes on and on and on…[439]

Although Gnanaoli did not want to join Auroville, he had many relatives and friends who were Aurovillians or worked in Auroville. He thought some villagers did not like Auroville because there was an impression of *Vellakara*s merely

436 Mani 201098.
437 Aravan 090603.
438 Gnanaoli 100703.
439 Chinnadurai 020703.

enjoying life in Auroville. Those who were "beneath" them could not join the community. This frustrated many villagers who would have liked to have a share of their well-being. To Gnanaoli, Auroville on the whole seemed like a nice place. Aurovillians seemed to have their own peaceful lives, nice jobs and "good flow of life." Their everyday life seemed to be fairly easygoing. The villagers, who had joined Auroville earlier, about twenty years ago, were now well-off, but those who had joined only recently were in financial difficulties. Gnanaoli was also one of the few interviewees who knew – or stated explicitly – something about the philosophical background of Auroville. He had heard that Auroville was established to promote world peace.[440] It was not so much that kind of peace but peacefulness that attracted many villagers to Auroville.Evidently one way in which villagers could link Auroville with spirituality was through its calm atmosphere. Balasingam, an Aurovillian teacher was motivated by the tranquility of the community:

> I was looking for a job. I came [to] Auroville, and I found that something here is very peaceful. My mind was at that time restless. Same time [in Auroville it was] very very peaceful[.][...] So it came to my mind that oh, this is the place that where I should live. [...] So I selected this place, because I thought we should live peaceful[ly].[441]

Perumal was born into a respected well-off family in the 1960s. His father knew the meaning of a good education as he had gone through nine standards of schooling. Hence, Perumal was put in a private English medium school in Pondicherry. Perumal said he was very fortunate as "in those days the village was very backward." That is why many poor villagers had joined Auroville. Perumal's first contact with Auroville was through sports. An Aurovillian community arranged facilities for the village kids – and they even gave them sportswear and snacks. In 2003, many influential Tamil Aurovillians were children of poor families of the 1970s who had got to know Auroville through different activities arranged by the community. In those days Perumal's father did not want him to join Auroville. Like many village fathers he was afraid that his Aurovillian son would not take care of the family any more. Perumal himself was not interested in joining either as he thought being Aurovillian would have confined him too much.[442] Contrary to Aurovillian beliefs not all villagers were attracted to "the freedom" of Auroville. Some villagers even thought Auroville life oppressive. For example, a young man working in an Auroville restaurant told me angrily that "to be an Indian in Auroville is to be a slave[443]."

According to Perumal, in the early days few villagers considered Auroville attractive, but nowadays many would have wanted their children to go there. Perumal himself had never applied for membership, because he liked to be "on the borderline." Now he was not tied to Auroville. He did not want to be tied to the village either. He was in line to be the next traditional village elder

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440 Gnanaoli 100703.
441 Jouhki 2002: 103.
442 Perumal 190603.
443 Jouhki 2002: 103.

but he planned to refuse because his future was in theatre. Although Perumal's education was a typical one for an upper middle-class villager, he was devoted to theatre and film. His hobby was drama and gradually he even took it up as a profession. His father thought this was absurd, not the least because it complicated arranging a marriage. "Who would want to marry a jester?" he had thought. Eventually a bride was arranged for Perumal and they got married. Now Perumal had his own company, which was involved in producing material to promote Aurovillian development work.[444]

Devanathan had no knowledge of why Auroville was founded, because it had happened before he was even born. He did not know the significance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for Auroville, but he very much doubted whether those joining Auroville had them on their mind. People joined Auroville for work, money and lifestyle. They wanted to enjoy life. When I asked Devanathan about Auroville's effect on the village, he told me that the community was changing the whole culture. The Westerners were admired.[445] Employment was a significant part of Kuilapalayam experience of Auroville. Interestingly, Aurovillians, who eagerly employed about five thousand villagers, bewailed the way the villagers could not see the "real" Auroville and how their only motivation was economic.

Assessing Aurovillian Morality

Villagers seemed to assess Auroville on the basis of the amount of helps from Auroville help directed to the village. Often help meant work but also charity in general. Villagers seemed to esteem employment as a significant sign of goodness. For example, if a villager had an *amma* employed in his house, this was considered to be helping her, not taking advantage of cheap labor. In Auroville about five thousand villagers were employed in mostly manual labor. Auroville was clearly founded on outside labor. Many Aurovillians thought it was outright scandalous to be so dependent when Auroville was supposed to be a self-sufficient community. At least as many thought employing villagers was the best form of development work. Then again, the villagers thought Auroville was not employing enough people. They thought that Auroville and especially Tamil Aurovillians were being selfish in not producing employment opportunities for the villagers. In addition, Auroville was not "giving help" as it used to. In the early days of Auroville, Aurovillians were indeed more charity-oriented, as they positively bought and gave away things to villagers, arranged for water, and so on. The North Indian Aurovillian Arjun described this as a Christian mentality which tends to produce dependence. Now, while there still was "Christian" charity (sponsoring schooling, donating and loaning money and things) to some extent, the organizational mode of help had changed a lot over the decades. Areas

444 Perumal 190603.
445 Ibid.

like public health, women's rights, caste equality, education and general infrastructure in the villages were given Aurovillian support in a more sustainable mode. This, for many villagers, did not always seem like "real help" at all. Moreover, as Kuilapalayam had become richer, Auroville was turning its attention towards the more remote and less developed villages. In this light, Auroville indeed was not helping Kuilapalayam any more, at least not as much as it used to.

The interface built on helping the villages came up in many interviews. Aurovillian Basim told me the villagers did not like Auroville because they thought Auroville had not done enough for them. The Aurovillian response was usually: they were not a social work organization. On the other hand, Basim opined, neighborly peace was in the interest of every community. It should not have been considered mere charity. To Basim it was interesting that the villages that had been most exposed to Auroville hated it the most, eventhough they had benefited the most. The villages which had benefited less were more sympathetic. In Basim's views, likewise the view of many other Aurovillians and some villagers, in the close villages people were hostile, but in the remote villages they were extremely friendly.[446]

When Auroville was started, Anushiya, now a pensioner with grandchildren, used to help her mother who worked as a street vendor in Pondicherry. Thus Anushiya was not really affected by Auroville. She remembered the early images of Auroville: cars and motorbikes. The children used to go to see *Vellakara*s and be amazed by their appearance. They did not really understand what Auroville was about. Later the people ceased to be amazed the got used to Aurovillians. In the early days Aurovillians were very friendly. They gave water to the village and helped them to develop. This was very friendly indeed, Anushiya recalled. There was also a big kitchen in an Aurovillian community where one could get a meal. The *villagers* even gave money to *Aurovillians* and made Aurovillians even richer, exclaimed Anushiya.[447]

Tamil Aurovillians, in Anushiya's view, had profited from Auroville and become proud in the process. They were not respecting their fellow villagers any more. The youth of the village had also been spoiled by money. Auroville had spoiled them. When I asked Anushiya about other negative aspects of Auroville, she addressed me using an impolite form of pronoun and lamented the fact that I and other Aurovillians were not offering enough employment to the villagers.[448] I do not know if Anushiya simply mistook me for an Aurovillian or if, as I suspect, she did not make any distinction between non-Aurovillian and Aurovillian *Vellakara*s. To many villagers, all *Vellakara*s in the area, whether they were tourists, newcomers or Aurovillians, were taken to be Aurovillians. Nevertheless, *Vellakara*s were seen as in charge of the community and their effect could supposedly be observed in Tamil Aurovillians who often

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446 Basim 150503. See also Ernst 020703, Franz 270503, Perumal 190603, Hans 220503, Vallikai 250503, Kavitha 070803 and Eliza 250799.

447 Anushiya 270603. The last comment made my interpreter laugh as he thought her statement was absurd.

448 Anushiya 270603.

were interpreted as "too selfish" if they did not arrange employment for their fellow villagers.

Devanathan, a man in his late twenties from a wealthy land-owning family, had never worked in Auroville because he was so rich, exclaimed my interpreter laughingly and teasing his friend. His indirect connections with Auroville were his villager friends who worked or lived in Auroville. None of his relatives had joined Auroville. Devanathan had no desire or need to join Auroville. When I asked about the relationship between Auroville and the village, Devanathan told me, like many other interviewees from the village, that Auroville had perhaps been helpful to the village ten or twenty years before but nowadays, the relationship was quite bad. Aurovillians were just focusing on money. Actually, Devanathan wanted to revise his statement, it was not quite so that Auroville was not helping the village. It *was* helping, but the villagers were not taking advantage of the opportunities.[449]

None of Anushiya's close relatives had joined Auroville, although her son was working and her daughter going to school in Auroville. Anushiya thought that, generally speaking, the villages seemed to have progressed because of Auroville. Those who had joined Auroville were well-off and looked civilized – they wore clean clothes and got education. When I asked Anushiya why she thought people had come to Auroville in the first place, she told me that it was because it was so easy to live there. Then she went on to ask my interpreter the purpose of Auroville. After my interpreter explained the thinking behind Auroville, Anushiya told me Auroville was indeed very attractive. Her daughter worked as an *amma* in Auroville and had married into another village, but then she had brought the family to her home village because of employment in Auroville.

The war between Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Society over the ownership of Auroville came up in many interviews with the villagers. For many it was rather a disturbing time as it often meant not being able to work in Auroville any more as Aurovillians were not eager to hire pro-Society villagers. Actually, it seemed, few villagers were actually, ideologically, pro-Society. The SAS was simply their official employer and Auroville was only their place of employment. Hence their loyalty was on the side of the employer. This made Aurovillians dismiss or demote many of their village workers. Obviously, many villagers thought this was wrong at it was still remembered with ill-feeling by many. When I asked Anushiya to talk about the war, she explained that the whole issue was about money. Since Auroville was such a profitable project, its ownership was contested. In my interpreter's view this thought was very interesting.[450]

Rathinam explained that the war did not affect the whole village. Only the villagers who worked in Auroville had to choose sides. When the war was over, those who were on the winners' side (Auroville) became rich and happy. Those on the losers' side had to leave their jobs. At this point my interpreter told me

449 Devanathan 020703.
450 Ibid.

he remembers how the behavior of *Vellakara*s during the war was a regular topic in the village, especially, when a group of them was jailed. The villagers wondered how the *Vellakara*s could continue in such high spirits: they sang and drew nice pictures on the walls of the jail.[451] Unfortunately not so many had positive memories of Auroville during the war.

Karthik's family had joined Auroville already when it was first set up. Karthik's father took care of a piece of Aurovillian land, but when the war with the SAS began, both the Aurovillians and the SAS officials wanted his loyalty. Then the SAS people took Karthik's father to Pondicherry and made him take a sacred oath and pledge allegiance to the SAS. After that the family decided Auroville was no longer a good place for them to stay. After the war Karthik's father got a job in Auroville, but only as a watchman. None of the Tamil Aurovillians who had been on the wrong side got a proper job in Auroville, Karthik explained. I observed that the fact that many pro-Society (or "Neutral") villagers were dismissed or significantly demoted was often complained about among the villagers. In the case of Karthik's family, the father wanted the family to move back to the village soon. He did not see a bright future for the former pro-SAS villagers in Auroville.[452] Kannappan, a pensioner born in a remote village, used to work as a gardener at Sri Aurobindo Ashram. In the early 1980s he was asked to join Auroville, but the war was still on and Kannappan was a Neutral, not taking sides on the matter. Thus he was not allowed to pass by the houses of the Radicals[453]. In those days, Kannappan thought, Auroville was far from being a model of human unity.[454]

Aravan did not like the fact that when the SAS and Auroville were at war, a *Vellakara* gathered young Kuilapalayams to act against the SAS, and confiscated the SAS land Aravan was taking care of. Nevertheless, despite the unfortunate events in the past, Aravan thought Auroville in general was a good place. The community was trying to do good things, although there were people who abused the system. Auroville had done much good to the village, mainly by offering employment. When I asked Aravan what he thought about Aurovillian ideals he told me he was not interested in Auroville's purposes nor did he want to find out about them. Here my interpreter added that many villagers were like Aravan: they did not know much about Auroville as they had no interest in the subject. To them, Auroville and the *Vellakara*s just happened to be there.[455]

In Perumal's opinion Auroville had had huge effect on his village: education had increased, the young people spoke English and the economy had grown. Before, Kuilapalayam used to be a village with strict rules. Now it seemed totally different. How much this was due to a general increase in

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451 Rathinam 090603.
452 Karthik 190703.
453 As I mentioned earlier, during the war Auroville was split up into the Neutrals, a smaller group that was more prone to dialog with the SAS, and the Radicals, the majority who were more confrontational with the SAS. There was deep hostility between the two groups.
454 Kannappan 090803.
455 Aravan 090603.

wealth or the effect of Auroville was hard for Perumal to say. There was money and there was luxury. The young were going to be ruined as everyone was their own master. There was no motivation and no one wanted to study, Perumal lamented. There was political upheaval and even violence. The culture and the way of life of the village had changed rapidly with both good and bad effects. Perumal strongly criticized Tamil Aurovillians for the decadence evident in Auroville and the village. Many Tamil Aurovillians supported local village rowdies and were turning Auroville into a commercial place. In Perumal's view, people should have meditated and worked for progress. According to him, Tamil Aurovillians especially were too business-oriented and not showing enough responsibility for their native village. On the other hand, the villagers were excessively envious of snobbish Tamil Aurovillians: "Once he was suffering in the village, and now, in Auroville, he is wearing jeans, sunglasses and a baseball cap and using a mobile phone," they gossiped, according to Perumal.[456]

Aurovillians were not helping the poor relationship between the two sides either, complained Perumal. It would have been important to get Aurovillians to work *within* the villages and have common projects with the villagers. However, Kuilapalayam was not a very receptive village compared to the more remote villages, which were more enthusiastic. In Kuilapalayam people only watched cable TV, Perumal lamented. Moreover, in Perumal's view Aurovillians were more modest and did a lot more for the villages in the early days. Before, Auroville was also respected by the villagers[457]. Now there were few links between Auroville and the villages, excluding the few organizations that were concentrating on the remote villages, because the Aurovillians did not want to get involved in village politics in the villages nearby. Before, the ideal of Auroville was clear: no ostentation but strong collectivity. Now Auroville had turned parochial and isolated. How were the villagers to love Auroville if Aurovillians stuck to themselves, Perumal wondered.[458]

Perumal told me that a simple thing Auroville could have done was to inform the villages about Auroville. Few villagers knew what Auroville was about. Moreover, the Aurovillians should have acted according to their ideals. Then villagers would have believed them. Auroville should have reorganized and regrouped. Aurovillians should have stopped compiling wealth and hiding from the outside. Why could Aurovillians not arrange projects with the villagers to help to make the area more pleasant? They could have cleared up rubbish together and fixed drainage, and so on. In Perumal's opinion Auroville had plenty of money to spend: why did they not arrange common events, festivals, hand out snacks, create friendships – whatever? Why did Aurovillians not give jobs to the unemployed youths of the village, give them education "and give themselves a good name?" Then the attitude of the villagers would have defi-

456 Perumal 190603.
457 This contradicts Perumal's earlier observation recalling that in the past few villagers liked Auroville.
458 Perumal 190603.

nitely changed. Then the land would not have been a problem any more because everyone would have offered their land to a reputable Auroville.[459]

Rathinam had experienced the British era and had worked hard as a child in the fields of the family. In the days of his youth Kuilapalayam was poor and money was rarely used. Today the village had become so rich that the villagers could even have bought the land of Auroville, claimed Rathinam, rather exaggerated. When Auroville came, the whole village thought it would be only temporary, that Aurovillians would run away after a while. Later, the villagers found that even if they were rude to Aurovillians, they would respond with quiet politeness. But now many villagers feared Aurovillians and their impolite language. Before, it was impossible to provoke Aurovillians. Present-day Aurovillians were ruder.[460]

It seems that Kuilapalayams thought the morals of both the villagers and Aurovillians had declined during the decades of their co-existence. Auroville was no longer helping as it used to and Kuilapalayams had become more selfish. However, the greatest pressure of moral scrutiny was directed at the Tamil Aurovillians. They had "drifted away" from their culture. They did not produce enough employment for the villagers. They were attracted to the ways of the *Vellakara* and fraternized with them. To villagers, *Vellakara*s had their own morality as they were simply different folk. Few villagers directly commented on Western morality but it seemed to be considered important in the way it affected Tamil Aurovillians. In both village Occidentalism and Aurovillian Orientalism, Tamil Aurovillians represented a borderline of a sort. Their position was often rather invidious, as there were strong pressures from both sides. Tamil Aurovillians were expected to be, at the same time, good villagers and good Aurovillians.

Tamil Aurovillian Views

In Between Cultures

Tamil Aurovillians occupied an imaginary borderline between Kuilapalayam and Auroville. As Aurovillian culture was hegemonically Western, Tamil Aurovillians, due to their village background, had difficulties in being accepted as "true Aurovillians." On the other hand, villagers seemed to view Tamil Aurovillians as Westernized people who had drifted away from village culture. Tamil Aurovillians themselves often bewailed their hybrid position in between "real Tamils" and "real Aurovillians," or, between the village and the West. They felt pressure from both sides.[461]

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459 Ibid.
460 Rathinam 090603.
461 Cf. Sarmela 2004, 62 about the puritanistic requirements set by outsiders defining a "real" representative of a culture.

Many Tamil Aurovillians thought Auroville's relationship with the villages was satisfactory. Naturally many problems could be pointed out because not everyone could be pleased but on the whole most Tamil Aurovillians thought that without Auroville the villages would not have been as developed as they were now. However, many seemed to think that the non-Tamil Aurovillians who had recently joined the community did not have much respect for Tamils. It seemed as if the old-timer Aurovillians respected the local villagers more.

Viveka was rather confused when I asked her, somewhat provokatively, why the villagers did not like Auroville. In my opinion this in its way confirmed the fact that there was no general dislike towards Auroville. Nevertheless, Viveka told me some villagers were envious of Aurovillians for their wealth and easy lifestyle. Especially their fellow villagers living in Auroville were the target of such envy. There had been a great deal of rumors and gossip about them. In Viveka's opinion many Tamil Aurovillians were indeed self-centered and cocky. Many Tamil Aurovillians who had joined in the early days had grown rich and were now egocentric. Viveka had also noticed that some leading Tamil Aurovillians wanted to control village-Auroville relations. If a villager or a Tamil Aurovillian wanted a job in Auroville, they had to go and speak to some of the leading Tamil Aurovillians first. Their bossiness was the reason why many Tamil Aurovillians were not liked in the village. Nevertheless, everyone spoke of these things only behind their backs, Viveka had observed.[462]

Incidentally, another Tamil Aurovillian informant gave me an example of how Tamil Aurovillians could become insolent when they joined Auroville. He told me about a village boy who had gone to a Tamil Aurovillian to ask for a job in Auroville. The Tamil Aurovillian had asked who the boy was and where he was from although the boy was living just three houses from the house where the Tamil Aurovillian was born. This was considered by my informant to be very offensive indeed. At first I did not realize what the point of the example was until I understood that the Tamil Aurovillian should have known the boy from his village. This example was supposed to show me how much Tamil Aurovillians had drifted away from their village when they did not know their fellow villagers any more.[463]

Velavan was the well-off manager of a convenience store in Auroville. He was in his mid forties, and the proud father of two well-educated daughters and a son with an office job. Velavan had joined Auroville already in the early seventies. His father did not want his son to join Auroville, but when Velavan promised his whole income to the family, the father approved. He was seventeen at the time, and he recalled with amazement that he was actually asked to join Auroville. In those days joining Auroville was much simpler. Velavan told me that the villagers viewed Auroville as a community where *Vellakara*s were in

462 Viveka 190903.
463 Mayilan 300503.

charge. Tamil Aurovillians were seen as their subordinates.[464] In Velavan's opinion Tamil Aurovillians did operate in between *Vellakara*s and villagers, sometimes even confusing the relationship. Unfortunately Velavan was not on good terms with the rest of Auroville. He used to work in an Auroville convenience store, but now that he had his own shop, he told me he was envied and regarded as unnecessary competition.[465]

There were many rumors about Velavan in Auroville. Many questioned the legality of his activities. It is hard to say whether or not these rumors were based on reality but, interestingly, many villagers, Western Aurovillians and Tamil Aurovillians themselves, either implied or explicitly stated that often Tamil Aurovillians were rather unscrupulous in taking financial advantage of Auroville. On the other hand, however, there was also much criticism of this kind of prejudice. Many refused to believe that only a dishonest Tamil Aurovillian could be wealthy. Perhaps the way Tamil Aurovillians occupied the borderline between Western Auroville and the Tamil village rendered them suspect. They did not seem to fit the binary model that divided people into Westerners and Tamils. They were a little of both and not enough of either.

Many Tamil Aurovillians did not like this borderline status and thus tried, at least rhetorically, escape it. It took Ravanan a long time to adapt to Auroville, to make the change and finally decide to join. "To understand Auroville takes time," Ravanan told me. Only after a long period of indecision could he leave his family and join Auroville. Ravanan had lived in at least in fifteen or sixteen Aurovillian communities. He started a family with a Tamil woman in Auroville and had a few sons. It was clear to him that he must join Auroville totally, and not "to keep the other foot in the village." The Mother wanted Aurovillians to abandon their old lives because only then would they be able to grow. But "life takes its own paths," observed Ravanan. Life did not belong to oneself, and it could not be directed. Ravanan's parents were not happy at Ravanan, their eldest son, moving to Auroville. As with many other families, they did not like the fact that the family would lose a significant resource, which is what the departure of Ravanan would mean. Ravanan remembered how in the beginning the villagers thought people were crazy to join Auroville, because they did not get much money, only food and a small allowance. Now it was different, because there were many perks in joining Auroville. Today Tamil Aurovillians were envied, because materially they were better off than their fellow villagers. Tamil Aurovillians invested their money back in the villages but, unfortunately, Auroville did not have the will to intervene, lamented Ravanan. [466] Interestingly it was considered questionable for Tamil Aurovillians to invest their income elsewhere while the investments of Western Aurovillians outside the commu-

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464 Also, Basim told me that the management of the Aurovillian units was always white. The bosses did not delegate responsibility to anyone, and thus the units did not grow. Many Indian workers were frustrated for not advancing in their career. Some established their own business units. Basim 150703.

465 Velavan 260603.

466 Ravanan 080703.

nity did not seem to come up for comment at all. Obviously, this seemed hypocritical to the Tamil Aurovillians who had noticed the fact.

Every third Aurovillian was a villager, and villagers were costly to maintain, Ravanan told me. Nowadays people had different motives for joining Auroville, and had "their feet on both sides," unlike Ravanan. Ravanan questioned the villagers' understanding of Auroville. Often the villagers were more of a burden than a resource to Auroville. But when one aspired genuinely, the result was bound to be positive. Ravanan emphasized the significance of honesty. Ravanan did not visit his relatives or family in the village. Ravanan concluded that his family had probably forgotten about him[467]. However, Ravanan's wife had not cut her ties to the village; neither was Ravanan urging her to do so. His wife went to the village festivals and other cultural events. Ravanan himself had discontinued his relations with the village, but he was encouraging people to practice the "original culture."[468]

In Ravanan's view there were many troublemakers in Kuilapalayam and they made money out of causing trouble and stealing. There had been two groups of about ten "rowdies[469]" in the village for about four years. It was very sad, Ravanan told me, as there had even been murders. Ravanan himself had been severely beaten because he was trying to calm down a group of village drunkards.[470] I observed that it was not rare for Tamil Aurovillians to get beaten by drunken villagers.

The recent misbehavior in the villages was, in Ravanan's view, partly caused by the rapid economic development. Auroville's influence was having unfortunate side effects of Auroville's influence. Auroville was not doing anything about the matter, because the internal situation of Auroville was too difficult. There was no time to concentrate on outside matters. The administration of Auroville was in trouble. Ravanan told me this was because the dream of Auroville was too ambitious. More people and support from the world was needed. Besides, Auroville had a bad reputation. Visitors perceived Auroville differently, and consequently published their distorted views[471]. The bad publicity impeded growth. The views of outsiders were often ill-founded and people did not understand Auroville's real purpose. Local people also, including the district collector[472], had no faith in Auroville. The officials were not supporting Auroville. The members of the *panchayat*[473] only pursued their own economic interests. Auroville was going through difficult times, but it was not facing a crisis, Ravanan told me.[474]

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467 Later Ravanan told me his father visited him often and was very proud of him.
468 Ravanan 080703.
469 The word "rowdy" was common among villagers and Aurovillians to describe the village trouble-makers.
470 Ravanan 080703.
471 I suspect this comment was aimed at me as a slight warning.
472 The district collector is appointed by the Central Government of India. District collectors are in charge of the governance of a district in a state. They are the most powerful government officials of the district, responsible for law and order, revenue collection, taxation, building-permits, etc.
473 *Panchayat* is the elected village council.
474 Ravanan 080703.

Ravanan thought that every individual in Auroville should have been developing themselves, but many had come to lead an easy life. It should not have come about that people worked for three months in Europe and came back to Auroville to live easily for the rest of the year. As long as this happened, the image of Auroville was not going to improve. Ravanan emphasized the fact that this was only his personal view of Auroville. For him, Auroville meant giving up certain things and "living in the heart." Too much analysis made one lose. Nowadays people thought, analyzed and oriented themselves only "mentally." In the beginning Auroville life was more harmonious and "heart-to-heart." However, not everyone agreed with Ravanan. Some said he should change in accordance with reality. But Ravanan thought, for example, that Auroville should not have been so commercially oriented. Material wealth was something sought outside Auroville. One should not be committed to two places at once, Ravanan repeated, or the whole project was undermined. However, Ravanan was still hopeful of Auroville. The organization could have been better, but there was progress eventhough the process should have been "more tuned into the right melody." Pursuing Ravanan's analogy, nowadays Aurovillians just wanted loud noise, even if it would have been desirable to have musical skills.[475]

The Reflections of Some Educated Tamil Aurovillians

Theepan was from a big city in southern Tamil Nadu. He had been expected to become an engineer, but he became interested in spirituality, mainly because of Swami Vivekananda's influence. Like Vivekananda, Theepan thought that the wisdom of India was in its nature and villages. Theepan visited Auroville as a tourist in the late 1990s and was interested in the individual freedom and free education. Moreover, Auroville seemed to be a suitable place to bring up children. Then Theepan became interested in the ecology and traditions of the villages. He researched especially the use of the medicinal plants of the region. In Theepan's opinion "traditions were forgotten in the villages" and they had to be retaught to the villagers. In Theepan's view, Auroville faced many challenges in connection with the villages. The dynamics of the village were complicated but Aurovillians were not interested in understanding the social structure of their neighbors. Theepan told me that religion was the undercurrent of everything in the village, a fact that should have been taken into account in Auroville. In Theepan's opinion, when Aurovillians showed the will to understand their cultural environment, the problems would start to recede automatically.[476]

In Theepan's view there was no will to understand on the village side either. Villagers did not feel the need to understand Auroville.[477] They were con-

475 Ibid.
476 Theepan 120503.
477 Or, as my interpreter – among others – told me, for the villager, Auroville just *was*, and there was no interest in pondering the reasons behind Auroville's existence or the motivation of Aurovillians.

tent when Auroville produced employment for them. Even to get a job in Auroville raised their status, and if a villager was lucky enough to join Auroville this was even greater elevation in status. The wealth of Auroville was very attractive to villagers too[478]. In short, Theepan's opinion was that Auroville was an experiment for which the villagers had provided the physical location, but Auroville's achievements were not achievements for the villager.[479]

In Kannappan's view, the villagers used to respect Auroville in the early days. Then community stood for something higher, but now villagers regarded Aurovillians as their equals. Nowadays, Auroville for them meant only a potential place of work. Moreover, in Kannappan's experience, villagers did not like the fact that Aurovillian example had made girls and boys interact more closely. He also wondered why learning Tamil was such an arduous task for Western Aurovillians. Could it really be so difficult, asked Kannappan, when, on another hand, Tamils learned English quite easily? When I asked Kannappan what he thought the Mother meant by calling villagers the first Aurovillians, he replied that if two equally qualified persons applied to Auroville, one from Madras and the other from Kuilapalayam, the close neighbor should be given priority.[480] Many Kuilapalayams also often referred to their priority in being close neighbors to Auroville.

Vallikai was an educated woman who had ended up in Auroville through development work. Before, she told me, she had rejected her Tamil origins because people astigmatized Tamils as cheats and liars[481]. Now she had made peace with her Tamil origins. The proximity of Auroville was a challenge to the villages as "they breathe us, we breathe them." In Vallikai's view, the development of the villages had been too fast. Later Vallikai mentioned that one could see the increasing wealth in the huge houses the villagers had built, but many of the houses did not even have a bathroom. It seems that to Vallikai this was a good example of development going ahead of the people. In Vallikai's view the change in the villages was beyond good and bad, but individually people had problems in coming to terms with the change. To Vallikai, the villagers were like sponges in the way they absorbed influences, which in fact is a common Indo-Orientalist analogy for India itself. Now that survival was not the question in the villages, villagers had to think what to do with the rest of their lives: how to entertain oneself and how to keep active. In Vallikai's view, Aurovillians should have been giving the villagers time and space to adapt to this change.

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478 In Theepan's view employment *per se* raised the villager's status. This was not concurred in other interviews or in my observations. If the villager's status was raised by being employed in Auroville, I would think it was because of the extra income, or, in the case of younger villagers, because of the novelty of being in the sphere of Western influence.

479 Theepan 120503. The last opinion of Theepan was concurred in many interviews, e.g. in Arjun 220503.

480 Kannappan 090803.

481 Cf. Mary, a young Aurovillian woman of Western descent, who told me that Auroville had problems with the villagers because they stole and were simple-minded. Mary 130903. Also, Basim described the stereotypical thinking of Aurovillians: "if a European is doing well, his grandma has sent him money. If an Indian is doing well he has stolen from Auroville." Basim 150703.

No one was able to stop the change, which was taking place "organically[482]." Vallikai was hopeful that at some point the villagers would examine themselves and question the process. Now they did not have the time to do so.[483]

Vallikai thought that the older generation in the village understood Auroville more "in their hearts than heads." They were impressed by Auroville, as "the White Man had come to do something good." The next generation did not have the same experience as they had been educated into the present climate. They were used to lighter work and had seen Aurovillians doing lighter work. Present day villagers between the ages of thirty and forty were frustrated and disappointed: "not enough this or that, no proper work, not as much as others," described Vallikai.[484] Although Vallikai's analysis aptly described the situation, in my view, it is interesting how many Aurovillians thought that the younger generations of the village should somehow collectively "remember" the era of their fathers and grandfathers and thus be content with the present for being economically on a higher level than life thirty years ago. It was easily thought that the village youth were selfish and ungrateful for Auroville's trickle-down effect. Although in general they had less than Aurovillians, they did have more than the villagers did decades ago, and for that they should have been content. Anyhow, Vallikai continued, there were wealth gaps everywhere in the world, even if people were trying to fill them. She declared people must take rational view of the gap, because without it the gap would produce "tormenting obsession."[485]

When Auroville was started the parents of Ganeshkumar were hired to work in Auroville. His mother worked to maintain the school, and his father's occupation was buying land for Auroville because he could speak Hindi with the SAS people. Then his father got construction work in Auroville. Ganeshkumar was accepted in the newly built school in the early 1970s when he was an infant. Actually, as many Tamil Aurovillians wanted to emphasize, his parents were asked to put their children in the Aurovillian school. At first Ganeshkumar lived in a boarding house run by an American couple for schoolchildren. In certain respects this was the golden age of Auroville, but in another way the present time was also. Ganeshkumar observed that Aurovillians had the tendency to romanticize the past: "Before everything was well and now we are all ruined!" In many ways Auroville had developed in the right direction. In the old days there was not really a concept of "joining" Auroville. It was more like getting involved or taking part.[486]

Ganeshkumar had never been in much contact with his relatives in the village. Instead he grew up bonding strongly with the children of the village who also studied in Auroville. Many of them had afterwards achieved important positions in Auroville. Ganeshkumar was lucky as he had an opportunity to

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482 Aurovillians seemed to think that change in the village was "organic" or chaotic whereas change in Auroville was planned and controlled.
483 Vallikai 250603.
484 Ibid.
485 Ibid.
486 Ganeshkumar 030703.

grow in a "mixed culture." In Ganeshkumar's youth everything in Auroville was on a smaller scale and it was easier for people to relate to each other. Now everything was bigger and Aurovillians were not interacting with the villagers so much. The quest for mutual understanding had diminished, and Aurovillians were not interested in what went on in the village. Ganeshkumar's age group had got to know Western Aurovillians very well. Today, no one would ask him who he was or what he was doing in Auroville.[487]

So far, Ganeshkumar thought, Auroville had done relatively well in its relationship with the villages. But clearly it was not enough. In many areas the relationship could have been more developed. The City was still under construction. The relationship with the workers should have been given more thought. If too many people were aggravated, the risk of conflict increased. "If the critical mass is not content with Auroville, then they are the law," explained Ganeshkumar. Whatever Auroville did, it should have kept the villagers informed[488]. There should have been more joint projects to improve the quality of life in the villages.[489]

Ganeshkumar told me that for a villager joining Auroville was a big change. For Ganeshkumar it had been hard, because his parents were not Aurovillians and they did not want him to join Auroville either. They were worried about the unity of the family. It had been difficult to break away from his parents, explained Ganeshkumar. "Many Tamil Aurovillians are not in the village or in Auroville but somewhere in between. There is pressure from both sides," he complained. Ganeshkumar was in a difficult position also in his work. He had to solve many problems, but Europeans were being "very verbal" and tried to pressure him to approve of their opinions. Ganeshkumar had to struggle to make up his own mind and stick to his decisions. Then the villagers often complained about Ganeshkumar fraternizing with the Europeans. It was hard to be in between. Many Tamil Aurovillians had left their "traditional lifestyle." For example, Ganeshkumar himself was married to a European woman. He had left many things behind but this did not mean that he approved of everything Western. Ganeshkumar told me he could not really relate to his parents anymore, which did not mean he disliked them.[490]

For Ganeshkumar, relating to his background and to the present situation was a constant struggle. He had experienced living with a Westerner, and he had seen how differently children could be brought up. Moreover, the Western concept of privacy caused problems, for example, when the relatives of Ganeshkumar often came to the house uninvited. This annoyed his Western partner. She would have liked to have her privacy, whereas Ganeshkumar's parents would have liked to help them more around the house. Ganeshkumar could not understand the Western urge to be left alone. Were parents not allowed to visit

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487 Ibid.

488 Basim also said there should be a basic policy to inform the villages about Auroville and to keep up communication. Basim 150703. Mary also suggested that there should have been Aurovillian liaison offices in the villages. Mary 130903.

489 Ganeshkumar 030703.

490 Ibid.

their son, he asked. Ganeshkumar had had to discard things that had normally been a part of social life in the village. Moreover, he told me he had had to get used to many things when he lived in Auroville.

> There are other things like adapting to the other lifestyle like… I spend more money on diapers and things than the villagers… you know they don't spend that much money on food. […] The needs in the village were very small in number… But now I have a TV, I have a phone and I have email and I have that and I have this… But to sustain all this you go mad, actually. You have to go mad. You lose the sense of… enjoying it, because you have to keep up. [491]

Ganeshkumar was trying to adapt to circumstances. He rarely visited the village, because most of his friends lived in Auroville. Tamil Aurovillians were often accused of not caring for their village anymore. To some extent, Ganeshkumar told me, this might have been true, but usually the caring was on a different level. Ganeshkumar was trying to organize many things for the village. He would have liked to see Auroville grow with the village and connect more to the village. But, as he stated, "there is a powerful group in Auroville that is trying to build a wall between Auroville and the villages." The village did not have to be merged with Auroville, but in many ways there could have been co-operation and mutual support.[492]

Viveka's Story

Viveka was born into a Tamil family in Kuilapalayam in the early 1980s. Her father and elder brothers were linked with Auroville through employment. Viveka was just an infant when her life changed dramatically upon the death of her mother. Without the support of his wife Viveka's father felt at a loss to provide an upbringing for his small daughter. By chance, a European lady working at an Aurovillian school for Tamil children nearby was informed about Viveka's situation and offered to help the bereaved family. Eventually, she ended up as Viveka's foster mother. [493]

Viveka remembered that moving into Auroville and having a new mother had been frightening to her at first. Presumably, such a change in an infant's life may be frightening in many ways, but when I asked about what she had been afraid of in the new situation Viveka recollected that her anxiety was caused by the white skin[494] of her "new mother." Viveka remembered experiencing a mixture of fear and hatred of the new situation which seemed to have taken concrete form in the strange appearance of her foster mother. Viveka's elder brothers were invited to live with Viveka in the new surroundings but they refused, according to Viveka, because of their fear of white people. Viveka would often run away from her new home back to her native village. Finally her foster

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491 Ibid.
492 Ibid.
493 Viveka 190903.
494 Only one other Tamil interviewee, Sundari, associated negative connotations with white skin. She told me many villagers did not like Aurovillians because of their white skin. Sundari 060903.

mother arranged for a new, more familiar carer for Viveka. A colleague of the European lady, a Tamil Aurovillian schoolmistress was to be Viveka's new foster mother.[495]

The three women became a sort of a family, and Viveka would stay at both of their houses as she pleased. Viveka would mostly live with her "Indian mother," and receive the "European mother's" financial support, while, obviously being strongly influenced by both. Viveka's childhood in Auroville was thrilling. She studied in Aurovillian schools, and recalls having been very energetic, and enjoying the nature and people of Auroville. At some point, Viveka's European mother left Auroville and after that Viveka met her only occasionally during her visits to Auroville and once in Europe. However, Viveka said that she and her European mother did not get along well at least when Viveka had grown older and reached her late teens. Even though one might assume otherwise, the reason for their disagreement did not lie in their different cultural backgrounds but, according to Viveka's interpretation, in their *similar* cultural backgrounds. Viveka and her foster mother were, "like Western women are," both very strong willed, and thus the relationship in Viveka's view tended to produce many "spicy duels."[496]

At the time of my fieldwork Viveka had officially been an Aurovillian for many years – a mere technicality in earlier times – and had lived together with a Tamil Aurovillian young man for a few years. She occupied a post of relatively high responsibility in Auroville, had her own house with her partner and, according to my observations, was known and respected as a bright young woman by most Aurovillians. Yet at that time Viveka told me she was suffering and feeling miserable. She felt as if she had to walk a tightrope between being European and Tamil, having one foot in European culture and one in Tamil. In addition to having run away numerous times from her European mother in her childhood, she had also run away from her Indian mother when she was sixteen. She did not feel quite at home in the European home, and in the Indian home she felt differently treated because of being adopted. Viveka had a deep feeling of two people living inside her. She had tried to have the best of both worlds, but had eventually noticed she was fully of neither, not Indian or Western.[497]

Interestingly, many Tamil Aurovillians expressed the view that it was hard to be a Tamil Aurovillian, because they were not villagers any more but they were not Westerners either. So this could mean that "being Aurovillian" was thought to equal "being Western," although Auroville was supposed to be a multicultural community. For example, Balasingam lamented:

> Tamil Aurovillians are not Indians, and not Westerners. The whole set up of Auroville is much more Western than Indian. The school, the system is much more Western. We have lost all the roots of India. The way we do things is an Indian doing things in a Western way. We are not Indian, we are not Westerner.[498]

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495 Viveka 190903.
496 Ibid.
497 Ibid.
498 Balasingam 220799.

For Viveka, it was very problematic to "be a little of both." She was a mixture in dress, cooking, and language – even in relationships. Viveka's partner, an Aurovillian from the village, would have liked her to be more Indian, for example in her appearance, but did not accept any reciprocal demands from Viveka. Viveka, for her part, wanted her partner to behave in a more "refined way." He had refused. Viveka declared she was able to do anything by herself. She was not "a normal Tamil girl," but her partner would have liked her to change. "But it is not possible – not just like that," Viveka exclaimed. For example, she could not and would not talk differently to people of different ages in the village; she would travel to the city on her own; if she did not like someone or something, she would say so frankly or walk away. She was strong in her deeds and speech. She followed the traditions that *she* thought were good. If she were to follow all the traditions, she would have to abstain from eating meat on Fridays and would have to do *puja*[499]. Until now she had not done puja, but whenever a friend from the village visited Viveka, the friend immediately asked: "Where is your *puja* room?" Recently she had made the concession of getting a small god figure, but she still did not do *puja*. When Viveka was visiting her village friends they always asked her if she had lit a fire for the gods. When Viveka said no, they would hurry her back home and have her light it.[500]

Viveka had never been interested in Tamil traditions, and she could never fake interest. She had never been religious, and had no prayers or gods. She had visited many temples, but only visited. She did not know nor was she interested in religious ceremonies. She did not want them. "Not even *Pongal*[501]," she exclaimed. Maybe sometime in the future she might feel drawn to those activities, but for now candy and rockets were enough. Viveka's relatives and siblings were *so* different from her that they felt only like acquaintances – not a family – to her. Viveka emphasized that she had taken all the steps in her life by herself; she had even chosen her own partner. Her relatives did not like it, but she told them it was not their business. If it was a problem to them, they could simply leave her alone. Viveka lived her own life and made her own decisions. If anyone – even her partner – did not like it, they could go separate ways.[502]

Viveka did fight with her partner. She wanted him to cook, at least for once! But he never did. He wanted to show her he was the man. An Indian man would not do housework, Viveka lamented. "The man's job is to go out and come home. The woman has to stay home and clean everything." This was not right, and Viveka did not like it from her partner. They should have been equal. Of course, all this was easier said than done, Viveka observed. Viveka did live in a society[503] whose opinions she did take into account. The moment she thought about, say, divorce, her "Indian self" stepped into play and said: "Oh, what will they say?" Now she lived in a relationship outside traditional mar-

499 *Puja* is a ritual in honor of the gods, performed either at home or in the temple.
500 Viveka 190903.
501 *Pongal* is a harvest festival and one of the most important annual festivals in South India.
502 Viveka 190903.
503 I.e. Tamil society.

riage. People gossiped about it, but Viveka did not care. But when it came to thinking about divorce, it was harder. Maybe in a different country she would have been able to go through with it. Or maybe if she were to move to another place it might be possible, Viveka mused. But living where she did, it was not possible. The culture made it very complicated. Viveka was probably going to spend the rest of her life in Auroville, but she would have liked to travel abroad too. But Tamil society was her home in the end.

> [T]his is my home country, even if I'm in Auroville, this is my place. I am also locally from here. This is my land. I can't say this is not my permanent place because where else can I go? This is my society, my place, my area.[504]

Viveka felt she had no choice. Maybe, she speculated, if she had arrived from abroad, she could have lived differently, but now she had to stay put. Maybe in another country she could have had different ideas, she supposed.[505]

Negotiations on the Borderline

Kannan told me that now, as he was living in Auroville, he was not fully able to follow the practices of village Hinduism any more. Kannan and his family did treat Friday as a holy day: lamps were lit and the house was cleaned – just like in the village, but traditions related to festivals could not be followed in full. This was because he was living separately from the village. For example, during *Pongal*, when traditionally lots of food was cooked, who was to eat all the food? In the village surplus food was given to the poor. Kannan cooked only a small pot of food "which does not look like *Pongal* at all!" Theoretically, Kannan said, he was doing just like the villagers, but in practice, not at all. During a village festival people ran around, shouted and greeted everyone, but Kannan could not do that in Auroville. If he had lived in the village, he could not have "escaped the rituals." Now the poor did not come to beg for food after a festival, because in Auroville there were fences, dogs and gates. Maybe they did not even know Kannan was living there.[506]

Kannan wanted his children to learn Tamil culture, but in his opinion this was not possible living in Auroville. That is why he sent his children to his parents' house for festival days.[507] Kannan told me he had an awkward relationship with the village. His relationship with his parents was stormy. This was due to Kannan moving to Auroville and marrying from a lower caste. Kannan was, however, helping his parents in the field. But to marry a *Dalit* was something villagers despised, so they looked down on Kannan[508]. Hence, Kannan thought he was not a good person to interview. He was not a "real villager." If

504 Viveka 190903.
505 Ibid.
506 Kannan 200503.
507 Interestingly, the festivals seemed to represent sort of essential Tamil culture for villagers.
508 One of my interpreters once told me that Kannan's marriage was not actually despised in the village. Only Kannan's parents lamented it.

Kannan had married the girl his parents wanted, the relationship with his parents would have been much better. However, he did have friends in the village. Every time Kannan drove by the village he stopped to chat with the villagers. He used to visit the village more often, but now that he was living in Auroville and in an intercaste marriage he had reduced his visits. The villagers did not visit Kannan often either. If there was a big festival in the village or a family feast, Kannan and his family were ignored[509]. It was painful.

If someone wanted Kannan's advice on marrying from a different caste, he would advise him or her not to go through with it, especially if the person was from a nice family. "It is too painful for the family, for everyone," Kannan said. Even Kannan himself was not happy, "because everything is connected to marriage," and everyone associated a person like him with his unusual marriage. Kannan was – like every Kuilapalayam – a *Vanniyar*, of farmer caste. But being of mixed caste was a bad thing for the children, because it was difficult to marry them off, especially the daughters. It was a very severe problem. The most painful thing to Kannan was that the consequences of a mixed marriage hit the children hardest. However, in Kannan's opinion, his children could marry anyone they pleased but he was not sure about what his wife thought about it.[510]

Mayilan was from a small village he called "backward" outside the Auroville bioregion, and he was obviously fascinated by the international atmosphere of the community. The most attractive thing about Auroville to him was the fact that there were so many different people from all over the world with different worldviews.[511] It was intriguing to him that he could not live with a girl outside marriage, whereas for people in the West it was perfectly normal! Mayilan was interested in knowing and exploring the "other side of the world." Auroville was helping him to do this without him having to travel the world. The idea of unending education in Auroville was also very attractive to him. Even elderly people could educate themselves in Auroville. This was not normal in a village or in any city in Tamil Nadu. Mayilan had finished his education, but now he was studying French, he exclaimed. Maybe he would study German of Finnish next. "Why not!" such opportunities did not exist anywhere else, Mayilan explained. That is why the Mother in her wisdom called Auroville "a living laboratory." Mayilan also told me that improving his economic situation was also one aspect of living in Auroville, but not a very significant one. The "inner life" was his priority. In his home village his spiritual life would have been almost non-existent.[512]

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509 However, this, to my observation, did not always seem to be the case. Once I even saw Kannan holding an important ritual position at a village wedding.

510 Kannan 200503.

511 Cf. Ulagarasan who told me it was very interesting for him to work with people from different countries. He also claimed that when he went to school in Auroville there was no idea of distinguishing children by their country of origin, at least not among the children who were born in India. However, he continued "this not applicable in work as it is involved with adults of different ages. So it has now become a bit difficult to understand the adults of other countries." Ulagarasan 221098.

512 Mayilan 150803.

Sometimes Mayilan questioned his own culture, and tried to find reason in it. In Mayilan's opinion, the other Tamils should also have done the same. Many Tamil traditions had been rational in the beginning, but nowadays only a minority of them were. Thus they should have been abandoned. For example, over-emphasizing astrology was not rational. Moreover, to live as a couple was not easy in Tamil culture. There were countless outside factors one had to take into account, mainly concerning the relatives. The family had to be satisfied, which was a hard task. Tamil people should have re-evaluated and reorganized their customs, Mayilan thought. One way to do that was to make the practices and requirements of everyday life easier. Mayilan's way of avoiding the cultural practices was to make an excuse of living so far away from his native village. Mayilan did not seem to respect most Tamil traditions. When people had absolute faith in tradition it was like "a blind man leading another," he explained. Mayilan had also had a hard time convincing his father about his moving to Auroville. Once he had succeeded in making his father understand his choice, the rest of the family had kept quiet. He had told his father he could not live in the village and that he expected his father to respect his decision. According to Mayilan, many Tamil people had a lot more difficulty convincing their parents about joining Auroville.[513]

Mayilan told me that without the villagers Auroville would not have been built. Before, everyone worked together in Auroville. Now it had changed, and Aurovillians were doing less manual work. For example, Mayilan's employer told him not to build his own house but to hire workers. Unfortunately, Mayilan complained, some Tamil Aurovillians had been involved in village politics and thus were involved with violence. Many other Tamil Aurovillians did not have any relationship with their native village. That is why the villagers blamed Auroville, for making Tamil Aurovillians burn bridges, explained Mayilan. The interaction had to be improved, but Tamil Aurovillians had forgotten they had once lived in the village. For Mayilan, the village background was very important. Interestingly, when I asked Mayilan about what Aurovillians should do to improve the relationship with the villagers, Mayilan replied as if I had asked about what *Tamil* Aurovillians should do.[514] It seems that many Tamil Aurovillians and villagers thought *Tamil* Aurovillians were the only group that should or could have a relationship with the village. Maybe Tamils thought *Vellakara*s did not even have to have a relationship with villagers.

Mayilan was clearly consciously trying to enculturate himself into the Western Aurovillian atmosphere. He seemed to be working on a separation, in discourse and action, between traditional Tamil culture and his new exposure to Western culture. For example, he repeatedly told me how his wedding had been a very short ceremony compared to the traditional "Hindu torture." He had learned to use a fork and a knife instead of simply the right hand. He tried to enjoy Western dishes instead of rice and *dahl*. He lived in the expensive Western area of Auroville, although he jokingly told me he was the only poor

513 Ibid.
514 Ibid.

person living there. He wanted to have only one child, not "a pack of them" like in the villages. As Mayilan was from a remote village, he also made a distinction between his native village and the villages near Auroville. For example, he told me the local Tamil language was very disrespectful. If someone used such language in his native village, he got himself a beating. In Mayilan's view, the coastal villages were the worst. Their language was very coarse and the fishermen themselves were coarse and acted hastily, without thinking, and suffered the consequences.[515]

Tamil Aurovillians did seem to depart from the religious customs and other cultural elements of village life after joining Auroville. Some of them felt rather relieved about it and some also seemed to feel guilty about it. Many felt estranged from the village and did not feel comfortable visiting their birthplace. However, there was a significant proportion of Tamil Aurovillians who still lived their lives according to the village culture and were closely connected to the villagers in their daily lives. For many Western Aurovillians they posed a problem as they were considered "too stuck" in their old ways considering that "true Aurovillians" were supposed to leave behind their cultural baggage, or at least integrate in the multicultural atmosphere. On this issue I will elaborate in the next chapter. There were also those Tamil Aurovillians who did not feel it was their responsibility to assist their relatives and friends to get in contact with Auroville. For example, Devanesan did not want Auroville to be more open to the villages, because Aurovillians should have kept their privacy. Otherwise "the villagers would be everywhere."[516] Balasingam also wanted to live as far away from the village as possible because he wanted to enjoy the peacefulness in Auroville.

Mayilan told me that ten years ago in his village he could not have imagined meeting people from all over the world. Only in his dreams did he meet different people from different lands. "But one wakes up from a dream," Mayilan told me. Auroville was like that dream, but it was real! How different had it been for him to live in his natal village where only the same faces could be seen. Now that his wife was pregnant, their family was so lucky to live in a truly international environment, Mayilan explained. In his view the local villagers took Auroville for granted, but Mayilan had more perspective and more experience and thus could give Auroville its due value. To him, Auroville was a unique place.[517]

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515 Ibid.
516 Devanesan 100703
517 Mayilan 150803.

Tamil Occidentalism

The Material Pros and the Cultural Cons

Villagers had few contacts with Western Aurovillians. Rathinam was one of the two villagers who spoke of having Western friends. He had one *Vellakara* friend whose hired bullock-cart driver he had been. They were good friends and they never had any disagreements. Once the friend had come to Rathinam's house and noticed how far the family had to go to fetch their water. He had arranged a water connection to the house, which would have cost three hundred rupees, but he would not accept any money. Eventually, after demanding to pay, Rathinam was allowed to pay him 120 rupees. When I asked Rathinam whether the friend ever told him about his home country, Rathinam told me that he never did. Even if he *had* told him something, Rathinam claimed that he would not have understood anything.[518]

Villagers of the older generation had heard about and even lived during the British era. That is why in the early days of Auroville many villagers were anxious about the new influx of *Vellakara*s. Many were afraid that the foreigners had come to take their land. However, in the end it was noticed that the white people kept to themselves and only wanted to buy land from villagers and employ them in their community. They even gave away their things to poor villagers. Slowly the villagers started to get used to the foreigners, but it seemed that a certain caution, even suspicion, never disappeared.

The main interface between Kuilapalayam and Auroville was employment. Villagers were in dire need of work and income and Aurovillians had plenty of money and the need of a workforce. The interaction quickly started to develop into mutual dependence. In the process more knowledge and impressions of *Vellakara*s were transmitted to the village – and vice versa. Strange Western ways were wondered at in the village and the "primitiveness" and "superstition" of the villagers were marveled at in Auroville.

When the first Tamil Aurovillian generation grew up the *Vellakara*s were no longer so distant and incomprehensible. While most village Tamils considered it immoral for Westerners not to employ villagers, many Tamil Aurovillians started to question the class division in Auroville. Why was there a Tamil working class and a Western administrative class in Auroville? Why was power unequally distributed in the community? These questions were, of course, pondered also by many Western Aurovillians, and one should note that sometimes the class division seemed to bother Western Aurovillians more than it did Tamil Aurovillians, let alone the villagers. While many Tamil Aurovillians contemplated these issues, only a few dared to speak up. However, the Tamils of Auroville had begun, to use a Marxist expression, to see themselves as a class for themselves. To put it simply and a bit exaggerated, while the villagers saw the rich *Vellakara* as a potential producer of well-being by producing employ-

518 Rathinam 090603.

ment, the Tamil Aurovillian had begun to see him as a potential exploiter. At any rate, the Other of the Westerners now had the chance to talk back to the Orientalist/Tamilist imagery of the hegemonic Aurovillian discourse.

I asked Rathinam whether it was hard to understand Aurovillians in the beginning. He replied that the villagers tried to understand Aurovillians but it was difficult as they bought land and fenced it right away. However, when there were problems between Aurovillians and villagers, Aurovillians used to come to the village and sit down together with the villagers to solve the problems. In the early days, they were like brothers-in-law, he claimed. When I asked Rathinam what kind of problems the villagers usually had with Auroville, he told me that most of them concerned the land of Auroville. Either the village cattle had intruded upon Auroville land or the villagers had cut down Aurovillian trees. At this point my interpreter exclaimed: "These were the biggest problems!" and laughed heartily. Peter, among other Aurovillians, also mentioned how in the early days Aurovillians had a hard time protecting their young trees from villagers collecting firewood or feeding their cattle on the saplings.[519] Kannan also told me how as a child he used to take the family cows near a fenced tree-growing area of Auroville, cut a hole in the fence and let the cows in to feed[520].

I asked Rathinam what he thought about the plans for Auroville to develop into a city of fifty thousand inhabitants. Rathinam told me he was not worried about the growth of Auroville since the whole of India used to be ruled by foreigners but in the end Indians got tired of them and they were driven out. Here my interpreter reminded me that the villagers were well aware that the government of India was in charge of Auroville. As the residence of foreign Aurovillians depended on their visas, there were certain pressures to be prudent in their behavior. Many Western Aurovillians had already been ordered to leave by the government for failure to observe the standards set by their host country. Nevertheless, Rathinam continued, there were no problems as long as people remembered they were brothers and sisters. And if sometime in the future there were to be problems, it only meant a separation – that is all. When I asked Rathinam why some villagers disliked Auroville, he told me it had to be for personal reasons, for example if their daughter or wife did not get a job in Auroville. Here my interpreter again added that there was no "general hate" towards Auroville although many Aurovillians seemed to think otherwise.[521]

My interpreter wanted to remind me again about the false Aurovillian conception of general hatred when I asked Anushiya if she had observed any problems between Auroville and the village. She remembered only one case when she had a problem with Auroville. She had cut down a tree on her land, but later it was discovered that it had stood on Aurovillian land.[522] *Vellakara*s might have appeared strange to villagers but for many this was not a reason to hate them. Apart from individual problems with Aurovillians, the only general

519 Peter 100803.
520 Kannan 200503.
521 Rathinam 090603.
522 Anushiya 270603.

things villagers seemed to dislike about Auroville were the lack of employment and the excess of moral influence, especially in gender interaction. However, it seemed that villagers did not judge Aurovillian gender morality *per se*, but only when it affected the youth of their village.

When I asked Rathinam what he thought about Tamil Aurovillians, he told me that, in general, they were "OK." However, there were some who "had gone ruined." At this point my interpreter explained that Rathinam meant *culturally* ruined, my interpreter – Rathinam's son – being an example of such a Tamil Aurovillian. People who joined Auroville got everything free, including clothes and food, Rathinam explained. This seemed to have spoiled Tamil Aurovillians. However, Rathinam seemed to moderate this statement in going on to say that many villagers whose sons and daughters were in Auroville were proud of them. They were very proudly spoken of.[523]

Despite all the troubles in the past, Karthik generally had a positive image of Auroville. Thanks to Auroville, the infrastructure of the villages had been improved. However, in Karthik's view, many villagers did not like Auroville, mainly because Aurovillians were not living according to their ideals any more.[524] However, I would question whether regular villagers had much knowledge of Aurovillian ideals. Perhaps Karthik's statement was more apt to describe his personal view of Auroville. Bava told me that the reason why some villagers did not like Aurovillians was the fact that in Tamil culture it was decent for a man to have only one wife, and there was no divorce. Now that the foreigners had settled there the village culture had become "foreign." The culture concerning marriage had changed and there were many problems, above all divorce. Auroville's example had created this problem. If a girl met a nice boy, she might marry him but after one year they might get a divorce. Young villagers did not "know about the culture anymore," Bava told me. Villagers also gossiped a lot about village girls who worked in Auroville. Thus the workers often got a bad reputation through working for foreigners. For example, if a girl like Bava had spoken to a foreign boy in front of the house the villagers would have spoken badly of her.[525]

At first Balasingam thought Auroville was a tourist place. When he got to know more about Auroville he wanted to join the community but he knew no one there. Besides, his parents were against Balasingam joining Auroville because they did not have a good opinion of the community. They thought it was a place where immoral Westerners lived. Even the villagers around Auroville did not know much about the community. "Even Finnish people might have more correct information on Auroville," Balasingam supposed.[526]

Ezhumalai told me how nowadays even Indian women and girls wore Western clothes. He did not like the fact that Indians forgot about their culture and adopted a Western lifestyle when they joined Auroville. Ezhumalai did like Western culture, but the purpose of Auroville was for everyone to cultivate

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523 Rathinam 090603.
524 Karthik 190703.
525 Bava 070703.
526 Balasingam 220799.

their *own* culture. Many Tamils wanted to go out, be with girls and boys as if they were from another country. This kind of socialization had even broken up marriages, claimed Ezhumalai. Divorce was acceptable if the spouse was bad, but Ezhumalai had seen cases where a good Tamil husband had a wife who was interested in a Western husband. Then she had sued for a divorce. Tamil women liked money, Ezhumalai explained, and they saw money in Auroville. Ezhumalai also told me that most Westerners did not know Tamil culture and only a few spoke Tamil. One could learn the language if one had the will – but not by staying in a corner. Some Westerners had even been violent towards villagers. Sometimes Ezhumalai had had to be a mediator between Westerners and villagers. Westerners should have had more patience with Tamils and should have known more about their ways. According to him, it was a common practice among some Western Aurovillians to berate Tamils by calling them stupid and dumb. This was a severe offence and could cause violence. But little by little Aurovillians were learning.[527]

As we will see in the next chapter, Tamil Occidentalism worked in a different way from Aurovillian Orientalism. This was perhaps because of a complex web knit together by issues of prestige, economy, education, employer-employee relations and even religion. Tamil villagers imagined Europeans by looking at Tamil Aurovillians, their fellow villagers who had moved to Auroville. Westerners were seen, but not really interpreted directly, other than by their appearance in dress, housing and interaction. As my interpreter told me, *Vellakara*s, for many villagers, just *were*. It should be noted that also for many Western Aurovillians the villagers just *were*, since there was not very much interest in learning the Tamil language or in Tamil culture.

Indirect interpretations of *Vellakara*s involved Tamil Aurovillians in whom the villagers saw certain changes after their joining Auroville. As one of my Tamil Aurovillian interviewees told me, it was hard for a villager to understand Western Aurovillians[528]. Actually, I do not think understanding Westerners would have been such a hard task for villagers. As my interpreter told me, to many villagers the Westerners were simply insignificant. Auroville was mostly evaluated and compared through Tamil Aurovillians. A Tamil Aurovillian from the village told me that villagers thought white people were in charge of Auroville and that Tamil Aurovillians were their subordinates[529]. This was, actually, not very far away from the reality. Being Tamil Aurovillian, for many villagers, meant being under the power and influence of white people. This influence had its drawbacks but, mostly, enviable rewards. There were two significant changes that the villagers observed in their fellow villagers who had joined Auroville: the rise in economic status and the turning away from "Tamil culture."

Aurovillians defined their community as spiritual, but it seemed as if the villagers who had heard that Auroville was a spiritual community were at the

527 Ezhumalai 130503.
528 Kannan 200503.
529 Velavan 260603.

least somewhat amused by the description, since for many villagers Auroville did not seem like a spiritual place at all. Surprisingly many villagers thought Auroville was a place for Western leisure founded on inexpensive Indian labor. Many villagers thought Auroville was simply a Western tourist resort. It should be noted though that only a few villagers lamented the fact that Tamils were the working class of Auroville. As a rule the only thing they lamented about the employment situation would be if there was no employment for them or their relatives in Auroville. Nevertheless, for the villager to imagine Auroville as a spiritual place was difficult because of the appearance of Aurovillians. As one Tamil Aurovillian claimed, Auroville was a spiritual place only by definition[530]. The fancy houses[531], the "half-naked" Westerners, businesses and fences, and especially the boys and the girls mixing together did not imply spirituality to villagers. Many Aurovillian Tamils spoke about the negative image of Aurovillian sexual morality but, interestingly, only one villager, a young woman teacher, remarked about it[532].

Village families were also worried about the effect of Auroville on their daughters' behavior. As my colleague Hege Andersen remarked: "One 'bad review' and the daughters lose the possibility of marriage, at least to a good guy[533]." Fences around fancy houses seemed arrogant to many villagers but also fences made by Aurovillians to protect vegetation on the government land where the village herds grazed annoyed many village cattle owners. Interestingly, only a few villagers I interviewed knew or, perhaps, wanted to answer the question why Auroville was built. On the other hand, Ganeshkumar told me that even if the villagers did not seem to know the reason behind Auroville, they might still have known it. Perhaps they only chose not to explain because it was too abstract for them. In other words, the villagers were not very interested in *explaining* Auroville, at least in Ganeshkumar's opinion. They might not have been *for* Auroville but they were not *against* either. Auroville should have tried to explain itself to the villagers, but without the pompous attitude, Ganeshkumar suggested. [534]

The Ontology of the *Vellakara*

As the villagers had relatively little information as to the purposes and philosophy of Auroville, the villagers interpreted the community in terms of what they saw: business and leisure. Many of the villagers who speculated why Auroville was built in the first place thought it was because of business. For example, Bava told me that thirty years ago a small group of foreigners came to the area and visited the villages and then thought the area was good for starting businesses.

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530 Arivalagi 060903.

531 Incidentally, according to Daniel 1987: 132, Tamils think a fancy house demands generousness from its owner. Otherwise the evil eye might cause harm to the house and its inhabitants.

532 E.g. Ezhumalai 130503, Vallikai 250603, Kannappan 090803, Kavitha 070803 and Bava 070703.

533 Email 26.2.2004.

534 Ganeshkumar 030703.

Besides, their money was worth more there. They could buy more things and their companies could make more profit.[535] In my view, the low cost of living at least helped many Western Aurovillians to make the decision to live in Auroville and pursue their spiritual goals.

The villagers who did have information on the philosophical and spiritual background of Auroville, thought Aurovillians were hypocrites to define their community as spiritual. Vallikai told me the villagers were puzzled by the fancy lifestyle of Aurovillians. Asceticism was no longer enough for Aurovillians and it seemed as if the fancy Aurovillian lifestyle had also affected the life choices of outsiders.[536] One of my interviewees originating from the village told me that if he was reading Sri Aurobindo or contemplating some philosophical matter, the villager might have said:

> What, what? Everyone thinks! Everyone prays! Everyone likes God! You go to the temple and come. Yeah, we also do festivals and pujas. We spend a lot of money [on them].[537]

A Tamil Aurovillian, he told me, could only prove his spirituality to a fellow villager by hard work and living simply. Otherwise, no villager would believe in the message of Aurovillian spirituality.[538]

Village Tamils did not wish Aurovillians to be converted to Hinduism or assume a Tamil identity, unlike Aurovillians who wished that Tamils would leave their superstition and imprisoning cultural ways behind. The village Tamils hoped for employment, a good price for their land, and – if only there was any hope – an end to the corrupting influence of Aurovillian ways on their youth. By this they meant, for example, the increase in "love marriages," intergender mixing, the decline of family and traditional values, the increase in consumerism and the growing selfishness often interpreted as individualism in Auroville. It is, of course, hard to estimate how much Auroville actually influenced the culture change in Kuilapalayam as India in general was changing rapidly and the city of Pondicherry close by was developing and spreading very quickly, affecting at the same time the surrounding countryside. Moreover, Kuilapalayams had long ago been introduced to the national and international media through their cable TVs. They watched soap operas, Hollywood action movies, Hindi films, domestic and foreign news, documentaries and so on. Kuilapalayam was not and never had been a community that would respond to anything that was offered to it with virginal innocence.

Auroville was by no means was the sole source of cultural influence in Kuilapalayam, nor were its innovations accepted without scrutiny. However, it is certain that Kuilapalayams believed Auroville to be the most significant factor behind the change in the young. Aurovillians, on the other hand, believed Kuilapalayam owed everything to Auroville, since without the community the

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535 Bava 070703.
536 Vallikai 250603.
537 Kannan 200503.
538 Ibid.

village would have been as underdeveloped as the remote villages. Thus, many Aurovillians thought Kuilapalayams, especially the young, were being ungrateful if they did not appreciate Auroville. After all, *before* Auroville Kuilapalayam was a sorry village in a "cultureless countryside." Aurovillians rarely thought that they had as much reason to be grateful to Kuilapalayams, although without them and their work Auroville would have been a shadow of what it was by now.

Aurovillians tended to think they were more advanced in almost every way compared to the village Tamils, although Aurovillians might have often stated that Westerners could learn from the child-like attitude of the village Tamils. The villagers, however, did not consider Aurovillians advanced in many ways. Indeed the only way that Auroville, to a villager, was more advanced, was in the excess of facilities. This, the villager seemed to think, was because of the land acquisition of the 1970s and/or the emphasized business-orientation of Aurovillians. A religious explanation for this viewed the Western god as more powerful than the village gods. Tamil villagers did not seem to think Auroville represented the future either, although one of my interviewees told me that innovations arrived in Auroville first and then came to Kuilapalayam.

It is interesting that the hegemonic Aurovillian discourse referring to Tamil villages was non-existent in Kuilapalayam. In the next chapter I will explain how Aurovillians seemed to think village Tamils were now in a way ahead of their own time. This was connected with the experience of wealth in the village. Aurovillians often wanted to see village Tamils as sort of traditional subsistence farming villagers who shied away from materialism. Thus the recent economic progress was seen as excessively rapid development for village Tamils, as if the cultural essence of Tamils was dragging behind their material development. None of this was thought in Kuilapalayam. However, one of the few things Aurovillians and (usually elder) villagers agreed on about village culture was that there was a threatening vacuum of values. I would say that in reality there was not so much a vacuum of values as an emergent change in them.

I would also argue that the Tamil villagers might have had a less prejudiced image of Western Aurovillians than the Westerners had of the villagers and Tamils in general. At least the Occidentalist archive from which the villagers drew did not seem to be as strong as the Westerners' Orientalist archive[539]. This, however, does not mean that villagers did not overgeneralize Auroville. They surely did, often. There were also those who had been dismissed by or involved in arguments with Aurovillians and then generalized their frustration and blamed the whole community.[540] The same kind of generalization seemed

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539 This will be also discussed in the following chapter.

540 For example, one Tamil villager was dismissed from an Aurovillian organization, but he turned the situation into a political issue and tried to pressure the organization to re-employ him. As one of the managers of the organization told me, the situation almost destroyed the whole organization as false rumors about it were spread in the villages. Kavitha 070803.

to have taken place in Auroville too, but intensified since Aurovillians had the vast archive of Indo-Orientalist preconceptions to draw on to manage the Tamilness of the villagers. Was the villager more rational or realistic when he did not attempt to examine or produce essentialist opinions about the Occident and Occidentals because of the lack of information? Were Western Aurovillians showing arrogance in judging Tamilness when they had almost as little knowledge to base their assessment on? As we shall see, an Aurovillian could write in the newspaper that Tamils and Aurovillians "perceive the same reality in complete opposite ways[541]," but I never noticed the same kind of binary ontology in village Occidentalism. The Westerners had their binary or sort of *plus-and-minus* ontology rendering Tamils and Westerners mirror images of one another. The villagers seemed to have their *plus-and-zero* ontology rendering Westerners something featureless or insipid and not worth spending much time thinking about[542].

Here we come to an interesting issue that takes us back to Said's *Orientalism*. Said claims that Orientalism is different from any other stereotyping discourses of the Other in having a significantly hegemonic position in relation to the Orient. Indeed, Europe has had the *power* to research, examine, study, probe, write about, experience, publish and analyze the Orientals which has build up a vast reservoir or a discursive archive to draw on. Perhaps this is why (Western) Aurovillians had their plus-minus ontology whereas the villagers did not have such a vast archive on Occidentalism. Thus they had only their plus-zero ontology to offer in order to manage the Other in their midst – or leave it unmanaged.

"Without Auroville Kuilapalayam wouldn't have survived." "The village would not exist without Auroville. Auroville has abolished hunger, and given work and education." "Auroville is giving work for masons and carpenters." "Auroville means development for the villages." In a documentary film made in Auroville, villagers around the community were asked about what they thought about Auroville. As the quotes show, most interviewees welcomed Auroville's material effects. However, there were more critical voices too as villagers demanded that "Auroville should guarantee a job for every family in every village" or as people remembered how "in the beginning Auroville gave soap, oil and saris" to the villagers. According to one villager, thirty years ago people were poorer, simpler and more honest, but less greedy and envious than today. Another interviewee said that because of Auroville the young had become freer as "they have bicycles, health care and education."[543] Some villagers interpreted the new possibilities as a threat to the community, while others were eager to welcome the change. Kuilapalayam and Auroville indeed "breathed in" each other. Kuilapalayams acknowledged that Auroville had economic hegemony and that the flourishing of the village was crucially dependent on the *Vellakara*s as well as the Tamil Aurovillians acting as mediators

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541 *AV News* 903/2001.

542 One must also remember that perhaps many people I interviewed in the the village were too polite to criticize Aurovillians.

543 *Villagers on Auroville* 1997.

between the two. However, as both sides also knew, villagers had a different kind of hegemony in the end. As many of the villagers told me, the British were driven out, and so would the Aurovillians be if they became unbearable. Obviously, this kind of rhetoric would never be put into practice but it seemed to give the villagers a little more self-respect in the midst of their humble job-searching and waiting-lists.

9 AUROVILLIAN DISCOURSE ON TAMILS

Making a Difference

Totally Different People

"They are home and you are the visitors," said the Mother, speaking to the Aurovillians about the villagers in 1969. Although Auroville was built on a barren plateau, it was not built on uninhabited land. From the beginning of the history of the community, Aurovillians had to take into account their neighbors in various ways and manage their strangeness in discourse. For an intentional or utopian community Auroville is long-lived[544]. The reasons for this may lie not only in the determination of Aurovillians and their commitment to their collective ideals but also in their not trying to implement them too rigidly or too fast. Moreover, compared to most utopian communities, Auroville had a staggering advantage in the enormous pool of cheap labor and plenty of valuable foreign currency with which to pay for it.

Tamil villagers at the same time represented vast material benefits for the community and on the other hand complex challenges. Over the years the Other of Auroville had come to resemble more the Self, and perhaps, as often happens, the symbolic borders of the community had thus to be reinforced. The discourse of Aurovillians has had to relate to the Tamils living around them and in their midst who defined the outer limits of their community. The discoursewas bound to be different in character from Tamil Occidentalism as there had been a constant influx of Tamil villagers to Auroville. They had to be managed policy-wise and discursively, whereas in village Occidentalism the *Vellakara* was outside and only rarely present in the village. Perhaps thus the villagers had the luxury of indifference towards Western Aurovillians. Nevertheless, both sides had drawn discursive boundaries of which the Aurovillian side will be dicussed next.

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544 Cf. Kanter 1972.

Sullivan quotes an Aurovillian pamphlet dating back to the first years of the community. It says that in experiencing Auroville the villagers

> are confronted first with an outer happening which they don't understand and which in no way relates to their traditional values (maybe it does relate to the inner qualities of those values, but certainly not to the way these are presently being lived.) […] Two *totally different* groups of people, of cultures, of minds, of sets of values meeting in one place to create and manifest things which surpass the understanding of both groups, but for which the total involvement of both is necessary.[545]

This quote is very much in line with the Aurovillian discourse of Aurovillian uniqueness, Auroville being so totally different from any other community in the world, and the difficulty of defining Auroville. This difficulty was especially shown up by the villagers' poor understanding of Auroville[546]. The discursive construction of bipolarity is clear. There were the "two totally different cultures," the advanced and the backward, the spiritual and the superstitious, the modern and the primitive. Knowledge was on the Aurovillian side. Aurovillians knew better what it was to be a villager or a Tamil. They knew the "real Tamil culture" and thus could manage it, for example in planning a "model village[547]." Tamils were "an ancient people" and some of them were "still in touch with the beginnings[548]" whereas Auroville was to be "the beginning of a new race[549]."

According to Savitra, when Auroville was set up Tamil consciousness was in decline and had not yet redeveloped to the necessary level. Tamils lived in "a cultureless countryside[550]" where villagers' "natural instincts [had] atrophied and been reduced to a bare utilitarianism[551]." As for Sullivan,

> [t]he current and most difficult problem is the mutual understanding between the mostly Western Aurovilians[552] and Tamil Indian villagers. There are approximately 20 000 Tamils in the neighbouring villages of Auroville who see these international pioneers more as a source of income than as an opportunity to transform human nature. They are among the poorest of the world. Although many Aurovilians are frustrated by the cultural and language barriers, they know it is their country, they know it is their spiritual work to share consciousness creating a planetary culture, and they know they need the Tamil labour to help build this city of tomorrow…[553]

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545 "On the nature of Auroville" from the pamphlet *Auroville January 1974* (s.a.) in Sullivan 1994: 21. Emphasis added.

546 Aurovillians also had the tendency to claim their community was a unique place and therefore could not be described to outsiders.

547 Sullivan 1994: 28. Cf. *Auroville Today* 120/1999: 3 where an educated Tamil Aurovillian from southern Tamil Nadu describes the local Tamilians:
The absence of an established ancient culture has, in fact, been an advantage for Auroville, because due to the lack of it, Auroville could more easily be established. It would have been far more problematic in Thanjavur or Madurai or any other of the agrarian or temple cities of Tamil Nadu.

548 Sullivan 1994: 34.

549 Ibid.: 39.

550 Savitra 1980: 93.

551 Ibid.: 91.

552 In Auroville "Aurovillian" was usually written "Aurovilian," without double-l. It seems to have first been a misspelling of the Mother, but later became orthography connoting the uniqueness of "Aurovilianess."

553 Sullivan 1994: 139–140.

It seems that Tamil villagers did not see the benefits of Auroville in the way Aurovillians themselves would have liked them to see. In an article in *Auroville Today*, an Aurovillian called the community members "living Karma Yogis[554]." A Sri Aurobindo Seminar was arranged for people of Tamil Nadu in Auroville and one of its purposes was to correct some misconceptions about Auroville. It was said that Auroville's responsibility was to make people understand that Aurovillians were actually Karma Yogis who had a very serious attitude towards their work.[555] Interestingly, there was a persistent theme in Aurovillian discourse that no one could come to Auroville just to "enjoy their lives." The more magico-spiritual explanation for this was that the Mother's force turned away all those who were not attuned to the Aurovillian atmosphere. The more material explanation emphasized that Auroville, after all, was not a very pleasant place to stay, so one had to be ideologically sound and serve the Aurovillian ideal to thrive in Auroville. I would, however, suggest that Auroville was indeed a very enjoyable place where one could adapt to the pleasant surroundings with without being exceedingly interested in the Aurovillian ideology. Many of my villager interviewees and some of the Aurovillian interviewees concurred with my observation.

Obviously, for many villagers Auroville was more a source of income than a source of the spiritual transformation Aurovillians hoped for. As some critics suggested, it could be said that the rather optimistic, romantic or even pompous Aurovillian view prevented Aurovillians from seeing the situation realistically. It was difficult for poor villagers to accept the extravagant Neo-Hinduist rhetoric and see the spiritual Auroville. They simply did not care about it. The same situation has occurred wherever wealthier and more prestigious expatriates have tried to transfer their ideologies to natives. It is, so to say, hard to hear the message when one's stomach rumbles. Christian missionaries have lamented the same thing as the Aurovillians did: why were the natives attracted to the wealth of the missionary station, not to the religious message[556]? Sullivan continues that

> [t]he identity of the Tamilians is not strong either. Though members of one of the oldest cultures in the world and known to be rich in values and depth, the present-day village life in this forgotten corner of Tamil Nadu is spiritually unexciting. The feasts and celebrations are there, the whole night through, and the old sacred books are sung, related, dramatized, superficially seen; however, life is dull and lacking initiative, creativity and inner color.[557]

Obviously, anthropologically speaking, to measure whether a group's identity is strong or weak is a rather difficult task, but the common Orientalist theme of cultural degeneration, explicit in this quote, is a significant aid. In this perspective, Tamil culture was valuable before, but now the remnants were mere superficiali-

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554 Karma Yoga is a form of yoga where the practitioner works while being at the same time conscious of the Divine or somehow dedicating his work to the Divine.
555 *Auroville Today* 172/2003: 4.
556 See e.g. Raiskio 1997 and Fagan 1984.
557 Sullivan 1994: 151–152.

ties that were "spiritually unexciting." Conversely, the Aurovillian way of life was obviously just as spiritually unexciting to Tamil villagers. The "ancientness" of Tamil culture is an idea repeated in the following extract from an Aurovillian newspaper which considers the way the villages

> bring in the Tamil element, *contemporary traces of that age-old culture*[558] which surely has a well-constructed and matured soul of its own. When this process *catches on*, what surprise of depth and wealth we will witness, to the benefit both of Tamil Nadu and Auroville. […] The key note in this process would then be the Village-Soul. We have now to search for the eyes which are the mirrors of those souls. The relationship between Auroville and the villages ought to realize itself on the levels of Yoga rather than on those of a development policy. One of the mirrors of the secret soul we have to look into is religion. In the villages the myths are still alive and provide the archetypes on which much of the village life thrives.[559]

Hence it was evidently thought at least in the 1970s, that *even* Tamils, "when this process catches on" would benefit Auroville and Tamil Nadu. Interestingly, villagers were to be lifted up in their consciousness by Auroville's yoga, not for example by development work[560]. Even more interestingly, the writer did not seem to think there were such things as myths in Auroville, but only in the villages. I would say that the myths on which much of Aurovillian life thrived were at least as important to Auroville as their counterparts elsewhere.

People and Things in the Wrong Places

When Shirley, a Western Aurovillian woman, noticed Kuilapalayam was "full of shit, garbage and barbed wire", she told me, she had exclaimed "What is wrong with these people?" She had wondered why the villagers did not try to change anything. The villages used to be more beautiful, not as "disgusting" as they were now to Shirley. According to her, Western people had already gone through "the garbage era" in the middle ages. She told me how garbage was thrown in the streets, but then there were plagues and big fires, as if God had said, "No! This has to be stopped!" They were a natural consequence of indifference, Shirley explained to me. Now the Third World had to go through the same step in evolution. It was not just about garbage but development. It was a way to make people interested in their environment. The villagers were at a different stage of consciousness[561]. Some had made no mental progress at all, Shirley claimed, and to her it was not

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558 Cf. Sarah who stated that the "villages have lost some of their original integrity." Sarah 160399.

559 Ruud Lohman, "Auroville and Aurovillages" in *Auroville Voice* (Fall 1977), 20 in Sullivan 1994: 155. Emphasis added.

560 It should be noted that by 2003, development work had taken over from yoga as the preferred mode of helping the villages.

561 The theme of Tamils being at another stage of being/consciousness and its variations were often repeated in Western Aurovillian interviews. For example, an American Aurovillian woman thought people could be classified according to a sort of *spiritual* caste system where the villagers would represent the Shudra (the serving) caste. Eliza 250799.

> judging but a simple fact. We [Westerners] have been developing for generations, so it is natural for us that our minds work. But if one has no mental progress or education one cannot see problems. The villagers don't have any solution to the garbage problem because they cannot see the problem. They cannot focus like we do.[562]

Shirley told me repeatedly that *tamas*, an energy of passiveness and darkness, had caused the indifference of Tamil villagers towards filth and garbage[563]. Indeed, to many Aurovillians it did seem that the villages were more filled with refuse, more disorganized and unclean than Auroville. The lack of cleanliness of villagers came up in various other interviews of Western Aurovillians. For many Westerners the villages were simply too dirty. There were empty bottles, remains of paper and plastic packing, and piles of dung on the streets of the villages. Interestingly, only one[564] of the villagers I interviewed mentioned the lack of cleanliness in the villages, but a few of the Tamil Aurovillian interviewees did. In Mary Douglas' view pollution means that there are things in wrong places[565]. The things that looked like refuse to a Westerner might not have seemed so to a villager. A villager might have looked at, for example, the fallen leaves (or plastic wrappings, etc. for that matter) in his/her yard, and then meticulously swept them off to make the yard clean again. However, the "garbage" in a more public place, such as a street, did not seem to be considered significant. No doubt, if there had been a public service for cleaning the streets, as there is in the West, the villagers would have appreciated the absence of rubbish on the streets. As there was no such service, no one thought it mattered very much to clean up the streets as there were certainly many other things to concentrate one's energy on.

The same Western interviewee lamented that she had tried to organize a village clean-up project but it had come to nothing after the trial period because the villagers were not willing to contribute financially. The Westerner interpreted this as the work of *tamas* or lack of mental development, but it could also be that the villagers did not feel it necessary to invest in a project that did not significantly improve the esthetic value of their lives considering the price they would have to pay. To understand this relative lack of enthusiasm for a "cleaner village," one could present an analogy. One could imagine a Western apartment building with a pleasant little park, a playground, benches, trees and bushes around it. Then one could imagine an innovator going from door to door to sell his relatively inexpensive idea of clearing the park of all the pine needles, pebbles and sand. How many residents would contribute financially to improving the esthetic value of their everyday lives? Maybe most of them would think that such things belong on the ground. Perhaps many would think that it a nice idea to clear them away, but not worth the investment. Some, perhaps the wealthiest, would be eager to invest in a tidier park. It seems that "garbage" for a Tamil villager and for a Western Aurovillian meant different things. But when a villager joined Auroville and was repeatedly exposed to

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562 Shirley 210503.
563 Ibid.
564 Perumal 190603.
565 Douglas 2002. See also Sarmela 2004, 59–60 on the symbolism on dirtiness and its relation to social hiearchy ideology.

"garbage discourse" he or she perhaps began to see garbage differently. The plastic wrapping on the street ceased to be a "natural thing" and became a "thing in a wrong place." It seems too that the answer to what garbage is was linked to the socioeconomic level of the speaker. If one had more time, more means and more capital for cleaning – or hiring a cleaner – one tended to see more garbage around to be cleared up. The Westerner might see the Tamil "negligence" where garbage was concerned as due to a lack of understanding caused by degeneration, *tamas*, lower level of evolution, or some general carelessness of "the race," whereas the villagers wondered what on earth all the fuss was about.

One cause of conflict between Auroville and the villages was the beach. Perhaps socially it was not very significant but culturally it was more so. There was a small patch of beach that Aurovillians used regularly for recreation. The beach was part of a small beach community with a number of visitors' huts, a juice bar and the houses of community members. The entrance to the area was guarded and the area fenced. Only Aurovillians or their guests were allowed into the area. However, as the state owns the shoreline in India, Aurovillians could not officially claim and fence in the beautiful beach area for themselves. Between the beach-side fenced border of the community and the shoreline there was about a hectare of government-owned beautiful sand for Aurovillians to lie on, in the company of a beach guard hired by Auroville. The problem was that Aurovillians wanted to keep to themselves while sunbathing and swimming, but the beach could not be fenced. Aurovillians had therefore put up signposts at both ends of the beach to ask non-Aurovillian people to respect Aurovillian privacy and keep out of the area.

One might ask why Aurovillians, who were seeking human unity, wanted to keep local people away from the beach. There were many reasons, the most significant being the harassment experienced mostly by Western women. On the beach, Western women in their swimsuits were practically nude to the Tamil eye. Obviously, it is more or less the case that Western women can depend on their light clothing does attracting explicit attention on a beach in the West. Whether on a beach in the West or a Western beach in India, Westerners want to dress relatively revealingly, but without attracting attention to. They want to be politely disregarded. Many Tamil men, however, were not used to what seemed like half-naked women on their land. Moreover, they were not used to paying only discreet or covert attention. Revealing clothing was explicitly revealing and it was noticed explicitly. Thus, the "harassment" in the Aurovillian beach area basically meant that Tamil men explicitly noticed Western women who dressed in an exceptional way. A Tamil man might comment on someone's outfit to his friends. He might stare at a lightly dressed Western woman or he might even go over to talk to her or sit by her. The peculiar sight of a *Vellakachi* was certainly noticed by Tamil men. This was disturbing to Western women who only wanted to lie on the beach and be left unnoticed. As Ting-Toomey describes it, there was no intercultural synchrony in the situation.

Expectations and interpretations were not shared, so intercultural tensions arose.[566]

Apart from the question of harassment on the beach, to Aurovillians Tamil villagers seemed to be abusing the beach. They used beaches as toilets, not as places for lying in the sun. It was acknowledged that Aurovillian beach-goers had disturbed the status quo, but their interpretation seemingly transferred responsibility to the villagers. Thus, Aurovillians called for a "natural sense of courtesy and restraint[567]" from the Tamil side, while the villagers, however, saw Aurovillian behavior as arrogant.

Rykaard, a Dutch Aurovillian, was worried about the personal hygiene of the villagers. The Aurovillian health center had tried to provide public toilets for the villages, but they had run out of resources and it seemed that villagers were not very eager to use them either. Now, as they always had, the villagers went to the toilet at the beach. In Rykaard's view, it was very difficult to change the behavior of the villagers. It was easier with the village children and therefore toilets were built near schools. Older villagers were not learning, because they did not see the reason to use these public toilets. Rykaard thought it was because they did not want to waste so much water. Thus the beach was full of villagers emptying their bowels in the mornings, lamented Rykaard, who himself lived near the beach. This upset many Aurovillians who thought the beach was meant to be a place of play, leisure and relaxation – in a more Western way. Now the health center had built eleven toilets, of which one alone cost two *lakh*[568] rupees. It also cost money to maintain, clean and guard them, Rykaard added.[569]

It should be mentioned that public toilets were built in Tamil villages on behalf of the state government also. Usually these were not very appealing to villagers, and often parts of them got stolen and/or they were turned, for example, into storage rooms. According to Ernst, a visiting nurse in Auroville, sharing public toilets might even have increased the disease rate[570]. Moreover, it should be added that prudence over potential pollution usually seemed to be a hindrance to the introduction of public toilets in a traditional Tamil village. Many Westerners wondered how villagers could build fancy houses without toilets, but to a traditional Tamil the idea of a toilet inside the living quarters was abhorrent.

Developing the Villages

Rykaard was happy about the effect of the health center in the villages. The health center worked in thirty-two villages, and had a health clinic in seven villages. The health center was educating and employing ninety-three health work-

566 Ting-Toomey 1985.
567 *Auroville Today* 171/2003: 3.
568 *Lakh* means the number 100 000 in Hindi, esp. when referring to this sum of rupees. The word was used throughout India and also in Auroville.
569 Rykaard 150303.
570 Ernst 020703.

ers, of whom about sixty were working in the villages, and the rest at the health center. "Health dramas[571]" were very popular in the villages. The treatment of village patients was effective. Every time the health center sent a doctor into a new village, positive changes soon occurred.[572]

In Ernst's view the effect of the health center on the villages was tolerable, at least in the surrounding villages, but there were also negative effects from Aurovillians moralizing the villagers. In the remote villages the effect was not very significant, for example, the child malnutrition rate was still seventy-five percent, which was the average in rural India. Because many villagers lived below the poverty line, they were not able to take advantage of the nutritional advice from the health center. At least Ernst could say that the situation would have been worse without the health center. According to him the difference in living standards between remote and nearby villages was not very great, but in the remote villages people were more thankful for what they had, even if they were poorer than the people of the nearby villages. In the remote villages a guest was still a god, and the villagers did not ask for money. The lifestyle of the rich Aurovillians had affected the nearby villages.[573]

Moreover, the situation was partly the fault of the health center. They had had the attitude of patronizing, forcing and moralizing the villagers. They had even threatened to stop helping the villagers if they did not accept all the new improvements, and the "you are dirty if you don't use the toilet" attitude was harmful in Ernst's view. "Maybe the villagers were getting tired of the white noses in the villages," he thought. Nevertheless, he recognized that the health center had its success stories. The health clinics in the villages were working, wound-dressing was effective, health drama educated the villagers and poor patients were treated free of charge. The state hospitals also gave free treatment, but the queues were long; for example, if heart surgery was needed in two weeks, one had to wait for six years in the queue. Naturally, many villagers had to spend their money on costly private hospitals. Another thing the health center was doing was raising money for individual sick people, and using its contact network to help patients with special needs.[574]

Franz had worked in village development for a few years. The difference between the nearby and remote villages was visible. The remote villages were like the "Aurovillian villages" thirty years ago. They had thatched roofs, swollen-bellied children and the like, whereas the villages close to Auroville were urbanizing. The Aurovillian development workers were not concentrating on the "Aurovillian villages" longer. Franz thought that the sociocultural effect of Auroville was negative. Villages were also changing from patrilocality to

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571 In health dramas plays about different health issues were written and then performed in the villages by a theatre group hired by the health center. Incidentally, health dramas were not arranged in Kuilapalayam because it seemed like the villagers were not interested in them. The director of the dramas complained that Kuilapalayams were more interested in their cable-TVs.

572 Rykaard 150303.

573 Ernst 020703.

574 Ibid.

matrilocality[575]. Many interviewees from the village mentioned the same phenomenon as a significant change. Traditional Tamil culture is patrilocal, but according to my sources, from the late 1990s onwards, village women who had been married off into remote villages started to move back to their native villages with their husbands. This was because Auroville provided such an attractive income and work environment. This change, however, mostly affected only the lower socio-economic strata of the village, since the wealthier villagers did not have to migrate for economic reasons.[576]

According to Franz, the saddest thing and the key issue of development work was the economic change that was dismantling the social and collective structure. To Franz, it was almost like "falling down from Paradise," although "tribal communities[577]" in general were not paradise-like because their subsistence meant back-breaking work. The fall from Paradise happened socially. The family network was deteriorating, collectivism was vanishing, and responsibility towards fellow villagers was diminishing. The big question to Franz was *why* Auroville was developing people. What was the objective? The leap away from subsistence agriculture had happened in one generation. Had the villages lost something in the process, wondered Franz.[578]

Franz had noticed that the villagers were detaching themselves from their social network. They wanted to rule their own lives, believe in their own things, isolate themselves, and move away from their parents' houses. For example, Franz told me about a Tamil gardener in an Aurovillian community whose wife and mother could not bear each other. The gardener built a new house for himself and his wife, something that could not have happened fifteen years previously, claimed Franz. The family would have integrated itself by force. Franz also saw that change had affected the village youth the most. The young people who came to Auroville from the villages were those most receptive of the new environment. They wanted to be with their friends and go out with Westerners. For the young change meant freedom, Franz observed. The film industry was a significant influence also. Some young Tamils whom Franz knew had "hastened to individualism" but had then "come back a little" and become interested in "their own roots." In Franz's view the same individualization that had taken place in the West over hundreds of years was happening to Tamil youth very rapidly. For example, some youths who did not even know how to speak high Tamil had "leaped straight to the computer era."[579]

Franz told me that Tamil culture is "a very ancient one." South India had absorbed many influences in its history and had still remained essentially the same[580]. The question was: what would the ancient Tamil culture do with its latest influence, Americanization? In Franz's view, AVAG's[581] mission was to

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575 Franz 270503.
576 See e.g. Perumal 190603, Kannan 200503, Devanathan 020703 and Moorthi 160803.
577 Franz was the only interviewee who applied the term "tribal" to Tamil society.
578 Franz 270503.
579 Ibid.
580 This, obviously, is a classic Orientalist statement.
581 The Auroville Village Action Group, one of the units concentrating on village development.

change the consciousness of the villagers. About six to seven years before AVAG had started to think development work was about changing consciousness. This worked best through training local people to do the job. At least those employed by AVAG had been a success in that field, although it had been noted that the changed consciousness was effective only at the workplace in Auroville. At home in the village the pressure of the family was too strong to allow a different consciousness, at least for the women. Another question occured to Franz: What was development if even the development workers from the villages reverted to the old consciousness? Fortunately, even though changing "Tamil consciousness" was a hard task, AVAG had improved health, nutrition and women's rights in the villages.[582]

Here one might pause to consider Basim, a scientist from North India who rather provokatively claimed that AVAG had been the "worst thing to happen to Auroville." AVAG had done lots of stupid things but they were good at taking credit for other people's actions. Basim recalled how in a village on the coast AVAG had tried to liberate the women by telling them to abandon their jewelry and their red face color, presumably, as symbols of the low status of women. This had caused a riot and the women were kicked out of the village. Basim had solved the problem in his own through dialogue, with a bottle of rum at the village council leader's house. It was no use going to the village and holding big meetings, preaching and making false promises, Basim claimed. AVAG only existed to give Aurovillians a clear consciousness and let them feel: "We are doing something for the villages!" So Basim explained the Aurovillian mentality.[583]

Ambika, a North Indian development worker and a student of philosophy, explained why Auroville was not funding village development work[584]. The community had too much to fund inside the community. In addition, the scale of the problems in the villages was so vast that a regular Western Aurovillian had difficulties understanding it. Some Aurovillians felt guilty about the relationship between Auroville and the villages. Many thought they had come to Auroville to join an international community, not to do social work for the villages. Before, Aurovillians had had to live with the villagers, who were a source of knowledge, and besides, Aurovillians were more idealistic in the early days. Now the relationship had different dynamics. The villagers did not really know what Auroville was about. Before, it had been about human unity and understanding between cultures, but now the Aurovillian infrastructure had improved so much that any Westerner could come and live in Auroville as comfortably as they did in the West. So Aurovillians did not have to maintain the relationship. The basic relationship was that of employment, which brought with it a feeling of superiority. In the beginning Aurovillians were more determined. The Mother was alive, with a positive – even romantic – influence on the

582 Franz 270503.

583 Basim 150703. Basim was notorious for his strong and perhaps provocative opinions in the Aurovillian media.

584 It should be noted that most Aurovillian units focusing on development work in the villages received little or no funding from the community.

relationship. The harsh environment had made the experiment more challenging and interesting, Ambika observed insightfully.[585]

In Shirley's view Auroville had woken up the villages. Auroville's effect had been mainly material, but the Tamil area used to be asleep, or in *tamas* and it still would have been without Auroville. Auroville was "dynamic," "forever progressing," and its "energy had spread to the villages." Even Auroville's ambition had diffused to the villages. Shirley had noticed that now the villagers wanted many things and wanted to "get moving." It was also due to general change, not only because of Auroville. Cashew-growing had had a great effect, but in Shirley's view "Auroville has been an incredible guide and beacon to the local people." The villagers who did not like Auroville were "just envious" and "had small lives." The villages were in need of a lot of guidance and energy from Auroville. However, Shirley saw the villages and Auroville as one united entity. It was not important whether one's status was Aurovillian or not. Only consciousness mattered. A villager could be Aurovillian without membership if he just had "the right consciousness."[586] Interestingly, the "insignificance" of "labels" like "Aurovillian" came up in various interviews of Aurovillians. However, this insignificance was emphasized only by those who had already acquired the label of "an Aurovillian." Those attempting to become Aurovillians saw "an Aurovillian" to be much more than a mere label.

Villager's Worth

One European View

Jacob was a highly educated European Aurovillian. I knew that he did not have much connection with or interest in the surrounding Tamil culture. Before interviewing Jacob I had interviewed many Aurovillians who were in rather close contact with the villagers, and I thought I needed more remote views for variety. Jacob was exceptionally explicit about his unromantic views about Tamil culture or Auroville for that matter. He did not like the spiritual discourse of the community and he told me he had joined Auroville to enjoy the open and innovative atmosphere. He was not building a city of the future. In Jacob's view Auroville had done what it could for the villages. Auroville had succeeded in keeping the villagers content to some extent, and to some extent also had let them take part in the development of the area. Auroville had initiated many projects and activated the youth and so on but in general the relationship had grown more difficult. There seemed to be dissatisfaction among the villagers who were not in contact with Auroville. Traditional social institutions had been shaken or brought down, obviously because of Auroville's influence. However, Jacob noted that the whole

585 Ambika 050603.
586 Shirley 210503.

of India was modernizing, and there were pockets that lagged behind and places where progress was faster.[587]

I asked Jacob's opinion on how economic growth had affected the villagers, and whether or not he thought Auroville was somehow exploiting the surrounding Tamil villages. In Jacob's view, the economic status of Auroville caused greed in the villagers. The incredible wealth that was visible in Auroville was taken granted by Aurovillians but it was out of reach of the villagers. Naturally, there were huge differences in wealth in the villages too, but even for the wealthier villagers Auroville stood for material riches. The gap was huge, and it caused dissatisfaction. As for Auroville exploiting the villagers, Jacob noted that for a visitor to the area it was easy to get the impression that there was exploitation of Tamil labor. But the Tamils were not hoplites. Auroville did not own them. The workers gained economic benefits. Certainly, Auroville was dependent on village labor, and without it Auroville could not have flourished as it now did. It was not that Aurovillians themselves did not work at all. They did but in addition other people were employed and paid.[588]

In Jacob's view Auroville was not exploiting the villagers in the pejorative sense of the word, but it most definitely was in the sense that Auroville was paying the average Indian wages that made Western Aurovillian life comfortable. One could hire a lot of labor and have servants. There were no servants in Europe any more, because it was too expensive. In India many households could have a servant because labor was cheap and abundant as employment opportunities were scarce. Auroville was merely not changing anything in the equation. Auroville was exploiting the workers in the sense that it was saying: "We pay you this much which is pretty good and we don't force you to toil. If it's not OK for you, we will get someone else, because there are plenty of you." The exploitation benefited the exploited, and the trickle down effect was working in the village. The land deals and new businesses were making villagers wealthier. Personally, Jacob did not suffer from guilty consciousness over the vast labor force. The situation seemed fair. Jacob realized, though, that from the outside it seemed the natives were exploited, and "the slaves had to work while the masters lie down."[589]

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587 Jacob 090803.

588 Ibid.

589 Ibid. Incidentally, *Auroville Today* had an article about employment in Auroville. According to a socio-economic survey made, Auroville employed officially 3762 villagers (according to many other estimates the real figure was ca. 5000) of whom one in three had a permanent job. The salaries paid by Aurovillians were lower than expected, 1545 rupees per month (a salary that is slightly over the international poverty line) on average. However, the reader was reminded that the workers interviewed for the survey might have given false information about their salaries. One fifth of Auroville's village workers were dissatisfied with their pay check. The reader was told that this was due to the attractive lifestyle of Aurovillians. "The workers" commended their Aurovillian work environment for safety, emotional support from the employer, peer support, cleanliness, and good general employer-employee relations. However, improvements were hoped for in upward career move potentials, training, insurance and innovative environment. *Auroville Today* 172/2003: 4.

Jacob told me self-mockingly that the villagers had become restless. He seemed to be very conscious of himself being a wealthy, highly educated European who had come to Auroville to enjoy the relaxed, inspiring – and inexpensive – atmosphere. Jacob explained that he had no interest in Tamil culture or language. None whatsoever. He had no romantic ideas about "in-the-heart" Tamils or Auroville as "the cradle of superman." The village came into Jacob's life only in the form of workers. He did have some Tamil acquaintances, mainly from playing sports together. Only a few Tamils lived in his community. Jacob did not speak any Tamil nor did he feel the need to. Sometimes he thought that living in Tamil Land one should know the Tamil language, but then he would immediately think "Why on earth?" There was not much to learn from them.[590]

Jacob did not think that Auroville could have benefited from Tamil culture in its progress. Tamil language proficiency might have been helpful for co-operation, supposing the villagers were interested in it. In Jacob's opinion some villagers were significantly lagging in maturity and self-awareness, which was actually characteristic of Indians in general. In the West people had been used to or forced to undergo "soul education." The villagers were living mainly in a clan society that was a lot less individualized than Western society, where one was forced to be an individual – for better or worse. The villagers were of no help in creating a vision of Auroville, he thought. Auroville benefited only from the work of the villagers. In the future, co-operation might improve their infrastructure and standard of living, and thus improve the relationship with Auroville. Auroville, to Jacob, was more advanced in "any conceivable way," so it was the villagers who had to adapt to Auroville, not vice versa. The villagers should have been made to understand the fact that Auroville was not harming the villages, but the villagers could expect benefits from Auroville. Many Aurovillians claimed the opposite, Jacob told me.[591]

To say villagers were "more natural" or "one with the nature" was romantic nonsense to Jacob. They were raping nature, spraying pesticides and cutting down the forests. "Surely they are not looking at the stars. The villagers have no time to contemplate – they sleep!" exclaimed Jacob in amusement. He reminded me that the Aurovillian myths about the villagers were archetypical, like the romantic myths about shepherds in Europe. People might have thought that one who lives on the land has a closer and more rational connection to the land. The villagers had cash crops, which was, of course, rational in their situation, but not for "harmony with nature. Were the goats and cows the connection to nature? They eat and destroy everything!" exclaimed Jacob.

Jacob had observed that the gap in wealth between Auroville and the villages was huge, and it caused dissatisfaction. In addition to Aurovillian wealth, TV commercials also affected the villagers. The commercials promised that goods solved problems. Naturally, goods were nice and they held out hope – if you were on that level. Getting rich and becoming happy were not necessarily dependent on each other. A certain level of saturation had to be reached for

590 Jacob 090803.
591 Ibid.

economic situation and happiness to be different things. They could go together, but there was no proof that economics would affect happiness. This might not be clear to those who had not gone through these cycles yet. The Promised Land of Goods was what Tamils longed for.[592]

Jacob told me that the village economy was based on short-term investments. The future was not thought of. Historical reflection was not very strong in Tamil culture, whereas development work required a strong historical awareness in approaching problems. A more comprehensive ability to understand causality, connections and society was needed in the villages. Humankind did not exist as a concrete entity to the villagers, Jacob explained, and they did not look at their deeds as causal factors affecting the future or humankind. When I asked Jacob what the much repeated Mother's slogan "Villagers are the first Aurovillians" meant to him, he replied, "absolutely nothing." Naturally, the villagers belonged to the area, but he did not want to integrate them into Auroville as such, because it would have changed the place too much.[593]

When I asked Jacob if there was *anything* he appreciated in Tamil culture, he paused for a moment and finally told me jokingly that he liked the flowers in women's hair. He then told me seriously that nothing he could appreciate came to his mind,

> neither their unreliability, nor their laissez-faire attitude about everything, nor the way treat their women, nor the way they go about maintaining of things… About the rites or festivities, I don't know much… […] It's their business [laughs]. […] I'm not religious, so there's nothing that speaks to me. In many respects I really see that also the culture is something… rather poor.[594]

The higher cultures, Jacob explained, had always been associated with wealth. Poor soil was not conducive to high culture, he explained. Naturally, the Tamils had their basic culture, aspects of which had developed in time and had deep roots. This was splendid *per se*, but had nothing meaningful to offer to Jacob.

When we discussed the Aurovillian policy of employing from the villages, Jacob remarked that guilty conscience was often went with the policy. It came from the West but Indians had no problem with it. The caste system with its hierarchy were still strong in their effect. A Westerner considered a gardener or

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592 Ibid.

593 Ibid.

594 At one point in the interview Jacob wanted to emphasize the fact that he was speaking of *village* Tamils. There were huge differences between Tamils in general. There were, of course, many kinds of Tamilness in Auroville: nearby village or remote village Tamilness, *Dalit*, *Vanniyar* Tamilness or Brahman Tamilness, new rich, poor, middle-class Tamilness, born-in-Auroville or Urban Tamilness, Christian Tamilness, male, female, child, elderly, poor administrative, educated, religious, atheist Tamilness. In Aurovillian discourse "a Tamil" usually meant "a non-Aurovillian Tamil from a neighboring village." For example, a Brahman Tamil lady referred to Tamils as "them." Villagers were often referred to as "Tamils" and white people as "Aurovillians" by Westerners. In the village, however, "Aurovillian" meant "*Tamil* Aurovillian" and "white people" meant "*any* white people," Aurovillian or not. Interestingly, no villager referred to himself/herself or to his community by using the narrative of Tamilness. However, may Tamil Aurovillians referred to Western Aurovillians as simply "Aurovillians."

an *amma* equal in principle. Certainly they were dependent and hired, but in human value they were equal, Jacob explained. That is why Westerners had guilty conscience about their low-paid workers. India had never had a revolution through which equality as a general ideology would have gained support. Indians valued each other differently. Low meant low also in a moral sense. In this way Auroville was influencing its surroundings positively. Women were treated differently, and they felt it, but this caused problems in the village. In this way too Auroville could be beneficial to the villages, but it could also cause crises. Maybe the latest wave of violence should have been viewed in this context, Jacob observed.[595]

Employing the Villagers

Peter, an Aurovillian farmer told me that the employment of villagers was evidently an economic benefit for the villages. Most Aurovillians drifted into employing villagers, but there were, of course, those who really enjoyed having them as servants. Auroville was also employing village women, which had definitely improved their status. In the end, Auroville was a part of the general process of modernizing India. But the issue involving most money was the land deals, which could be a more questionable matter, thought Peter.[596] It seemed to me that to a Tamil land-owner the concept of land was very different. Even if the land was not producing anything, she/he might not have been willing to sell the land because of its prestige value and, obviously too, because of price speculation. Interestingly, Aurovillians were eager to lament the land speculation of village land-owners, although the villagers were only fitting in the general "economic status quo."

If one takes a look back at Jacob who thought Auroville was exploiting the villagers only in the mildest sense, by "not changing the economic equation," considering that the village workers were not bound like "hoplites," one could equally remark that there should be nothing to lament about the land speculation. The land-owners were merely not changing the "economic equation" and they were definitely not holding Aurovillian land-buyers as hoplites. Nevertheless, Tamil land-owners were criticized for selling their land to non-Aurovillian real-estate dealers. As Vallikai told me, this caused rebellion in the mind of the land-owner, as he thought, "you won't let me sell my own land to outside, and you won't give me the price I want" which was of course astronomical, because he had been exposed to the Western lifestyle.[597]

Interestingly, Peter was the only Western Aurovillian who commended Tamil villagers for their strong work ethic[598]. Peter told me that Tamils were famous workers. They were carpenters, masons etc. and were known as hard-working people. Auroville had to be grateful to Tamils for making the commu-

595 Jacob 090803.
596 Peter 100803.
597 Vallikai 250603.
598 Although, Hans told me how Tamil workers wanted to make their employer happy. Hans 220503.

nity flourish. Tamils did not work grudgingly. Generally, Tamils did not do work they disliked, and what they did they did excellently. Peter had been fortunate to be with Tamils who enjoyed their work. There was no need to give them orders. Once Peter had worked with North Indian people, and noticed that they did not show any initiative and preferred watching him work. If Peter were to choose one "race" and go to sea with a crew of that race, he would choose Tamils, because they were so easy to get along with. Peter thought Tamils were intelligent, and through Auroville they got opportunities to use their intelligence.[599]

In Benjamin's view some Tamil youths thought that Auroville was just an opportunity to get employment, and that Aurovillians were obliged to employ them. Older villagers knew that Auroville had done a lot for them. Kuilapalayam of thirty-five years ago was very different: no good houses or water. Some villagers had joined Auroville and some of them had become relatively rich. Nowadays, the motivation of the villagers was financial. The young people in the villages were not interested in the spiritual side of Auroville. They were attracted to the fancy houses, TV, cars and so forth. In Benjamin's view the degenerating Tamil culture was passive[600]. Tamils were suffering from the general problems of degenerating civilizations. They thought the government had to give them everything. They had lost their "original independence." The government was God and the same was thought of Auroville. According to Benjamin, the villagers also thought that Auroville was responsible for providing them with everything.[601]

"Auroville belongs to me as a whole[602]," many Aurovillians thought according to Arjun. The Charter said Auroville belonged "to humanity as a whole," and to live in Auroville one had to be "the willing servitor of Divine Consciousness." Most Aurovillians thought Auroville belonged to *them* because they were a part of humanity and vaguely they thought they were the servitors of the Divine. At present Auroville was the Tower of Babylon. Europeans had adopted the middle class Indian attitude towards work. Every city in the world had migrant workers, but most of the tasks were performed by the inhabitants of the city. Arjun was waiting for the future when every Aurovillian would do their job, with a little outside help if needed. Today cheap labor was too conveniently available. In Europe everything was done by oneself if possible. The Indian middle class had easy access to a very affordable and plentiful workforce. This attitude had to be eventually rejected in Auroville.[603]

Manprasad analyzed the change Auroville had induced in the villages. The Indian government had done nothing for the villages, but Auroville was employing thousands of locals without large-scale industry or a hazardous working environment. Aurovillian employment meant low tech, nice jobs,

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599 Peter 100803.
600 Just as Shirley described Tamils as being "in *tamas*." Shirley 210503.
601 Benjamin 080803.
602 As opposed to "Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole" which was one of the founding principles of the community.
603 Arjun 220503.

snacks, gardening, health services and so on. Manprasad described how Auroville had a population of two thousand, but it was employing four to five thousand outsiders. If there were to be fifty thousand people in Auroville as planned, there would be a need for two hundred thousand employees, which would result in slums everywhere in and around Auroville. Now there was already significant migration from remote villages towards Auroville. The pride of the local *Vanniyar* caste prevented villagers from doing heavy work even at a normal wage, but the migrant workers were willing to do the same work for less pay. Besides, as many of my interviewees told me, there was the growing population density due to the change from patrilocality to matrilocality. This together with the influx of migrant workers made the populations of villages near Auroville grow and created tension because of limited resources.[604]

To Aravinth, a resident of Kuilapalayam, migrant workers brought with them questionable phenomena. As soon as the migrant workers had some modest savings, they would spend them on purchasing a house and a plot. Interestingly, I might addd, this critique of conspicuous consumption was popular in both Kuilapalayam and Auroville and all parties whether Westerners, villagers, migrant workers or Tamil Aurovillians were subjected to it. Moreover, in Balakrisha's view, the migrant workers did not understand the Kuilapalayam way of life and thus did not behave the way they should. They were not adapting well to the village.[605] "It is a free market," said Manprasad about the employment of villagers. Maybe he would hire somebody from a village thirty kilometers away who was squatting nearby and who worked half a day for thirty rupees – which was a good wage – because no one else in the village would do the same work for the same pay. Then the local villagers would complain that Auroville was not giving them work. In Manprasad's experience the fact was that the locals were not *accepting* work.[606]

It seemed that Aurovillians viewed the mass employment of villagers as a necessary evil. They knew their philosophy did not approve such a policy but there were extenuating circumstances. The city was under construction and it needed manual labor. The workforce was cheap and plentiful and gave Aurovillians the luxury of being able to concentrate on more important aspects of their daily life. Moreover, both villagers and Aurovillians usually thought employment signified helping. Thus employment seemed to be one of the few cultural interfaces where villagers and Aurovillians agreed on a matter. The two were dependent on each other.

"…which makes him a little violent."

Jasmin, an Aurovillian in a high administrative position described how backward the villages of her childhood were. According to Jasmin, the villagers had not seen any white people before, which caused confusion. For example, Jasmin's

604 See e.g. Kavitha 070803 and Aravinth 300503.
605 Aravinth 300503.
606 Manprasad 210503.

baby brother was thought of as an old man, because of his white hair. Village life was "rather primitive" at that time. Jasmin recalled that previously Auroville had not been a target for aggression, but just a "weird thing" for the villagers, who respected those who came all the way to India. Now Auroville was an easy target of frustration. Auroville was the Other for the villagers. The villagers thought Aurovillians had come to live in the community to be comfortable and to live cheaply.[607] I might add that this was not far from the truth for many Aurovillians.

Jasmin told me that the war with the SAS had severely impaired the relationship with the villages. This was affirmed by many other interviewees, villagers and Aurovillians alike[608]. For example Ganeshkumar's parents were employed by the SAS in Kuilapalayam, which made them loyal to their employer, although not very strongly, Ganeshkumar added. The fact that the parents dealt with the SAS kept them from officially joining Auroville. To Ganeshkumar the war was a hard issue, and difficult to understand. He was too young to understand the politics of it. The war had caused many things to break down in Auroville, including the school, which upset him. Many teachers were considered SAS sympathizers, so they had to leave Auroville and the school was closed. "A horrible war!" Ganeshkumar exclaimed. Today, Auroville wanted to be a closed community. Auroville should have grown and lived *with* the world, and brought something *to* the world, Ganeshkumar thought. If Auroville could have grown more united, it could have shown others it was living like a model community.[609] A VIP Aurovillian in the 1970s even described the war as "an evolutionary choice between the Earth's past and its future" just as there had been the choice between Hitler and the Resistance or *Pithecanthropus* and *Homo sapiens*[610].

Jasmin had spoken about the war at a village meeting and had learned that for the villagers the war had been very confusing. Many Aurovillians considered pro-SAS villagers working in Auroville to be their enemies. The Ashram used villagers as hired rowdies. However, to Jasmin the villagers were more child-like[611], more open to the spirit of Auroville. Unfortunately, the villagers were frustrated and misinformed about Auroville. Many villagers lamented the fact that they had sold their land to Aurovillians and had not even got work in Auroville. They had lost their self-respect. They thought people from all over the world had come to make money in Auroville. Jasmin told me that employment issues and conflict with the villagers kept the Working Committee of Auroville very busy. She feared that in the future frustration in villages might erupt into something very harmful. An upheaval could occur in the villages and the results could not be predicted. Possibly the frustration in the villages could be resolved in a way that would be the foundation of something

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607 Jasmin 010903.

608 See Karthik 190703, Aravan 090603, Rathinam 090603, Kannappan 090803, Lakshmi 070903, Balasingam 220799, Kavitha 070803 and Gauri 3/1999.

609 Ganeshkumar 030703.

610 Sullivan 1994: 209.

611 In the Aurovillian discourse Tamils were often regarded as child-like. E.g. a Canadian Aurovillian described Tamils as "children [and] young at heart" Alain 120899. This is, of course, part and parcel of common Orientalist discourse.

new between Auroville and the villages. Or then everything might change very slowly. Maybe the differences in appearance would decrease, Jasmin supposed.[612]

To Manprasad, the language was a threshold between interest and disinterest. The disinterested Westerners said they "tolerated" Tamil culture because "the Mother had put Auroville here." Most people in Auroville said they had not come to Auroville for India or for Tamil culture, but for the Mother and Auroville. But how, asked Manprasad, could people participate in a project aiming at human unity and be dedicated to humankind, and at the same time shun and berate the local people[613]? Most non-Tamil Aurovillians knew only a few words of Tamil, mostly negative, imperative sentences. It would be an even bigger problem in the future, predicted Manprasad. Many villagers were bitter about it already, he claimed. When one did not speak the Tamil language he or she could easily come to the conclusion that the villagers were trying to cheat or take advantage of them. Without language proficiency, Aurovillians' experience of villagers was based on highly superficial interpretations, Manprasad explained. They had often led to false impressions in village-Auroville relations. For example, Manprasad told me, if a Tamil invited a Western Aurovillian to his home because he was interested in him and wanted to know more about him, the Westerner was inclined to think the villager was trying to extract money from him. They were not able to communicate. The Westerner might have left thinking that Tamil people were aggressive and imposing, and the villager might have thought the Westerner had refused his hospitality because he was arrogant. The result was usually zero.[614]

In Manprasad's view, the villagers felt left out. They did not understand the Aurovillian ideals of "no property," "human unity" and the like. They saw the same problems as they were facing with violence, sex and marriage. There should have been no difference between Auroville and village land. The Mother did not ask Aurovillians to kick villagers out, but on the contrary, to integrate them. Auroville was becoming a corrupt community just as India was. Nevertheless, there was a lot of good will as well as productivity in Auroville. There were some bad people, manipulators and schemers in the villages but the same went for Auroville, and these schemers had not been kicked out. The outsiders saw the bad apples, and because Western Aurovillians did not speak Tamil or know the culture they did not recognize the good Tamils wanting to join Auroville, Manprasad explained. The best Tamils for the Entry Group were those who spoke correctly and used fine English with an eloquent twist. At the same time they were on the make. These people got into Auroville easily. They were the ones who knew English and were considered humble. They dressed in a modern way and talked fluently. The older villagers with more traditional val-

612 Jasmin 010903.

613 Another North Indian man told me that Aurovillian "human unity" should begin with its neighbors. Karamchand 290603. Many other Aurovillian and non-Aurovillian interviewees shared the same view.

614 Manprasad 210503.

ues and traditional dress were rejected, Manprasad claimed. He, on the other hand, liked the ones who were rebellious, as he could see their potential.[615]

The older generation in the villages was mostly illiterate and uneducated. According to Manprasad, they were on the wrong side of the generation gap. The Tamils in their twenties, born in Auroville or in the village had cable TV, and their value system was often negative, materialistic and non-traditional, claimed Manprasad. The traditional relations of the village dissipated and resulted "in a dangerous vacuum." The young had a better chance to get into Auroville whereas the old were confused about the community. Manprasad wanted to stress the value of Tamil traditions and in that way heighten the self-esteem of the villagers, but without reverting to old values. Even the young Aurovillian Tamils reverted to old values when a Western girlfriend was not "cooking or jumping" when he wanted her to, Manprasad told me. For Auroville, it was important to crystallize the "finest aspects of Tamil culture." Also the Westerners should have been more cognizant of the culturally rich environment. However, in the future there would be problems. Many Aurovillians already lived behind fences and gates, Manprasad said gloomily.[616]

Jaisukh analyzed the causes of the aggression Aurovillians had experienced from the village's side. According to Jaisukh "[t]he villager is forced to face his inferiority, which makes him a little violent." Villagers felt deprived when they saw the Aurovillian way of life. It was very attractive and drew attention. Moreover, the virtual nakedness of Westerners frustrated the villagers. Particularly the white women were despised for their way of dressing. This was a sort of cultural shock to the Indian villager. Naturally sexuality was being aroused, Jaisukh explained, and when this sexuality did not find an outlet, there was frustration.[617]

Basim thought the village problem could have been solved rather easily if Auroville had taken more economic responsibility. There should have been more resources available to educate the villagers, and their integration into the Master Plan should have been stopped. It just did not work. The "model villages" of the Master Plan of Auroville would have turned the villages into residential slums. Auroville should have created education and employment. In the villages "small businesses have emerged, but Auroville is trying to impede them as competitors!" This had caused a lot of bad blood in the villages, explained Basim.[618]

Leela was a Brahman with European education. She was very frank and explicit in her views about Aurovillians and the Tamil villagers. She told me that it would take three or four more generations until Tamil Aurovillians could be "objective." Now they were too close to the village and too "vital." They had "not enough intellectual thinking" and "not enough reasoning." In Leela's view Indians, even the most educated ones, acted much more emotionally than Europeans, "by nature." "India is more in the heart than in the mind," she told

615 Ibid.
616 Ibid.
617 Jaisukh 050899.
618 Basim 150703.

me[619]. India needed help because it was "in the worst situation ever."[620] I might add that it is interesting how, for some reason, many Aurovillians thought India was "the concentration of the world's problems[621]," although by many criteria India was a country developing significantly and far from being among the worst problem cases of the world.[622].

In Leela's opinion India had always survived because it could "keep the spirit alive." To her, Indians were fatalists. India did have a lot of knowledge which was not, however, distributed evenly. The decline had continued since the British era. The British way of ruling did not "suit the Indian mind." In Leela's view, during the Vedic times India had a good political system. These practices should have been founded again because they suited India. What exactly these more suitable ancient practices were, Leela did not mention. However, she told me that Indian cultures were "united in diversity." Historically, the South was the oldest culture. Sri Aurobindo consciously chose to establish his project in the "darkest place in the world." In Leela's opinion, the South was "very inward." Nevertheless, the history, language and culture of the South were rich. Auroville had to face the "inwardedness of the South" every day. Auroville had five hundred Tamils with their traditions, and they could not be expected to change. "Maybe their grandchildren will be changed," contemplated Leela. She also explained to me that most Aurovillians were non-Indians, or for the villagers, "the educated, the best, the white." The second largest group were the local people, and then the Indians from everywhere else.[623]

Leela did not like to use the term "North Indian," because in the South it was associated with the "white, the powerful, the educated and thus the unwanted." In Leela's view, North Indians could converse with Westerners objectively. If Leela as an Indian criticized the Westerners, she was thought of as a racist. North Indians were thought of as too proud and better than the rest. "It is true that Indians are better," Leela told me, but she did not want to act like it. Local people did not understand "Western thought," and they could not oppose the Westerners because of the inability to argue with them. Only a few Tamil Aurovillians could argue intellectually, Leela claimed. Most had insufficient education for it. The employment situation was also very dangerous. The Tamils had superior numbers, and some Tamil Aurovillians could "blow up the whole place." When the villagers could not solve a problem rationally, they reverted to violence. People got beaten up when the villagers could not go through the process of appealing, rationalizing, dialog etc., explained Leela. The

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619 Also, a North Indian working in Auroville told me Westerners had the organizing skills and Indians the endogenous spiritual abilities needed in Auroville. This is, of course, a common Orientalist dichotomy dividing the West and the East into rational and emotional halves. Karamchand 290603.

620 Leela 200503.

621 See e.g. Sullivan 1994: 51 & 140.

622 In 1973 India did have the sixth lowest GNP per citizen, but at the turn of the millennium India was far above the bottom in child mortality, life expectancy, Aids/HIV statistics and GNP. Only in literacy was India at the bottom, being the 36th lowest nation with an average 54,5% literacy rate. WWW5.

623 Leela 200503.

villages had lots of inner tensions and even murders. As an example of the predicament Leela told me about an Aurovillian Frenchman who, with his missionary attitude, wanted to help the villagers "with good intentions. But you don't help them at the end. They become a monster and they attack you," Leela exclaimed. The man had practiced charity, but eventually the villagers had attacked him. Helping caused polarization and made the villagers envious of each other. When there was no education, violence was the only tool, Leela remarked.[624]

Leela's view represented Aurovillian Orientalist discourse at its most explicit. Obviously, the villagers were seen as inferior, but usually not without Aurovillian sympathy. They were inferior but they had to be taken care of, nurtured (or disciplined) into the higher consciousness that could be provided by Auroville. Many Aurovillians seemed to think villagers were somehow on a lower level of evolution which made them ignorant and violent. Those who thought like this either dismissed Tamils as something negative that could harm Auroville or embraced Tamilness as it represented something child-like that had to be helped over its growing pains. Just as a child could be violent, it still represented something authentic and uninhibited.

Imprisoned by Culture, Driven by Economic Benefits

The Images of Freedom

Gewertz and Errington notice how Margaret Mead and her daughter Mary Bateson have in their studies celebrated "the freedom of the Western woman" compared to the women of the so-called primitive societies in which lives are more "defined" by the culture.[625] The women of the West are indeed relatively free *if* we consider upper middle-class educated and wealthy women like Mead and Bateson. Countless other Western women (and men) and their lives are defined by the realities of work, economy, gender and other sociocultural factors – just as in "primitive" societies. Obviously, different degrees of freedom/confinement can be estimated, but it does not seem that cultures can be divided binarily into free and not-free.

Western Aurovillians shared a tendency to see Tamil villagers as somehow essentially not free but imprisoned by their culture[626] and customs, whereas they saw themselves as creative, capable of initiative and free to regulate, control and govern their lives. Aurovillians were free to go against the mainstream. To a certain extent this might have been true. However, one might pause to consider whether the issue of freedom was a question of culture or

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624 Ibid.

625 In Gewertz & Errington 1991.

626 Even adopted babies of Tamil origin were thought to be representatives of Tamil culture and the relationship of the parent and the adopted baby was seen as "intercultural." *AV News* 905/2001.

simply a question of economy and surplus. Were Aurovillians simply so much wealthier than villagers that they could go against the mainstream and follow whatever stream they wanted? One might, for example, compare Aurovillian organic farmers who had the economic resources to experiment with different techniques and who were not so reliant on high crop yield with village farmers many of whom would have become destitute if their crops had failed. Western Aurovillians could meditate, practice arts, take time planning, sit in numerous meetings, build Matrimandir, focus on women's and children's rights, arrange festivals and parties, watch movies, drive around, travel and take holidays, read, study and take advantage of being served by others. They could try new things, revert to old ways, experiment and explore, take leave to spend more time on their family or hobbies. They could switch jobs, have that time to seek their inner selves or the Truth, and try different ways of seeking the meaning of life. This was actually the philosophy of the living laboratory.

It seems that Aurovillians were indeed freer than regular villagers or perhaps they had the luxury of freedom based on their economic advantage. Obviously, Auroville could not have existed as such an economically succesful community in USA or Europe. Perhaps only some of them could have had the economic abilities to experiment on life in Sweden instead of India. Aurovillians were made freer by the large scale employment of villagers. It was often claimed in Auroville that if Auroville had existed in a European country, it would have had European employees[627]. Perhaps Auroville indeed would have had European employees in Europe, but definitely not on the same scale as it now employed local people. It should be remembered that by investing, say, ten percent of a modest European salary one could hire as many as five full-time servants from the villages to work in Auroville for a month. In Europe, with the same ten percent one could hire one servant for two days at the most. At a rough estimate, in Europe labor cost fifty times as much as in India. Perhaps the freedom brought by economic hegemony led Aurovillians to interpret their freedom[628] as due to some superior spiritual, moral, evolutionary, racial or even karmic causality, or simply due to the atmosphere of Auroville. At the same time, the imprisoned villagers could blame themselves for their degeneration and for deserting their ancient civilization. Aurovillians seemed to picture Tamil culture as a senile old man who had done something valuable in his youth. He used to be wise, able and dignified, but now the strength of his youth had gone. Now his dementia had to be tolerated and understood, he had to be

627 See e.g. Sullivan 1994: 160.

628 There are, however, aspects of that "freedom" some Aurovillians question. For example, Basim was an ardent columnist of Indian nationality on an Aurovillian newspaper willing to write about problematic issues in Auroville. However, as he critically explored the relationship between Auroville and the Indian government many Western Aurovillians tried to muffle him in order to protect the relationship. In Basim's opinion Aurovillians were trying to make him give up his freedom of speech. "Imagine going into a foreign country and tell the people to give up their tights! Aurovillians are so arrogant. Western colonial mentality is in effect in Auroville!" Basim exclaimed. Basim 150703.

fed and guarded. Only his offspring was able to try and rise to the glory of his youth.

Auroville was a multinational community with a strong Euro-American cultural and material hegemony although in Aurovillian discourse the community was not Western-oriented but "a mixture" in a "balanced way[629]." In my view, Auroville was led by a Euro-American way of thinking and working although its symbolic and rhetorical representations emphasized some kind of "planetary" or "unity-in-diversity" aspects joining the East and the West. In adapting to the Aurovillian sociocultural environment and concretely joining Auroville Westerners had the upper hand compared to Tamil villagers[630].

It seemed as if the Aurovillian ideal of "unity in diversity" meant unity in *Western* diversity. It has to be noted, though, that many Tamil Aurovillians indeed thought the Aurovillian atmosphere enabled more freedom than living in the village. Consider, for example, a Tamil woman's account:

> [W]hile I was working in Auroville I could feel the freedom. I saw the way we could live in Auroville. I didn't know much about yoga or Mother, but I sensed a different future although I did not even know what exactly I was going to do. […] [W]hat is most valuable to me is that in Auroville I am not expected to ask permission first, either from my husband or my parents, if I want to do something. I can decide for myself whether I want to go to a meeting, to a friend's house, or join a sight-seeing tour.[631]

Most comments on Aurovillian freedom contrasted the tight relationship with the family, the controlled position of women or the amount of religious rituals in the village.[632] Vallikai, who worked with the village women, told me that village women who felt oppressed often saw Auroville as their only chance to free themselves[633]. One of my Tamil Aurovillian interviewees also told me that it felt liberating to live in Auroville without the pressure from the family. Nevertheless, although he had joined Auroville wanting to live as a single man and explore the world, his employer, a respected North Indian man had told him that was impossible. He had to get married, and so he did.[634]

One of the Tamil managers of the Auroville Village Action Group elaborated on village life. She described how the AVAG had positively influenced the village women and given them self-confidence. A downside of this development was the fact that many village women's husbands had been angered by this new consciousness which they interpreted as rebellion against male

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629 See e.g. Sullivan 1994: 160. Why are Africa, Japan and China underrepresented in Auroville asked a writer in *Auroville Today* 164/2002: 5. The reason according to him was either that these countries did not have any knowledge of Auroville *or* they were not ready for Auroville.

630 Although it seemed that philosophically the Indians of northern background had the benefit of having adapted to the neo-Hinduist thought of Sri Aurobindo. See also Meier 2004.

631 *The Auroville Adventure* 1998: 154.

632 See e.g. Balasingam 220799, Kavitha 070803 and Kannan 200503.

633 Vallikai 250603.

634 Mayilan 150803.

power.[635] Basim lamented the fact that Aurovillian gender equality projects were exceedingly insensitive and undiplomatic towards the village culture. If gender consciousness had to be raised, the action taken would have had to be a lot more subtle to be effective.[636] Moreover, in the projects AVAG had organized, *Dalit*s and non-*Dalit*s had been working together for a common goal[637]. Another development was that before, women could not, for example, perform in plays, but now gender equality had increased and women could be actors as well. In the manager's view there was an essential difference between Tamils and Westerners. Tamils ("we" in the article as the writer was a Tamil) were social animals and not so individualistic. In planning his actions a Tamil considers first the reaction of his family, relatives and community.[638]

In Western Aurovillian discourse villagers were seen to be attracted to Auroville mainly for economic reasons. If there was any other reason given for their attraction, it was Auroville's peaceful environment, such as could not be experienced in the tumult of the village. Interestingly, in the Occidentalist discourse of the villagers and Tamil Aurovillians, Western Aurovillians were also seen to be attracted to Auroville for economic reasons. I have no evidence of villagers being *more* economically motivated than Westerners in aspiring to become Aurovillians. However, it is safe to say that Westerners did offer various other reasons for joining Auroville and that their economic reasons were not stated as explicitly as in the villagers' discourse or they were expressed in euphemisms. An old-timer Aurovillian of Western descent told me that Tamil people perhaps were not able to express their motivation as nicely as the Westerners did, so for that rason they might have had less chance in the Entry Group interview. If they were asked their motivation for joining Auroville, they could answer "it is peaceful" or "it is nice." Or if they were asked about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, they could answer "good people" etc. However, both villagers and Westerners often joined Auroville for economic reasons. The villagers perhaps saw Auroville as a place where they could improve their living standards, and Westerners perhaps saw Auroville as a place where they could live comfortably on their savings.[639]

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635 *Auroville Today* 172/2003: 5.

636 Basim 150703. It should be added that Western feminism has often been rejected by Indian women because of the idea that gender liberty encourages free sex. Cf. Parameswaran 2001.

637 This was concurred by my own observations.

638 *Auroville Today* 172/2003: 5.

639 Alfred explained that the villagers did not abandon their families when they entered Auroville, but the Westerners did. Alfred wondered for whom the change was more drastic, a villager moving from a few kilometers away, or a Westerner coming from a country a few thousand kilometers away. Alfred 150503. Leela told me Western Aurovillians tended to think that because they had "left everything behind" they were doing the right thing. Leela 200503. Many Aurovillians and villagers viewed the entry policy of Auroville as questionable or arbitrary. See e.g. Rajiv 130503, Manprasad 210503, Alfred 150503 and Arjun 220503.

The "Tamil Issue"

The local newspaper[640] talked about an Entry Group meeting particularly on the "Tamil issue," meaning the villagers joining Auroville for economic reasons. However, a Tamil Aurovillian at the meeting wanted to point out that many Westerners also came to Auroville for economic reasons.[641] Hence singling out Tamils in this matter was discrimination. Another Tamil Aurovillian expressed his disappointment about the Tamil issue. To him, Westerners were doing a lot more damage to the community with their wrong economic motivation and example. In a special Tamil oriented issue called "Brothers in spirit" in *Auroville Today*[642] the "problematic position of Tamil Aurovillians" was analyzed. It was stated that many local villagers liked the quietness of Auroville, and "the ability to live as equals." Obviously, it depended on what one means by "to live as equals," but in my view, the status of Tamil Aurovillians was far from being equal to that of Western Aurovillians. Perhaps the statement meant that in Auroville everyone was equally free to pursue their goals without much interference from the community. So, in joining Auroville the villagers became as free *from* something (i.e. had the same *negative* freedom) as Aurovillians, but not as free *to do* certain things (i.e. did not have the same *positive* freedom) as Western Aurovillians were. It was, of course, another thing whether or not this equality was ever realizable. In the article it was repeated that the economic benefits attracted Tamil villagers. It was stated that "even some Tamil Aurovillians were worried about this[643]." It seems as if like the writer was surprised that Tamils were not, after all, a collectively thinking, united group[644]. The statement continued that "[Tamil villagers] must realize that life here is not as easy as it seems. […] [I]t demands many sacrifices."

Interestingly, the theme of Aurovillians having sacrificed something was often repeated in public discussion, especially when referring to the "wrong" image of Auroville conveyed to Tamil villagers. For example, in *Auroville Today* it was lamented that Tamils had too easy an image of Auroville as "they don't know that being Aurovillian means dedication, aspiration and sacrifice[645]." Obviously, in my view, the villagers did see Aurovillian life as involving much sacrifice. Interestingly, the article repeated a common pattern when discussing the Tamil issue. Often an article or a discussion of this theme went on to tell readers how much the material benefits attracted the villagers and Tamil Auro-

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640 *AV News* 905/2001.

641 Also many of my interviewees stated the same. E.g. Arivalagi told me she did not want to earn money outside the community "like a *Vellakara*." Arivalagi 060903.

642 151/2001.

643 Actually many Tamil Aurovillians *did* lament the economic motivation of other Tamils. For example, Velavan told me that Tamil Aurovillians have two faces: one for Auroville and one for business. Velavan 260603. See also Ravanan 080703 for double identity of Tamil Aurovillians.

644 Indeed, Tamil Aurovillians were not at all a collectively thinking group but many Tamil Aurovillians, especially the educated, wealthy and/or of urban origin wanted to distinguish themselves from "the Tamil stigma" affiliated with village Tamils as one Tamil Aurovillian described me in email. Kundran 270304.

645 *Auroville Today* 151/2001: 1.

villians. Then it went on to tell how Aurovillian Tamils had side businesses outside the community, how they became rich and spent their profits on their villages and families, and invested in cashew and jewelry. Tamil materialism was on the rise and Tamils saw only the material side of Auroville. They indulged in conspicuous consumption which was, paradoxically, hidden from other Aurovillians. *But*, it was "not only a Tamil problem." Almost every story or discussion ended with the routine statement that seemed to produce immunity against charges of discrimination: some *Westerners* also came to Auroville for the economic benefits. However, Western economic motivation was never exposed to the same kind of scrutiny as its Tamil counterpart.

In Auroville, modernization was thought to be a phenomenon the villagers could not smoothly cope with. It was thought that when villagers got wealthier, they displayed it in excess. Cashew and casuarina were not grown by "real" Tamils, because this was too business-oriented, although they were the most common crops in the district. A sort of cultural ventriloquism took place when a Western Aurovillian portrayed a "real" Tamil as a collectivist, stick-dancing farmer who lived by the traditions of his ancient culture and was not interested in improving his economic status by joining Auroville. For example, the Tamil Heritage Centre was established in Auroville to protect local Tamil customs so that they would not disappear and "lose their real meaning[646]."

In Aurovillian discourse, a villager adopting too many Western or Aurovillian habits was a sort of copycat or an impostor, whereas a Western Aurovillian adopting cultural elements from Tamil villagers was represented as a liberal multiculturalist. A Tamil Aurovillian, however, was expected to Westernize but in a pleasantly mild way in order not to "forget his roots" or go against his imagined cultural essence.[647] One interviewee of Western origin told me that to have Western and Tamil children living together in Auroville would have been great. In this way their "cultural heritages" could merge. According to him there should have been fewer Western kids in the community, because the "psyche of a Western child" was stronger than that of an Indian child[648]. Indian children were shy, he told me, and the effect of "Western personality" was not good for them. Western children should have learned from the Indian context, the "Spirit of India," which was something "indescribably spiritual." Aurovillian Western education made children lose touch with the Indian Spirit because such education was mainly "mental." Collectivism instead of individualism should have been taught to the children.[649]

In Eva's view Tamil people had to evolve in the way Western Aurovillians had already done. The big difference between Auroville and the villages was

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646 *News & Notes* 27/2004. Western Aurovillians seemed to have an essentialist image of what "real" Tamil culture is. Tamils seemed to belong in a traditional village of an ancient time. Compare this to Spencer who discovered that "modern" usually means *urban* and *Western* "modern." Spencer 2003: 238–240.

647 Cf. Hänninen 2005 who describes how excess in stylistic expression of belonging may be considered as inauthentic.

648 Imaran, a North Indian Aurovillian, even described Tamil children as having an "almost dead spirit." Imaran 3/99.

649 Jacques 090503.

that Tamils were interested in material things like big houses etc. It was not a bad thing *per se*, but the Tamils were still "stuck in their culture." For example, their family values were still strong.[650] In the same article mentioned above Auroville was said to be a place in which the best elements from "all the world's cultures" were to contribute towards the future. The position of Tamil Aurovillians was problematic because, for one thing, some Tamil Aurovillians were – again – "stuck in their cultural identity" in a way that did not allow them "to gain a broader perspective." Also again, the significance of family in Indian life was considered too strong. Many Aurovillian Tamils visited their relatives outside Auroville. Thus, it was concluded, "Tamil Nadu customs and religious beliefs remained" and Tamil Aurovillians "got mixed in local problems and politics." It was also lamented that

> [q]uite a few Tamil Aurovilians live no differently than in the village. This prevents them from focusing time and energy on Auroville's progress and from orienting their thinking towards human unity and a moneyless economy. […] At the same time, some Tamil Aurovilians express feeling a sense of loss of cultural identity. Interacting with an environment that is ostensibly Western, some Tamil people have a tendency to forget the value of traditional practices.[651]

It seems as if Tamil Aurovillians could do nothing right, either they were "stuck in their culture" or they had "forgotten their traditions." These themes were common also among many Westernized Tamil Aurovillians who wanted to sort of lift up the cultural spirit of the villages by promoting the knowledge of traditional Tamil culture. Or, as one of my Tamil Aurovillian informants told me, he wanted the villages not "to just *be*, but to know their own history and culture[652]."

Interestingly, Aurovillians seldom lamented how stuck in their culture *Western* Aurovillians were. If this sometimes occured, it was because of the Westerners' seasonal employment in Europe or because of the Westerners being too "mental" in their thought. However, the image of being stuck was often applied to Aurovillian and village Tamils. The cultural imprisonment of Tamils was often lamented and their strong connections with their village, family and religion were deplored. For example, according to a colleague of mine, a Western Aurovillian described Tamil culture as a prison, especially for the women[653]. He had established a kindergarten for the village children in order to separate the children from their families. The children could only go home to their villages on Sundays.[654] This was an explicit mode of acculturation where Tamil culture was portrayed as dangerous or degenerate and where children had to be "saved" from being enculturated in the harmful Tamil society.

An interesting question arises when exploring the Western Aurovillian criticism of the way Tamils were so closely connected with their families. Were

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650 Eva 130803.
651 *News & Notes* 27/2004.
652 Kumar 100603.
653 In my view the poor position of women in Tamil culture has been exaggerated as Tamil women, especially mothers, seem to wield a lot of power within the household and indirect power in public matters. See e.g. Trawick 1990.
654 VoIP conversation with David Zurmely, 19.5.2004.

Western Aurovillians making a virtue out of a necessity when they downplayed the importance of the (Tamil) family? One is at least tempted to come to this conclusion considering how Western Aurovillians were forced to be apart from their relatives in the West. On a more general level, why was it that Aurovillians denigrated the family influence on *Tamil* Aurovillians? And why focus on the influence of the family? Certainly, Westerners were not influenced by their families as much as Tamils were, but obviously they were influenced by many other social groups, institutions and pressures. So it might be highly dubious to state that Tamils were more *socially influenced* than Westerners were, or at least it is very difficult to measure. It is true that Tamils were on the whole more influenced by their relatives and families than Europeans were[655], but that was only one form of social influence. So why did Aurovillians emphasize the danger of being affected by one's family? Perhaps the family was seen as a source of traditional and thus out-dated ideology. Perhaps Western Aurovillians who had left their relatives thought they were freer from out-dated influences. A suitable Tamil Aurovillian had mild connections with his local and contemporary culture but strong connections with the ancient culture and sufficient connection with Western culture.

Auroville Today[656], two years after the above mentioned issue, once again had an article on Tamils where it was mentioned that the place of Tamils in their society was "very defined by their culture." Tamil Aurovillians "walked in both worlds" and had excessively strong traditions and family connections. It seems that walking in both worlds was considered harmful to the Tamil, but beneficial to the Westerner. The view of "ancient Tamil culture" was also very ambiguous in Aurovillian discourse. Sometimes Tamils "being stuck" in the ancient culture was lamented, sometimes the "incredible richness" of their ancient culture was venerated. Sometimes the strong connections between Tamil family members were respected and sometimes seen as an inhibitor of progress. These notions were free-floating signifiers that could be used either against or for Tamil culture, just as in common Orientalist discourse.

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655 On one occasion I interviewed three young Tamil men from villages on behalf of an Aurovillian running a village development project. I asked them about their preferences in life. All of them preferred family values over anything else, although they were all from broken and dysfunctional families.

656 178/2003. See also *Auroville Today* 151/2001: 2 where "the strong cultural identity of Tamil Aurovillians" was not approved and the fact that Tamil Aurovillians visit outside Auroville to meet their relatives and thus fortify their old bonds, traditions and beliefs. Also, in the same article, it is lamented that "many Tamilians are not aware of their real Tamil traditions."

Tamils in Time

The Ancientness

Hegemonic Aurovillian discourse emphasized the notion of essentially ancient Tamilness. Ever since the inception of Auroville the rhetoric had remained fundamentally unchanged. The core essence of "being Tamil" seemed to carry with it a vestige of the golden age, a primeval quality of a lost Tamil civilization.[657] The villagers whom I interviewed did not have this kind of nostalgia for the ancient. However, many of them did see village life a few decades previously as having been more harmonious or peaceful, although it had been significantly poorer. In most instances of Aurovillian discourse the ancient core of Tamilness connoted something positive: it evoked authenticity, purity, wisdom and spirituality. However, it was also often referred to as a hindrance to progress, not as a direct implication of the "good ancientness," but because of cultural degeneration. Just what the signs of Tamil degeneration were it was hard for many of my informants to say, although images of individualization and modernization seemed to have much to with it. However, in the discourse, during the long development of Tamil culture from archaic times to the contemporary stage of imminent modernity this good ancientness was seen by Aurovillians as having been contaminated or even distorted. In other words, Tamils were thought of as having first enjoyed a period of high culture in their past and then for various reasons (like the caste system, racial qualities, British rule, *tamas*) having started to degenerate. At some point the "real" Tamilness had declined and almost disappeared or became a jungle-like chaotic aggregate of "false traditions." However, hopeful glimpses or vestiges of the ways of the ancient people had remained. In Aurovillian thought, these traces could be dug out and reinforced with the right kind of help from conscious and knowledgeable people who appreciated the "right" Tamil traditions.[658]

In Aurovillian discourse this vision of the development of Tamilness was not limited to include only Tamil society, but extended to the whole of India. Most Aurovillians, drawing on Western Indo-Orientalist traditions in general and Aurobindoist thought in particular, seemed to think of India in a rather nostalgic light that emphasized the golden age of the Vedas. This was thought to be the time when India's authentic essence was at its purest. At this point it would be useful to elaborate on the matter with a few specific examples.

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657 It should be noted that also many Tamil revivalists and politicians of various ideologies have seen Tamil society as being in decline. The golden age was that of the great Tamil kings in an age of peace, prosperity and happiness. Many believed that in the ancient time there were no inequities based on caste, creed or gender. Today's decline was seen as a result of Northern and Western influences. See e.g. Ramaswamy 1993: 691–692.

658 See FIGURE 2 on next page.

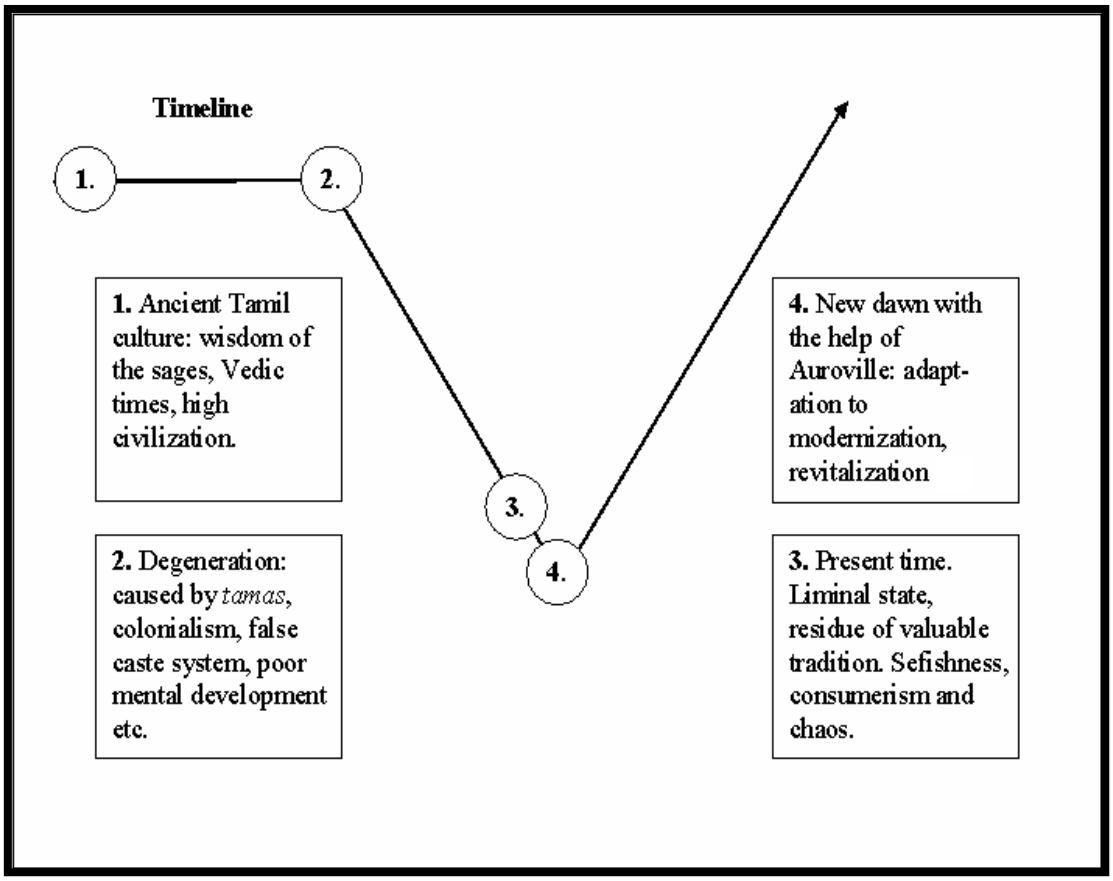

FIGURE 2 An Aurovillian conception of the development of Tamil civilization.

Ravanan, an educated Tamil Aurovillian originating in a nearby village was exceptionally devoted to the spiritual ideals of Auroville and to Indian spiritual traditions in general. He drew inspiration from ancient Tamil literature and had even tried the life of a traveling *saddhu* for a year. Although Ravanan said he had cut his ties with his relatives in the village, he did have a strong interest in Tamil culture. He was not shy about his distinctive views on the state of contemporary Tamil village culture of the area. Ravanan had encouraged villagers to practice the "original" culture of Tamil people, not the "fake" culture that was being practiced so popularly today, for example in commercialized temple festivals.

> I do motivate the culture, the original culture. I do motivate any social work […]. I do motivate the real thing, not fake because nowadays they tend to do lot of fake, the celebrations are fake, the traditions are fake. It is not original anymore. … If it's original, I'm willing to promote it. I do a lot of this sort of work to…. rediscover, to reinvoke…[659]

Since a few years back Ravanan had wanted to revitalize Tamil culture. For example, with his cultural expertise a temple dating back to the seventh century

659 Ravanan 080703.

had been restored and a festival according to the "ancient tradition without modern influence[660]" held on the spot. Ravanan had three times taken part in arranging the festival for Aurovillians and villagers together. Then a temple foundation was formed and, as Ravanan lamented, the trustees of the foundation did not understand Ravanan's vision any more. To Ravanan, tube lights, cement and other "modern" materials in the temple did not "belong to a real temple," so Ravanan withdrew from the temple administration.[661]

Rykaard, an Aurovillian administrator of European origin was worried about the vanishing Tamil traditions. So he had started to finance a dance group from his neighboring village. Their task was to learn and perform the stick dance[662], which Rykaard thought was of ancient origin. Rykaard lamented how Tamils had so many great traditions but either they did not appreciate them or did not have the organizational skills to keep them up. Rykaard feared that in a few years' time the villagers would lose their knowledge of these great traditions.[663] Rykaard's view was very common among Aurovillians, who showed a desire to retraditionalize Tamil villagers and recreate a "real" village culture according to the Aurovillian image of what that was.

Benjamin came from Europe to live in Auroville in the 1970s. He realized that in order to maintain and develop a healthy relationship with Auroville's Tamil neighbors (and workers), a European should learn the Tamil language. As a manual laborer working with villagers, Benjamin quickly became fluent in Tamil and eventually married a Tamil woman from a village nearby. Benjamin spoke highly of Tamil civilization, especially the ancientness of it.

> Tamilian people are very proud. As I said, they have continuous history of more than five thousand years. Slow degradation but no interruption. There has been no interruption at all. But it is degradating, and they are quite conscious of that. They are trying to revive the spirit. They have even, a few centuries ago, they have lost the written language, totally lost because of… like in Egypt it was in the control of the [dominant] class.[664]

Because Tamil civilization was much older than European, Benjamin thought Aurovillians had much to learn from the local villagers. He also claimed that Tamils suffered from the general problems of a degenerating civilization, one aspect of which was the dependence on the government of India. To Benjamin, Tamils had lost their "original independence" as a result of demanding government actions to improve (or to "give everything" to villagers, as Benjamin expressed) village living conditions.[665] Interestingly, even those European interviewees who only mentioned Tamil culture in passing because of their explicitly stated ignorance of it never forgot to mention how *ancient* Tamil culture

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660 Meaning mainly building and ornamental materials.
661 Ravanan 080703.
662 The stick dance was called *Kolataam* in Tamil and it has been known throughout Tamil Nadu.
663 Rykaard 150303.
664 Benjamin 080803.
665 Ibid.

was[666]. Those – both Indian and European Aurovillians – who did elaborate on Tamil culture and did claim at least some knowledge of the matter usually referred to this ancientness almost immediately at the beginning of their description of Tamils.

As mentioned earlier, although the ancientness of the Tamils seemed to connote something positive, it also implied something stagnant. Because of their ancientness and especially the distorting and obstructing effects of degeneration Tamils were thought of as having considerably greater problems in adjusting to the inescapable processes of modernization. Just as an elderly person is thought to revert to his old ways and be unable to cope with novelty, the ancient (if not senile) Tamil village culture was seen as unable to cope with the surge of modernity. Then again, as already mentioned, Tamils could also be seen as children who were to be guided towards their adulthood.

Western Aurovillians tended to envisage the surrounding Tamil culture as in chaotic flux or in a liminal state. Tamils had lost or degenerated from their ancient civilization, but they had not constructed anything worthy to replace it. Now, as they were on the verge of modernity but lacking *essence*, they were in their most *vital* state. This vitality meant enjoying or even devouring or being devoured by soulless materiality. Because of their ancientness and old ways, villagers were not spiritually or mentally ready for the challenge of upward change, as if the speed of material development had somehow surpassed their psychological abilities to adjust to change. Auroville was also said to be in a state of flux, but whereas the liminal state of Tamil villagers was seen as dangerous, rootless, aimless and full of materialism, Aurovillian liminality was considered a necessary, positive phase on the path towards utopia[667]. Aurovillian (positive) liminality was a justification fo the various imperfections of the community, whereas Tamil (negative) liminality meant inability to progress. Spiritually and mentally evolved Aurovillians were thought to be able to handle this liminality and use it to their advantage whereas the liminality of the villagers was equated with sort of anarchy.

Of Evolution

The concept of evolution was highly significant to most Aurovillians as the term was associated with the core philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, the philosopher-mystic behind Auroville, and with the general goals of the community. Auroville's purpose was to evolve and have its community members – and eventually the whole world – evolve. Hence, it is no surprise that in the Aurovillian view of life, a theory of evolution held a significant position. Many Aurovillians supported a kind of folk evolution theory that mixed Darwinist and spiritual-mystical Aurobindoan beliefs in the evolution of the spiritual-

666 Jacob 090803 was the only exception.

667 Certainly there were many contrary opinions at odds with the positive attitude towards the Aurovillian liminal stage, but it seemed that the positive view was hegemonic.

material human being[668]. According to Aurovillian philosophy, the human being was a creature in transition bound to evolve spiritually and biologically. Humankind was expected to eventually take another step in evolution and the human individual become a more refined, sensitive, ethical and, in general, more advanced being. It was only a matter of time before humankind would take the leap, and Auroville was there to hasten the process. Perhaps Aurovillians were even to be the first group to face the new dawn of humanity, and have the "superman" born in their community[669]. Many Aurovillians seemed to think that the authentic, degeneration-free antiquity of the Tamils (or of India as a whole) was something that was necessary in the evolutionary process. However, antiquity was only one ingredient in the making of New Man. It was to be reinforced with a new spirituality, a new form of government and organization – a whole new mode of living, thinking and experiencing. Auroville was thought to be the best medium for mixing the essential properties of different cultures and, if you will, *times*, into the next step producing a synthesized human race.

Like many Aurovillians, Franz, a European with a decade's experience of Auroville, understood evolution in a spiritual light. In human evolution, there was first a safe and collective tribal state of being. Then, as the culture progressed in its awareness, there was a painful transition to individuality, away from Mother Nature. Franz's view went well with the general Aurovillian view according to which collectiveness and a sort of old-fashioned communality was often associated with Nature. Consider, for example, an Aurovillian who maintained that the reason behind erosion of the soil and deforestation in the area lay in the fact that

> [t]his once fertile plain had succumbed to the impoverishment of man's consciousness – a consciousness which had not yet seen its inseparable relationship with nature [and that] the natural instincts have atrophied and been reduced to a bare utilitarianism.[670]

According to Franz, when culture had parted from nature and reached individuality, independence started to develop and eventually led to a higher level. On this higher level cultures could "reconnect" with the ancient ways and close the circle of progress. In Franz's view, in order to evolve to the next and final stage, human beings had to be able to extract the good things from the ancient way of life. To Franz, the Western world was way ahead in its individualization, a process that had already started during ancient Greek culture and had continued ever

668 E.g. Lingappan described how for humankind the superman was the same kind of step than evolution from the ape-man to human had been. Lingappan 210799 . However, it should be remembered that many Aurovillians were at least rather skeptic about the idea of the new race. See e.g. Alfred 120899; Jacob 090803; Basim 150703; Oscar 230699 and Rykaard 150503.

669 See Jouhki 2002: 162–167 for Aurovillian eschatology involving the advent of superman.

670 Savitra 1980: 91.

since. In his view, Tamils were experiencing the same process of individualization in a single generation.[671]

As the common Orientalist discourse has it, India is a sponge absorbing all kinds of influences from outside, without change in its *essence*. Likewise, Franz viewed Tamil culture as a very ancient one, having absorbed many influences in its history but still surviving as a single Tamil culture. This kind of reificatory and essentialist concept of culture was highly popular in Auroville, as it is in general Orientalism, and even town-planning had taken it into account. Since Aurovillians believed their purpose was to implement human "unity in diversity," they viewed all cultures as to be respected and learned from. Hence Aurovillians had organized several cultural pavilions that represented the key aspects of different cultures. At the time of my fieldwork there were pavilions for Indian, Tibetan and German culture and several other European pavilions were being planned. Many Aurovillians seemed to have adopted the Aurobindoan idea of a "nation-soul" as if countries were beings that had distinct qualities. See for example the next excerpt from an article describing the founding of the German pavilion:

> What is it to be German?
>
> As Germans are in general very practical people, efficient and work-minded, it should not be difficult to agree on a construction plan or a material action. It is more difficult for the Germans to agree on the ideology behind the German pavilion. The feelings and opinions regarding the pavilion expressed by Germans who live in Germany and by Germans living in Auroville tend to be far apart.
>
> As I am German myself, but living in Auroville for almost 20 years, I feel kind of detached from the daily life process in Germany, but all these discussions in the last months around the German soul brought back to me the question as to why I incarnated in Germany this time, and not in some other country.
>
> As the soul chooses to be born in a particular country, it automatically takes on certain qualities of that particular nation-soul to work with these qualities in life. In that sense I may feel like a world-citizen in Auroville, but with certain German qualities which express themselves through my work and how I do and perceive things. During the ceremony yesterday, I silently expressed my desire to see this beautiful goddess-being who is the nation-soul of Germany with my own eyes one day.[672]

In Auroville, every culture was seen as a being that has an essence – if not a soul – and Auroville's purpose was to gather those different essences, (re)connect with them, and see the unity behind them all. Tamil culture was thought to have had the same essence for five thousand years, although superficial or even more serious deviations had made it harder for the essence to materialize in action today. In *Auroville Today* an educated Tamil Aurovillian woman with urban origins claimed there was a significant increase in Aurovillian interest in Tamil culture, language and traditions. Hence the relationship between Auroville and the villages had improved. Her group had gradually collected historical anecdotes about the Tamil area surrounding Auroville. Eventually they were able to tell the villagers about their rich heritage and culture. To the writer,

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671 Franz 270503.
672 WWW6.

> Tamil culture is one of the oldest known living cultures [...]. There is an idea now to make Bharatipuram, which exists within the Auroville City region, into a living Tamil Heritage Village.[673]

Incidentally, there were no plans to create a living French, English or German Heritage Village within the Auroville City region. It seems that for Aurovillians being Tamil meant being essentially affiliated with village culture, and not just any village culture, but that of a village with a noble past without influences that were thought to be too modern. Most Aurovillians considered their community's role to be highly important to the fate of the surrounding Tamil culture. With Aurovillian help, Tamil villagers could recover their lost antiquity, find their lost traditions and harmoniously merge noble ways of old with the modern way of living. For many, Auroville was not only going to be the savior of the Tamils but the new *shakti*[674] of India as a whole. As the Aurovillian historian announced, the force that India had once lost had now returned – to Auroville:

> It was here in India, a land that had renounced matter, a land whose shakti was forced to flee westward leaving behind an impoverished civilization, that that same shakti would now return, awaken its slumbering soul and call forth a point for new earth, a whole earth, and earth healed of its dualities.[675]

In Aurovillian discourse, Tamil traditions, ways of thinking and tools of subsistence were ancient in that the people were living relics of a past civilization. As an interesting example, there was a commonplace article on *contemporary* Tamil cuisine in *Auroville Today*[676]. Yet, the recipes from the villages were referred to as containing "ageless wisdom" although it was just a matter of everyday food. It seems that Aurovillians were prone to interpret many things in Tamil culture as "ancient." To Western Aurovillians ancientness was something essential to the Tamil world and thus the ancientness of the Tamils infiltrated numerous Aurovillian depictions of being Tamil. For example, another historian of Auroville described how the villagers of the "ancient past" met "the international arrivals' young present[677]," and Auroville was "so intertwined with an ancient village culture[678]." Interestingly enough, the discourse of ancientness could be used both for and against Tamil villagers and their culture. The "genuine" ancientness of the Tamils was something noble and pristine and thus something Auroville and its Western, "mental[679]," people should "regain." Then again, ancientness could also mean that the Tamils were caught in their timeless, stagnant state which hindered progress. According to this view, ancient also meant primeval, archaic, even primitive and backward. Whether the discourse of ancientness was used to

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673 *Auroville Today* 172/2003: 4.
674 *Shakti* is a Sanskrit word meaning generative power, energy of action and supreme divine power.
675 Savitra 1980: 95.
676 137/2000: 6.
677 Sullivan 1994: 154.
678 Ibid.: 141.
679 For example, an Aurovillian scientist of North Indian origin told me that often when he criticizes Auroville as an organization Aurovillians accuse him of being "too mental." Basim 150703.

praise or blame, it is clear that it in one way or the other denied that Tamil villagers were coeval with Aurovillians.

The discourse of ancientness evokes a list of interesting questions. What exactly *was* ancient in a Tamil village of the turn of the millennium? The tools? The relative impecuniousness of the people compared to Aurovillians? Was it the agriculture or the religion? Was the elaborate marriage ceremony a sign of ancientness? Were the colorful, non-Protestant religious rituals in general ancient? Were the thatched village huts relics of an ancient past? Could a temple – without tube lights – be revived in its ancientness? Was the lack of gadgets, mobile phones and the Internet equal to ancientness? Were the stray dogs, women wearing *sari*s, men wearing *dhoti*s, bullock-carts, farmers smoking *bidi*s or Ganesh the elephant god signs of Tamil ancientness? How old did a habit, a tool, a house or an element of culture have to be to signify "ancient?" How many "modern" elements could a Tamil person possess before ceasing to be ancient? What were the significant or chosen signs of ancientness as, obviously, all people have old habits, rituals, things and ways of being? Could a Western Aurovillian be a little ancient when he burned incense, wore Tamil clothes and went to visit a Hindu temple? Why was Auroville seen as modern in contrast? Because of technology? Did Auroville not possess ancient properties? Could one not say that there were various ancient phenomena in Auroville as well? Were Aurovillians not practicing ancient agriculture, riding ancient horses (an ancient way of traveling and an ancient species for that matter), eating ancient food (e.g. meat, milk and vegetables), singing and dancing (ancient habits), praying (definitely ancient), swimming, running, cleaning, sleeping, using servants, arguing, loving, walking, living and breathing like the ancients before them.

Doubtless, if one measures ancientness by the use of the applications of the latest Western technology, Tamil villagers on average were some way behind. Or, if one imagines an essence of Tamilness dating back thousands of years, Tamils could be called ancient. However, on the whole it seems as if the "ancientness" in Tamils was just a matter of choosing a suitable (Orientalist) narrative. Did "modern" actually mean "Western" and did "ancient" equal "non-Western" in Auroville? Was it the case that whatever "non-Western" element the Aurovillians saw in the villages connoted "ancientness?" It seems that Aurovillians imagined a Tamil genealogy, a continuum of essential Tamilness from the early civilization to the present day. Europeans, however, did not see themselves in terms of a similar genealogy. "Being European" was seemingly associated with change, variation and heterogeneity. A European was always fresh, modern, innovative and disconnected from or not significantly affected by the past. European Aurovillians seemed to imagine themselves as representatives of not the present time but the future, whereas the villagers/the natives belonged to their collective community[680], to their *history* and were defined by

680 Cf. a comment in *Auroville Today* 171/2003: 3 where villagers were seen as "people who naturally live in community."

their past. Indeed, the purpose of Auroville was to "create a bridge between the past and the future."

The Significance of the Tamils to Aurovillian Identity

Reinforcing the Aurovillian "Us"

From the 1990s on Auroville progressed rapidly economically. The villagers were lower in economic status and their material input as Aurovillians was usually lower than that of the Westerners. Consequently the villagers applying to become Aurovillians were heavily filtered. If a villager did not have the economic means to become an Aurovillian, he or she had to have the right symbolic capital, meaning the right way of speaking, being humble and submissive, to be accepted. Many villagers could obtain that symbolic capital for the entry process, as did many Westerners[681]. In 2003, Auroville had more resources than ever, but the intake of villagers had not risen accordingly. The richer Auroville became, the more attractive it was to villagers and Westerners, and the more the applicants who were thought not to be economically viable were screened and denied membership of the community. Aurovillians were not willing to and did not have to live in the pioneering spirit and the asceticism of the 1970s any more. Obviously there were and had to be limits to how much they wanted to share their wealth with Tamil villagers. It was thought that only when the community was strong enough to take care of its own could it start significantly concentrating on the outside. This theme was repeated in many statements on the responsibility of Auroville towards the surrounding Tamil society and it has also not been out of step with the official statements made by wealthy industrial countries when considering the intake of refugees and immigrants. It seems there was a correlation between the change in Aurovillian Orientalism and the change in Aurovillian wealth, just as there was between Orientalism and the disintegration of colonialism[682].

Perhaps Aurovillians of the 1970s saw Tamil villagers as harmonious natural yogis because they were not so much a threat as an asset to Auroville. Perhaps in 2003 they were seen more "vital" humans, opportunists, alcoholics and criminals because they had grown closer to Auroville in many ways. Is it the case, as Cohen[683] claims, that the more two cultures begin to resemble each other, the more the cultural differences are emphasized?[684] The presence and

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681 As Manprasad told me, the Entry Group was filtering out the wrong villagers. They sought after the ones who knew the right rhetoric although they should have been looking for those who were willing to express criticism of Auroville. Manprasad 210503.

682 See Said 1995: 257.

683 1985: 40.

684 Incidentally, the same has happened in the European attitude towards China. Because China has begun to be a significant economic rival, its human rights violations

closeness of Tamil villagers was significant – if not crucial – for the construction of Aurovillian identity. Tamils were often represented as tied to the physical world whereas Aurovillians aspired towards spirituality. Or, as a Canadian Aurovillian hoped,

> Maybe the great Tamil based population of the future of Auroville will suddenly realize [how] good the Charter is after they have made lots of money and conquered all mortal realms. […] Maybe the Tamil culture here of the Aurovilians is transforming into a more liberal, more free-spirited people who will be as noble as the ancients. Maybe physical needs will one day not be the leading factor in their lives…thanks to Auroville…maybe they won't even realize that it is thanks to Auroville. […] [Tamils have] very strong traditions. Conformity is the norm, status is purely financial, I have my doubts about this people in their ability to manifest Auroville in all its glories.[685]

Aurovillians were a heterogeneous group and sometimes suffered from relatively high internal discord. Perhaps in a more European setting, the community's discordance would have subverted the apparent coherence expressed via its boundary-making. If Auroville had been in Europe, its members might have come to feel that they had less in common with each other than with members of some other community. However, all members of Auroville realized and celebrated – at least rhetorically – this heterogeneity, and the mission of the community and its members was to overcome the discord due to it. Actually and paradoxically, this mission for many was the only thing in common with other Aurovillians. There was a unilateral separation between the Aurovillian in-group and the villager out-group, and many Aurovillians wanted to hold up a wall between "us" and "them," "modern" and "primitive," "Western" and "Other," "progressing" and "static." However, the villagers constituted a valuable pool of labor that could not be kept back behind walls. Neither side even wanted it. Aurovillians seemed to have an inherent way of thinking that being Aurovillian meant modernization, progress, cultivated Europeanness, knowledge of the "true India." Tamils, at worst, represented physical and spiritual indolence, sloppiness, and irresponsibility. Villagers were often seen as lazy workers. Moreover, there was a conception that work meant totally different things to villagers. As a Western Aurovillian remembered how they worked on the Matrimandir in the 1970s:

> '[T]he locals couldn't understand what was going on', recalls Robin. 'Here we were, four foreigners, all in shorts, working like demons with no obvious boss and laughing all the time. The energy was incredible.'[686]

The fact that the Westerners worked lightly dressed, hard, without supervision and joyfully was imagined by the Western writer not to be unintelligible to villagers. He seemed to imply that Tamils worked heavily dressed, with supervision and without joy. The theme of Tamils not understanding the West or Auroville came up many times in Aurovillian discourse during my fieldwork. Interestingly, Westerners never seemed to wonder (in the media or interviews) how

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are being emphasized in European discussion, even though there are plenty of worse violations in other parts of the world. See Korhonen 1996.

685 WWW7.

686 *Auroville Today* 2/1992, 7 in Sullivan 1994: 308–309.

Western Aurovillians could not understand Tamil villagers. Fundamentally, the applicants to Auroville were judged the same way, regardless of their ethnic background. The bias occurred when it looked like that to fulfill the criteria of "being a good Aurovillian" in terms of spiritual commitment was harder for Tamil villagers. It seems that for a Tamil villager to become a good Aurovillian a public denunciation of the village ways was required. The village religion represented corrupted and degenerate Hinduism to Aurovillians, as opposed to the "real Vedanta," the Aurobindoan neo-Hinduist view of religion. A villager with village religion could never be a "true" Aurovillian.[687]

The Outer Limits of Being Aurovillian

Ferdinand Tönnies held the view that women were incapable of rational thinking, understanding and calculation. Women were ruled by emotion whereas men acted according to their understanding.[688] In Tönnies' time this kind of classic chauvinism was common, although scientifically unfounded. It was groundless to presume that female sex *per se* caused irrationality. Obviously, there have been differences in general education between the sexes, and women have been seen by men as irrational, but there are no biological factors that could produce these differences. An analogy of this sexism was obvious in Aurovillian Orientalism. The Tamils were seen as incapable of the European style of rational thinking. Many Aurovillians thought Tamils were more "in the heart," irrational, impulsive and incapable of logical thinking. Obviously, Tamils had less Western education than Western Aurovillians and this might have led one to believe there was something in "being Tamil" that caused irrationality.

Village religion did not suit Auroville since Auroville was not considered religious but, rather, representative of something more progressive, above and ahead of religion. It was also not religion for Aurovillians when they prayed to the Mother, believed that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo did not have to die but they had chosen to die and that they now interacted with Aurovillians "from beyond." It did not seem to bother Aurovillians that the ultimate goal of Auroville was superman, a representative of new human race that was to be more spiritual than the present species and possessed of psychic abilities. Moreover, it was not considered contradictory to Aurovillian non-religious ideology that, for example in their newspaper people were asked to gather to "invoke *Agni*" the Vedic god of fire[689]. Meier's thesis on Aurovillian spirituality reveals that

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687 For this observation I am grateful to Ms. Janne Meier. See also Meier 2004 on narrative constructions of Self and belonging in Auroville. See also Ramaswamy 1993: 694 according to whom Neo-Hinduism has denigrated the non-Aryan/non-Sanskritic traditions as "aboriginal," "animistic" and "prone to devil-worship."

688 See e.g. Töttö 1996: 164.

689 *News & Notes* 20/2004. The Aurovillian rhetoric also resembles religious rhetoric. Consider, e.g., commonly used and very meaningful Aurovillian expressions such as "Divinity," "Kingdom of God," "the race of the Sons of God," "Inner Divinity," "willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness," "the cradle of superman," and "a super-humanity." These concepts are discussed in *Auroville Today* 177/2003 with Auroville's popular "cultish" image.

Aurovillians seem to have no trouble in believing in the Divine, believing in one eternal religion, feeling the Divine in their body cells, doing *puja*s for the Mother, visiting the Aurovillian Temple of the Divine Mother, uniting with God, revering *Kali* and *Krishna*, believing in reincarnation, opening heart chakras, using Hindu terminology, viewing Auroville as predestined and believing in inevitable Divine evolution, not to mention the Mother and Sri Aurobindo spiritually defeating Hitler and how Sri Aurobindo's spirit moved into the Mother's body.[690] The prohibition of religion in Auroville seemed to mean a monopoly of Aurovillian *neo*religion[691].

When thinking of the relationship between Auroville and the villages one might be reminded of the relationship between the United States and the Third World. A fraction of the latter is antipathetic towards the US and a fraction of that fraction resorts to violence to express their frustration. However, books about aggressive non-Western Occidentalism are written, as if a widespread collective hatred against the West in general and the US in particular existed. Many Aurovillians assumed that villagers hated Auroville *per se* and that aggression was caused by some inexplicable general hatred. It is true that some villagers felt frustrated about Auroville and some of them were even violent on occasion[692]. As one of my interviewees told me, after being dismissed from a job

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It is also said that Auroville is not religion, because 1. for each problem and question Sri Aurobindo presents all aspects. 2. Sri Aurobindo is advocating a synthesis as the Truth. 3. speaking of Sri Aurobindo is not a question of teaching nor even of revelation, but of an Action from Supreme, so "upon this, no religion whatsoever can be founded." 4. Auroville is not religion because it is guaranteed by the Auroville Act of the Supreme Court. Interestingly, only one of my Aurovillian interviewees concurred with the idea of Auroville being a religion. My colleague, Ms. Meier, also told me she had discussed the religious aspect of Auroville and often had an Aurovillian conclude that Auroville was indeed a religion if it was defined in an anthropological way, but in actuality it was something *beyond* religion.

690 Meier 2004. I should add that there were many Aurovillians whose orientation to the religious/spiritual aspects of the community was either mild or non-existent. See e.g. Alfred 010399, Willem 290799 and Anna 290799 among many others.

691 See also Minor 1999 for Supreme Court discussion on Auroville's religion. The Supreme Court eventually defined Auroville as a non-religious but spiritual community. Otherwise it would have been illegal for the secular Indian government to fund a religious organization. It should be added that nowadays in India there is also a widely accepted conception that Hinduism is not a religion but more like a philosophy.

692 It should be noted that also Western Aurovillians were blamed for violence towards villagers. See e.g. Ezhumalai 130503. The difference in the modes of confrontation between Western Aurovillians and Tamil villagers seems an interesting tangential issue. The Western mode of confrontation seems to have been to adopt a more verbal approach first and then perhaps legal means and only in the end use force if the law was on one's side. The Tamil mode seems to have started with an incubatory period as verbal confrontation was not desired. Then came the use of force, which was resorted to only to express to the other side that something was wrong. The use of force was a message *per se*, implemented to get the other side's attention. Only after that could negotiations be initiated. Cf. Salem 1993 on different modes of conflict resolution.

Basim criticized the Aurovillian decision makers who thought merely saying "let's be good to each other" resolved problems. In Basim's opinion they were the worst. They wanted everyone "sharing their emotions." They had romantic views on conflict resolution, and it did not work. Basim 150703. In Salem 1993 the so-called "flower power negotiation" is discussed. Salem describes how many Western conflict

in Auroville he could even consider beating up some Aurovillian who came to his yard when he was drunk. At any rate, it seems as if the imagined hatred was as highly exaggerated in Auroville as it is in the West.

Tamilness defined the outer limits of being Aurovillian, although some elements of being Tamil were, at least rhetorically, revered and contributed their value to being Aurovillian. The village Tamils were at once accused and defended in terms of their "vitality," "childishness," "ancientness" etc. In other words, hardly any Western – or Tamil – Aurovillian broke away from the hegemonic Orientalist discourse which defined the Aurovillian language play speaking of Tamil villagers. The arguments used a discursive reservoir that contained only a limited selection of the qualities of Tamilness. The debate was kept inside the discourse and it only revolved around whether or not these properties were valuable or not, whether "vitality" meant "bestiality" or "intuition," whether "childishness" meant "immaturity" or "fresh thought," whether "ancientness" meant "stagnant" and "stuck" or "valuable heritage." Perhaps even more interestingly, none of the villagers I interviewed drew on this archive and only a few exceptions in Western Auroville refrained from using this discursive reservoir. The Westerners not using the discourse seemed to be either in very close interaction with villagers or had virtually no interaction at all with them.[693]

Hardly any Western Aurovillians knew how to speak Tamil. One Aurovillian of Western descent even told me "there is no real grammar in Tamil," so the language was hard to learn[694]. She might have been confused by the differences between written and spoken Tamil and the differences between various regional and caste dialects[695]. Another Western interviewee defended his lack of

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resolution techniques emphasize "opening up" and sharing "personal experiences," "feelings" and "deep interests," and how developing "relationships" with the opponents "as individuals" is seen significant. For members of certain societies this mode of conflict resolution might be felt as distressing and improper in a situation where formal roles are expected to be maintained.

Perhaps the Western Aurovillian "softness" and "sharing" when negotiating confused Tamil villagers. Perhaps the "openness," to a villager, might have been a property that signified weakness and thus could not be taken seriously. Also, following Salem, in more fragmented societies that are organized around the family, the clan etc., large-scale teamwork might seem futile because the world appears too competitive for it. Extensive group work might be perceived as a chance to be cheated. Thus, the "working together" ideology might not have seemed attractive to Tamil villagers, although it might have seemed natural for Westerners.

693 For example, Alfred told me "Tamils are people like everyone else. Nothing more peculiar in that." Naturally, they were different to some extent, Alfred explained, but many educated Tamils felt more unity with Western educated people than with the working class people of their own society. Maybe cultural differences were socioeconomic differences, wondered Alfred. Generally Tamils were nice people, but sometimes "someone can go really nuts." Some Tamils thought Auroville was a good place, some think "it stinks." Probably landowners were more likely to say Auroville stinks, because they wanted better prices for their land. Alfred told me he got along with all kinds of people – "even army people" – even if he did not like their culture. He did not like all aspects of Tamil culture, but it did not stop him from working or being a friend to Tamils. Alfred 150503. See also Peter 100803 for the same kind of binarity-breaking attitude.

694 Mary 130903

695 See e.g. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1983: 14.

fluency in Tamil by stating the statistical facts of the geography of languages in India. He regarded learning Tamil as useless since Tamil could only be used in Tamil Nadu. The fact that he lived in Tamil Nadu and in a rural area where most of the native people spoke only Tamil did not seem to matter to him.[696] A Western Aurovillian farmer who had lived in Auroville for thirty years and spoke fluent Tamil regretted how poor his Tamil was considering all the years he had spent in Tamil Nadu. After thirty years, he said, in any other place, one could speak the vernacular almost like a native.[697] The level of fluency in the Tamil language seemed to be inversely proportional to the hegemony of non-Tamils in Auroville.

Money had a multifaceted meaning in the relationship. The Westerners lamented that Tamil Aurovillians worked in Auroville but invested their income in the village. Moreover, the villagers did not know how to "spend correctly." Actually, what seemed like conspicuous consumption to a Westerner was usually a just investment to a villager, since buying ornaments, building a house and so on were ways of investing money in an economic environment where banks were not trusted[698]. Tamil Aurovillians, for their part, lamented how the *Vellakara*s worked in Europe and came to spend their money on easy living in Auroville. The villagers lamented that Tamil Aurovillians worked in Auroville but *did not* spend their money in or create enough opportunities for the village.

Auroville had indeed lifted the economy of the surrounding area and, as it was claimed in Auroville's web page, "Thanks to the presence [of] Auroville, there has been a gradual improvement in living conditions in the villages." Thanks to the presence of *villages*, it might also have been observed, there had been a gradual improvement in living conditions also in *Auroville*, mainly because of the cheap village labor. Aurovillians also claimed that today's lack of respect towards Auroville in the villages was due to rapid economic growth in the villages. The economic growth of Auroville was not mentioned as likewise affecting the general Aurovillian attitude towards the villagers. Why was the growth of the village economy considered to produce immorality while Auroville's growth was seen as producing possibilities for the further development of Auroville's ideals? It makes one wonder if this is a general feature in Orientalist/Occidentalist discourse on Eastern/Western change. It seems that Western change is thought to be more governed by purpose or have a *telos* whereas Eastern change is more characterized by jungle-like growth bound to inflict chaos.

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696 Oscar 230699.
697 Alfred 150503.
698 Gold, for example, kept its value and was easily changed into cash if needed.

10 IMAGINING THE OTHER

Coming to Terms with the Other

According to Edward Said, Orientalism is a long European tradition of "coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience[699]." In Tamil-European relations, "coming to terms" with the Other seemed to be essential to the Self-image. For Europeans, the exotic Other, the seemingly strange Tamil villagers, had to be managed, represented and thus discursively contained and made familiar. It would have been contradictory for Auroville, the community of human unity, to relate to its cultural surroundings with antipathy. Thus a discursive strategy was needed focusing on the essential ancientness of Tamil villagers. Drawing from the general Orientalist and Indo-Orientalist archives, Aurovillians narrated Tamils as being essentially of ancient quality. Just as "no Semite could ever shake loose the pastoral, desert environment of his tent and tribe[700]," nor could Tamil villagers shake loose the ancientness of their culture. The elements of contemporary Tamil culture were imagined to be the residue of an ancient time. All Tamils were considered ancient and if there were some Tamils that were not, they were not "real" Tamils, but copycats, consumerists or Westernized people who had forgotten their roots. Ancientness permeated numerous aspects of Tamil life. Their food recipes were ancient, the tools they used were ancient, and their habits, rituals, festivals, beliefs, relationships and recreation were ancient.

As in general Orientalism, in Aurovillian Tamilism the discourse was pre-existent, with its collection of dreams, images and vocabularies to be used by anyone who tried to talk about the people of the immediate surroundings of Auroville. Both Kuilapalayams and Aurovillians had come to terms with their Other and they had done so by constructing imagery and discourse suitable for their needs. In Auroville the villagers/Tamils were *seen through* and not looked at. They were often analyzed as problems but rarely as members of the com-

699 Said 1995: 1.
700 Ibid.: 233–234.

munity[701]. Obviously, in Auroville the Tamils were the prime focus of public concern, since they were associated with violence, wrong economic motivation and an over-influential cultural background. These associations did not apply to Western Aurovillians, although a few rebel cries of Tamil Aurovillians might have reminded Aurovillians about the power of Western money in the Indian economy. The villagers, however, did not see through *Western* Aurovillians, but rather they saw through Tamil Aurovillians to the immorality of the West.

In the Orientalism Said has described, the Orient was allowed no possibility of development, and the Orient and the Oriental could never be seen as transforming and dynamic entities[702]. In the Tamil villages change was obvious to almost any observer. But in Aurovillian discourse it was seen as coming from outside as a force the villagers could not manage or contain, but which caused the evils of unhealthy individualism (i.e. selfishness), consumerism, cultural amnesia and the distortion of tradition. The contemporary, modern Tamil was an anomaly as he had forgotten his ancientness and he was *always already* late compared to the Westerners[703]. Also, just as the Orient needed European penetration and insemination by colonization[704], Tamil villages were imagined to need Auroville in order to flourish. Villagers also thought so, but only in the form of economic influence. In ideology or values Aurovillians had nothing to offer to most villagers.

No one could deny that there was change in the village but Aurovillians had a prevailing image of the change being somewhat chaotic and detaching the Tamils from a nostalgic "real" past, although at the same time their essence was left untouched. Auroville's role was, for many Aurovillians, to be the savior of Tamils by infecting them with the Aurovillian spirit and guiding them to "right Tamilhood." Obviously, many Aurovillians could not care less about the surrounding Tamil culture, and there were also many who thought that improving the general health and living standards of the villagers was enough on Auroville's part. But perhaps the more spiritually inclined Aurovillians saw their community as a beacon for Tamil culture – if only the villagers could have understood the real meaning of Auroville, or even the real meaning of their own culture.

Villagers also saw that their village was in a transitional period, and many bewailed the decline of valued traditions, especially religious ones. However, the younger generation seemed to have no objections to the change. Auroville was indeed thought to be superior to the villages, but only on the economic level. Spiritually, it seems, many thought Auroville was even lower than the villages. Its seemingly business-oriented life and immoral practices excluded the possibility of Auroville being – at least significantly – a spiritual place. Auroville was rich and employment was a way Auroville could help the villages. A spiritual person was, to most villagers, one who took part in the village festivities and who knew the temple rituals, or perhaps he was a *saddhu*, a trav-

701 Cf. Said 1995: 206–207.
702 Said 1995: 207–208.
703 Cf. Ahiska 2003: 353–354.
704 Said 1995: 219–220.

eling holy man. Of course the Pondicherry ashramites from the North were often seen as superior in spirituality, but theirs was a more elitist type and few villagers felt familiar with or attracted to it. Only when villagers joined Auroville did they come under the influence of the Northern (Hindic/Neo Hinduist) spirituality which was also the Brahmanic and Indo-Orientalist kind. To the villagers, Matrimandir, the huge structure dedicated to the Divine Mother, was perhaps the only sign of Aurovillian spirituality, but ironically, to Aurovillians, villagers using it as a temple were superstitious and abusing the real meaning of the construction.

Said claims that Orientalism has imprisoned the Orient so that it "was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action." The Orient (like the Occident) is man-made and images of it have functioned as an underground Self for the West, demarcating what the West is *not* and thus giving strength and identity to the Western identity. The West and the East as European ideas have had a long tradition including certain ways of thinking, imaging and vocabulary to give the ideas "reality and presence in and for the West."[705] In Auroville, villagers were indeed seen as imprisoned by their culture and many Western Aurovillians emphasized the need to prevent Tamil Aurovillians from reverting to their old ways or from being too strongly influenced by them. Thus their family connections should be reduced, just the same way as had happened to Western Aurovillians when they moved to India. Auroville offered Tamil Aurovillians a forum where they could be freed from the dragging weights of their culture. This was not only rhetoric, for some Tamil Aurovillians felt indeed freed from a confining culture. But instead of the pressures of Tamil culture they had new Aurovillian, requirements to attend to. However, Auroville was not thought to force any culture on its inhabitants and Aurovillians were by no means thought to be imprisoned by *their* culture. Tamil culture represented a pinch of what Auroville could use and a lot of what it should abandon on its path towards a better humanity. In-the-heart Tamilness was a desirable ingredient of the New Man, but the superstition, influence of the family and force of tradition of the Tamils were not. Interestingly, Aurovillians did not see themselves as traditional, superstitious or too much influenced by their families. Perhaps they projected onto Tamil culture the things they disliked in themselves.

Stuart Hall claims that colonized natives accept the hegemonic Othering of the colonizer and thus begin to see themselves as Others[706]. Kuilapalayam, obviously was not colonized by Auroville and there was not enough Western information, contact, and, perhaps, hegemony, for a similar process to occur. For the villagers, the Aurovillians simply *existed*. The *Vellakara*s had their ways and the villagers had theirs. It seems that villagers had a rather relativist view of Auroville. Aurovillians could do whatever they wanted and behave as they liked as they were simply different folk. The two sides were seen as incommensurable. *Vellakara*s had their own god who had blessed them with wealth and villagers had theirs. The Western style of behavior might not have been accept-

705 Said 1995: 3–5.
706 Hall 1994: 394–395.

able among villagers but as long as it did not infiltrate the village, it did not matter. The villagers might not have liked Auroville but that did not mean they hated it either. Aurovillians, on the other hand, were often afraid of the villagers. There was a general fear when Aurovillians thought there was general hatred among villagers towards Auroville. For Western Aurovillians, villages were merely places to hurry past by when traveling to Pondicherry, the post office, the beach and so forth. However, the self-othering Hall describes was more evident in Tamil Aurovillians. Many of them faced the effects of the Western exercise of cultural power and normalization, and, in my view, saw themselves as the Other.

Orientalism is a form of cultural hegemony at work reinforcing and intertwining with the constructed image of Western culture and identity which are thought to be superior to their non-European counterparts. As Said says, the European observer in the Orient has never lost his upper hand to the Oriental. The European has gone to the Orient, has been present because he has been able to, and has experienced the Orient in a way that has met little resistance from the Orient's part.[707] Western Aurovillian representations of Tamils rarely met any resistance from the villagers' side as the villagers rarely had any knowledge of them. However, Tamil Aurovillians were able to resist the most upsetting depictions. They counter-criticized Westerners for their economic motivation and they resisted the tight filtering of Tamil applicants, but they never seemed to resist the key essentializations and the bipolarization. Perhaps these constituted seemingly more neutral-sounding representations of Tamil culture. For example, ancientness never came up in the villagers' interviews but Aurovillian Tamils seemed to make considerable use of the notion. It gave additional value to them as Aurovillians, and they did not seem to think it would have implicitly imprisoned them in a time lag or undermined the value of their contemporary culture.

Village Occidentalism represented Auroville as a place of business. Aurovillians were businesswomen and businessmen. The villagers could observe it in their fancy houses and motorbikes and the increasing wealth of fellow villagers who had joined or been employed by Auroville. Aurovillians did try to counter this representation. They tried to explain that Auroville was primarily a spiritual place. However, the villagers could hardly detect any spirituality in the community. The villagers had their own spirituality, their own religious rituals and festivities, prayers and temples. Actually, most Aurovillians saw no spirituality in the village either, as "spirituality" for Aurovillians was above religion. And religion – or even worse, superstition – was what the villagers had.

According to Said Orientalism has never been in direct relationship with political power, but it has indeed been in indirect and uneven exchange with it (meaning colonial establishments) *and* with cultural and moral power, not to mention intellectual power. It has been involved in establishing and reifying orthodoxies and canons of values and texts. Moreover, it has promoted thinking

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707 Said 1995: 7–8.

in terms of an "us" doing and thinking something "they" do not understand or never do in the way "we" do. For Said, Orientalism does not merely reflect the political-intellectual culture, but it *is* a considerable dimension of it. Ironically, it often seems to tell more about "our" world than it does about "theirs."[708] In Auroville, Orientalism likewise did not equal political power but was intertwined with it. In its most negative depictions, irresponsible, unreliable, lazy, opportunist Aurovillians of village origin were incapable of rising to administrative status since managerial skills were not thought natural to the Tamil character.[709]

Tamils were the underdogs of Auroville. They had less means than Westerners and they were often thought of as an economic burden to the community. Most Tamils were considered best kept on the outskirts of the community, on the borderline, employed and in contact, but not absorbed into Auroville. It was economically sound to have such a policy, although economics should have had nothing to do with the entry policy, at least according to the official philosophy of the community. While it is true that most human communities, countries, states and federations have limited the intake of economically insecure outsiders and it has been seen as economically rational of an "us" to share the cake only with "our people," Auroville, on the other hand, belonged to "humanity as a whole" and to live in Auroville one only had to have "good will" and be "the willing servitor of Divine consciousness." In my view, villagers seemed to possess these qualities at least as strongly as the Westerners did but they had significantly less money. Thus most of them could not be taken in, or had to wait years to join the community. Auroville indeed had a Tamil issue.

However, one has to admit that although Tamil applicants were discriminated against because of their low income, Auroville did help the villages in many ways. The health center provided services for villagers without means, free education was given to hundreds of village children and vocational training to the young. In addition, sustainable development projects were encouraged in the village by Aurovillian organizations. In this respect, many nations could have learned from the example of Auroville's help to outsiders eventhough the Central Fund of Auroville did not help the Aurovillian organzations and they were obliged to arrange for their own funding which often came from foreign and domestic donors. On the other hand, there are few nations in the world that are significantly dependent on migrant workers, and no country in the world has three times as many non-citizen migrant workers like Auroville. However, this is not so much a moral issue in itself, since most migrant workers in Auroville and in the world in general feel helped by the opportunity to work away from home, but to claim that it is merely an act of generosity on the part of the employer could be seen as hypocrisy.

Few Western Aurovillians had a profound or even adequate knowledge of Tamil culture. And what one does not know, one is often afraid of. The threat-

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708 Ibid.: 11–12.

709 Obviously, many Tamils did not have enough education for this but some village and Aurovillian Tamils and non-Tamil Aurovillians told me an educated Tamil had fewer chances in the Aurovillian job market.

ening otherness of Tamil villagers was translated into childlike, in-the-heart, ancient Tamilness. The attractiveness of these representations obscured the artificiality of the Aurovillian construction of Tamilness. Tamils were rhetorically important to Auroville as they represented the past which it was Auroville's role to link with the future. Aurovillian Tamilism, like Orientalism in general, responded more to the culture that produced it than to the object it imagined. The Tamils who spoke for themselves against the discourse were often considered, if not trouble-makers and agitators, arrogantly ungrateful for the presence of Auroville. Especially the youth of the village (and young Tamil Aurovillians) were thought of as not "remembering" the time before Auroville and how wretched "their" life had been before the establishment of Auroville and the consequent trickle-down effect on the village. Perhaps Western culture was as threatening to many villagers as Tamilness was for Westerners. However, if the villagers had bothered more to look into the thoughts and motives of Aurovillians and not draw conclusions based on their clothing, gender values and employer-status, they could perhaps have found Aurovillians valuable as neighbors in a greater variety of ways. Many of the villagers who did see behind village Occidentalism respected Aurovillian intentions and philosophy and aspired to become a part of the community. Unfortunately many of them were also thwarted in their aspirations because of their socio-economic background, among other reasons.

For many Aurovillians, the great moments of the Tamils were in the past and exactly like Said's Orientals, if they were useful to modern Auroville it was because the community was able to bring them out of their decline and turn them into "rehabilitated residents[710]." Like the Arabs in Orientalism, so too were Tamil villagers seen in Auroville as, at their worst, "devoid of energy and initiative," much given to "intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals[.]" They were "inveterate liars," "lethargic and suspicious," and "in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race."[711] An Oriental has been expected to act like an Oriental. If there has been any deviation, it must have been due to unnatural or non-indigenous factors. This was also the case in the Western Aurovillian view of the village, but inside Auroville the case was somewhat different. Tamil *Aurovillians* were actually expected to deviate more from their present culture to become "real" Tamils.

"Real" Tamils were the few individuals who could speak fluent English, who acted in a refined way, who could analyze the pros and cons of their culture and who could pleasantly and mildly criticize Western culture. A good Tamil Aurovillian was a rehabilitated villager who had learned the Indo-Orientalist narrative with respect to his own culture and who could see that the "right" spirituality was that of the Brahmanic Aurobindoan kind which Aurovillians attempted to practice. However, in the village Tamil Aurovillians were often seen as renegades of a sort, especially if they did not take care of their

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710 Cf. Said 1995: 33–35.

711 Cf. Baring & Cromer 1908: 146–167 in Said 1995: 38–39. This Orientalist view seems to have a lot in common with the so-called folk theories that are used in popular prejudices against unfamiliar peoples and marginalized groups. See Sarmela 2004.

former community anymore. If Tamil Aurovillians simply kept to themselves, did not produce any employment opportunities for fellow villagers and did not take part in collective village events, they became the Other for villagers, a lost cause and a sign of Western decadent influence that did not "bring any good to the family or the country," as a villager told me. Often they remained on the borderline as the Other to "both sides."

As in Said's Orientalism, in the most extreme forms of Aurovillian discourse the greatness of ancient Indian civilization was admired, but Aurovillians still valued more highly almost every Western aspect set for comparison, whether it was politics, culture or religion. If the Westerner was rational, virtuous and mature, the Tamil was irrational, depraved and childlike. The world of the Tamil had its own logic and coherence but it seemed that only Aurovillians could analyze it, make it intelligible and unveil its valuable cultural elements, even to Tamils themselves. Again, just as in common Orientalism, the intelligibility of Tamil culture was an outcome of *Western* analytical thinking, which yielded a Tamil identity for Western use. Thus, knowledge of the Tamils in a way created a special Tamilness for Western Aurovillians. The Tamil became something "one could judge, study, discipline and illustrate, and, hence, contain and represent."[712] The responsibility of Auroville was to defend the Tamils and their "real" traditional culture because they were on the verge of chaos and cultural extinction[713]. Considering the Western Aurovillian view, Tamils also seemed to fit well into the Hegelian imagery that shows the interaction between the East and the West as one-sided. The West is the one with agency and the maker of history while the non-Western Other is "a passive prisoner of his own culture, without history and waiting for the salvation from the West."[714]

Village Occidentalism in its representations of *Vellakara*s came surprisingly close to the Cameroonian stereotypes of white people[715]. As the land of the white people was the ultimate goal for many Cameroonians discussed in Chapter 4, likewise many Kuilapalayams dreamed of becoming Aurovillians. For both the Cameroonians and Tamil villagers to achieve the goal meant struggle. For both too the white man represented in the most prejudiced forms of discourse, "a wallet with legs" and meant infinite possibilities or quick cash. For Cameroonians white also meant exploitation, but this was not the case in Kuilapalayam. Only when Kuilapalayams joined Auroville did they start to see the equation in the binarity of exploiter/exploited. Although *Vellakara*s were often morally despised, there was still certain prestige attached to them. Or, as Ahiska claims, Occidentalism at the same time connotes something people both reject and want to be. The West has simultaneously been seen as a possibility and a threat, or superior but morally despised.[716]

712 Cf. Said 1995: 40.
713 Ibid.: 269–272.
714 Cf. Coronil 1996: 57–61.
715 Cf. Nyamnjoh & Page 2002.
716 Ahiska 2003: 365–367.

So what?

"So what?" a cynical observer might ask. The truth is a mobile army of metaphors, we cannot escape the power of discourse, people cannot avoid stereotyping, dividing into "us" and "them." Occidentalism and Orientalism have been and will be around forever. Stereotyping and essentialization have their undoubted benefits, as they reduce cognitive complexity to simpler terms and convey our perceptions in shorthand fashion[717]. All human perception is intertwined with some sort of imagination, conceptions of what ought to be, the Foucauldian archives and so forth. "So what?" The most obvious answer to the question is the ideology of human studies, the clearer view, more profound understanding, and the quest for less prejudice. The Orientalism and Occidentalism of academic disciplines and popular culture interact and are intertwined. Is it not healthy or even vital for anthropology, to name one discipline[718], to question its traditional assumptions, the West and the East? Scholars are not born in a vacuum and they are, needless to say, affected by the prevailing popular discourses of the Other. Obviously, popular culture is also affected by scholarly culture. It seems like the quest is to rid the discipline of the weight of the unnecessary preconceptions without reducing the discipline to soulless mathematical equations trying to explain people's behavior. Critical study of Occidentalist and Orientalist discourses might help scholars who want to draw a better map of the Other and Self to more strenuously guard their conclusions from preconceived archival stereotypes and imagery. The perfect map of the Other or the Self is, of course, never attainable.

As for Aurovillians and Kuilapalayams or any other "us" and "them" in the contemporary world, whether it is the Third World and the First, Muslims and Christians, terrorists and infidels, citizens and refugees, the rich and the poor, the gay and the straight, women and men, questioning the Orientalisms and Occidentalisms that essentialize the other might lead to surprising discoveries, the shattering of prejudices, from unilateral reduction to multilateral *pro*duction. Why is it that only Western Aurovillians saw villagers as ancient or imprisoned by their culture? Why did the villagers not see themselves as such? Why did only villagers see Auroville as a mere place of business? Or, on a more general level, why do discursive reductions and essentializations represent qualities of the Other group that few or none of the Others can identify with? I doubt if truthful representations can ever be reached and, however hard we try, peoples, nations, tribes, villages, us and them will always to some extent remain imagined. Thus, the question we must all (scholars, citizens of a country or members of a community) ask ourselves is why certain discourses prevail over others. Of the countless possible narratives and representational modalities, which factors, cultural configurations, balances of hegemony, political reasons do we choose instead of others? Why are certain modes of othering popular rather than the countless alternatives?

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717 Rubin & Sander 1991: 15

718 "Discipline" can also be read more methaphorically here.

We must also ask ourselves how imagining the Other relates to our imagining ourselves. The dangerous result of Orientalism and the Occidentalism that follows might be a form of social control[719]. If we accept definitions of terms like "the West" and "the East" or "Tamil" and "Aurovillian" without questioning them as if they directly referred to actual entities, conceptions of *real* Westerners and *real* Easterners or *real* Tamils and *real* Aurovillians emerge. Hence, the Other *and* the marginal Self like any other representative of "us" or "them," can be disciplined and brought into line. Hence, the hegemonic "we" can point to the archive and tell the marginalized or the outsider that he is not one of us and has to be excluded or, in order to become one of "us," assimilated.

Orientalism and Occidentalism in the end define the way to imagine the "right" Other and Self. In Auroville's Orientalism the right Tamils have the "real" traditions. They live modestly in their ancient village and respect and appreciate Auroville for its help. In the discourse, the right *Tamil* Aurovillian is somewhat different as he is supposed to be a representative of the right Tamilness but, in the new context, expected to renounce some of the old cultural elements and adopt new pleasantly Western and thus correctly Aurovillian ones. Aurovillian Occidentalism also defines "the Westerner," an essential character Aurovillians should have evolved onwards from. The Westerner is too "mental," meaning not very intuitive and far too rational[720]. Often Western Aurovillians thought they were a balanced mix of the East and the West, drawing on the best features of both sides. The hegemonic discourse of Auroville defined – or perhaps, confined – the elements of the East and the West that were acceptable. *Tamil* Aurovillians were, to some extent, to discard the overt influence of their families and relatives and turn away from their superstitious religion filled with empty rituals. Westerners were to moderate their rationalism and tone down their individualism for the sake of the well-being of the collective community. But, despite all the rhetoric, Auroville still remained hegemonically "Western" in its values.

Interestingly, although villagers were rather uninterested in setting themselves and *Vellakara*s in a dichotomy, they could be seen to have their own Orientalism, which represented the *Dalit*s as the Other. While it has to be remembered that I came across this phenomenon only tangentially in my fieldwork, as Kuilapalayam had no *Dalit* population, it is nonetheless surprising how much Vincentnathan's description of how the *Vanniyar*s view *Dalit*s resembles the Western Aurovillian view of Kuilapalayams. According to Vincentnathan *Vanniyar*s thought that *Dalit*s were intrinsically stupid, lazy and untrustworthy, and that no education could have affected their essential character. *Dalit*s could not handle or invest money properly. Nowadays, when *Dalit*s had educated themselves, obtained relatively high status occupations and started behaving in an egalitarian manner, the *Vanniyar*s engaged in nostalgic recollection of how humble and respectful towards *Vanniyar*s *Dalit*s had been in the old days. Vin-

719 Cf. Carrier 2003: 9.

720 Incidentally, many academically trained Aurovillians told me they had been blamed for being "too mental."

centnathan describes how the *Vanniyar*s lamented that now all had changed. *Dalit*s had become wealthier, which was visible in their conspicuous consumption. They had forgotten the valuable customs and traditions of Indian society. They were insolent and did not know their place any more. Although *Vanniyar*s treated *Dalit*s well, *Dalit*s had still become pushy and arrogant. Some *Dalit*s, however, had remained good and respectful.[721] It seems that every group and community has its hegemonic discourse against some other group that is looked down on. In Indian society, even *Dalit*s have their Others, who are either other *Dalit jati*s or the elite castes.

One should refrain from the easy conclusion that Auroville had a policy of exploitation of poor Indians in the community. Far from it. There were numerous non-Tamil people who had a genuine interest in Tamil culture, who treated their "workers" with a care and a friendliness uncommon in many Indian workplaces. Many villagers indeed felt more free and respected in Auroville. Blatant racism was rare and genuine altruism, sometimes inspired by Christian guilt, encouraged many to give financial support to the young, the women, the elderly and the underprivileged of the village. The only way Auroville could be seen as exploiting Tamils was in the acceptance of the economic status quo of India in the sense of capitalizing on the extremely cheap labor. However, most villagers did not see this as exploitation but help. The group of Tamils who were starting to view it as an exploitative policy were the (often young) Tamil Aurovillians who were adapted to the Aurovillian social environment and who had perhaps grown more attuned to the rhetoric of egalitarianism, while at the same time recognizing the huge financial capacity of Western Aurovillians.

Thus, a new mode of relative deprivation emerged in Auroville for Tamils who had before been more or less equally as indigent as their fellow villagers. Before, from the village, Tamils perhaps saw Western Aurovillian wealth as more like something existing in a dream-like state. It was viewed from a distance that made it seem almost like another world. "All of us" in the village were poor compared to "them, the *Vellakara*s," in Auroville. But when villagers joined Auroville, the wealth came closer and the people who owned the wealth more familiar. Then for the Tamil Aurovillian "some of us" Aurovillians were poor and "some of us" Aurovillians very rich. The wealth was not in a different world any more, but almost within reach. Nevertheless, in Auroville the wealth gap was striking and it was obvious that most of the people on the "wrong" side of the gap were Tamils.

The Pattern of Encounters

Brian Fagan has studied the clash of cultures in the context of Western exploration from the age of first great discoveries outside of Europe to the era of the

721 Vincentnathan 1996: 496.

colonization of the western plains of America[722]. In reading Fagan, one notes affinities with the relationship between Auroville and Kuilapalayam. According to Fagan,

> [i]n most cases, the first encounter with a hitherto unknown society was but a fleeting kaleidoscope of curiosity, sometimes horrified fascination, and often romantic excitement[723].

By way of an example Fagan describes the thoughts of Captain Cook who was surprised at how the natives he met were content with "just being." They did not seem to do anything, compared to the toiling Westerners. Many European explorers and Europeans reading about exotic peoples, however, viewed the natives with nostalgia. Their "uncomplicated" and "natural" lifestyle was admired and they seemed to represent some kind of lost paradise of the West. As the frequency of contact grew, the non-Westerners were turned into child-like beings only fit to work as servants for the colonizers. They were the lowest rank in European society on foreign soil and had no chance of upward mobility, even though some of them achieved prosperity and adopted Western manners, language and religion in the colonial society. Often the clergymen tried to convert the natives but their languages were too hard to master and they had enough to keep them busy with their own flock. The idyllic life, the simplicity and the strong sense of community of the natives was envied, but none of the Westerners really wanted to live like them in the end, because the society of the natives was after all that of ten-year-old children and they lacked all the great benefits and virtues of civilization. Eventually, nostalgia for the noble savage seemed to give way to the optimism about civilization concentrating on the West in the nineteenth century.[724]

With the growth of industrialization and the new political climate of the nineteenth century Europe, the people of non-Western societies started to be seen differently. Europeans no longer looked to the "savage past" as a simple utopian paradise but felt optimistic about the future of their own civilization. As European self-esteem reached new heights, popular esteem of the savages declined. Their putative nobleness turned into ignorance, dirtiness and limited intelligence while Europe began to mean "progress" and "freedom." When European colonialism had reached its peak, social scientists became convinced of the existence of races and the possibility of classifying them in such a way that lightness of skin color was indicative of the mental capacities of the race. The evolution of the races seemed inexorably to reach its glorious zenith in Western industrial society, which was ruled by logic and thus had the ability to progress.[725]

The natives, however, usually valued the European visitors for their trade goods, not their ideas. For example, in Tahiti Christianity was a lot harder to assimilate into the local culture than nails and firearms. The Tahitians were also rather uninterested in the world outside their islands, although most accounts

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722 Fagan 1984.
723 Ibid.: 2.
724 Ibid.: 2–127.
725 Ibid.: 127–132.

of foreign lands were heard with amazement and disbelief. Western missionaries, on the other hand, were exceedingly interested in the Tahitians. They established "model civilized societies[726]" on Tahitian land as an exmaple for the Tahitians to follow. The foreigners tried to persuade the natives to give their land to the colonizers on the grounds that there were to be significant benefits from the colonial residence for the locals. The European newcomers assumed they were doing the natives a tremendous favor. The missionaries expected the Tahitians to abandon their traditional beliefs and rituals, and other customs that had bonded their communities together. The new Tahitians were to be artisans, traders and farmers cultivating European crops. Norms laid down by the colonizer were to be accepted in art, music, dress, village layout and food.[727]

Often, in encountering the West, native people have seen significant political and material benefit in adopting the ideologies of the incomers. Usually the first to benefit have been the marginalized people of the native society, those with no secure position. Once they had adapted to the new culture, and once the colonization had gathered strength, they became important mediators between the Westerners and natives, having knowledge of both sides. In the case of the North American Hurons, trade and the white man's goods made Hurons increasingly dependent on the colonizers. The Christian faith was adopted quickly, not solely because the Hurons wanted to be spiritually saved but also because they hoped to gain economic benefits from it. White missionaries encouraged Huron converts to avoid their pagan families. Many Hurons were happy to renounce some of their burdensome traditional customs like gift giving. [728]

However, not all encounters between the West and the non-West have exemplified unequal balance of power. When the first merchant ships arrived on the northwest coast of America the Indians soon accepted the Europeans in all their strangeness as fellow humans and equal partners. The feeling seems to have been mutual, and the white traders even learned Indian culture and language because they quickly saw how beneficial this was for trade. For a long time, the Indians had a monopoly and thus the upper hand in dealings with the white men. Or, as Fagan says,

> The visiting captains had to treat [the Indians] with deference and coddle them with lavish hospitality. A close understanding of Indian customs and one's ceremonial obligations was essential to survival in the […] trade.[729]

In the long run the settling of Europeans along the coast of the northwest started to change Indian society. Indians lamented the white man's impact on Indian culture but tolerated the settlers for economic reasons. Interestingly, again, the individuals who benefited most were those who had earlier had low status in the native society. Perhaps they had nothing to lose in forming close contacts with

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726 Fagan later describes in p. 232 how a white settler missionary in North America built a model Christian village for Indians.
727 Fagan 1984: 147–149.
728 Ibid.: 150–208.
729 Ibid.: 216–217.

the foreigners. Their contacts with white settlers were scorned, though perhaps also envied by the majority of the native community, but they eventually turned out to produce economic gains and, further, prestige in the native society. Much later, when the trade had begun to decline, the natives had become dependent on a cash economy but had fewer sources of income because of competition. Many of the Indian tribes started to generate cash by producing artwork for the East Coast urban elite. The natives lost the upper hand as settlers invaded their lands. Interestingly, new stereotypes of Indians emerged. Now they were hostile and treacherous, they enjoyed disgusting ceremonies, were superstitious and incapable of hard work. However, according to Fagan, these negative attitudes towards the Indians were founded not only on ignorance but also on fear and insecurity. The settlers' society was fragile and if it had collapsed perhaps the settlers would have "reverted to the level of the Indians." The settlers felt outnumbered and were afraid of possible attacks from the outside. They lived in a new environment, alienated from their old and familiar social milieus. Intolerance and the feeling of racial superiority seemingly enabled the settlers to cope with their situation.[730]

It is not claimed here that Auroville is an example of the Western world colonizing the non-Western. However, it seems that an encounter between societies and the subsequent formation of hegemonic discourse about the Other obey at least some general rules related to the economic (im)balance and the interconnected feeling of hegemony. Fagan also says that

> [f]or more than four centuries, Europeans have debated their policies towards tribal societies, sometimes with passion, sometimes with insincerity, often with praiseworthy humanitarian concern. But rarely have they listened to the voices of the tribal societies themselves, and in most cases, the recommendation has been that indigenous peoples integrate themselves into the dominant society, blending the "best of both worlds" into a new, much more progressive future.[731]

What's in a Difference?

About five kilometers north of Auroville a "real India" for many Aurovillians and Kuilapalayams started, a place of water buffaloes, goats, women gathering firewood, men building keet roofs or toiling in the paddy fields, people waking up at dawn, eating one meal a day and toiling away as long as there was light. They did not grow cash crops but food for their families. They lived in villages built of clay, mud, straw and leaves. There were only a few brick houses built by the few big landowners, no fences, no guard dogs, no cars. There were a few motorbikes and mopeds here and there, and one bus a day to take the farmer to the city to sell his surplus or the farmer's wife to sell her flowers or handicrafts. The neighbors were always there and the work was hard but the life peaceful. Conflicts between people were few. Only the chicken, the goats, the buffaloes or the

730 Ibid.: 226–229.
731 Ibid.: 278.

cows caused trouble if they ate the neighbor's crops. But when the next wedding came, the conflicts were forgotten as were the saplings eaten by a cow. Caste existed and would remain, but perhaps there was a hidden rationality in the system.

The remote village for many Tamils and Westerners represented the *Krita Yuga*, the golden age of village India. For many Tamil Aurovillians it was the Kuilapalayam of their childhood, where people toiled but there was enough food and nothing was missing in life as there was nothing to ask for. There was a break from toil during a festival and every day long breaks were held under the Banyan tree, chatting with other farmers and friends, smoking *bidi*s and drinking coconut. Modernization of the villages had shattered this idyll. Why did the villages have to have phones, electricity, and cable TV? asked many who were nostalgically inclined. Why could the villages not be villages anymore? Was the whole of India bound to be drawn into the world of the mass media, commercials and rootlessness? Were the government and corporations bound to be extended even to the old man guarding the field and the granny sorting her cotton? Perhaps the old system where the landlord had the authority and the executive power had its weaknesses but, for many, it seemed harmonious enough. The neighbors and the relatives were their social security. Many romantically minded individuals asked whether the plastic tide had to destroy the village gods. Who was going to invite gods to their wedding or ask them for favors when it was revealed that only money could buy favors?

To many, something seemed to be vanishing fast. The warmth that could be felt in a remote village was disappearing by the laws of thermodynamics. The window to the cold global world had been opened. The warmth was escaping, and the shivering people were curling up by themselves, learning life from television, building safetynets of cash and starting to suffer from the endless syndrome of relative deprivation that was eventually to suffocate the whole world. The Westerners were no longer the only ones to consume, although many had hoped that the commodities, the products, the stores, the outlets, the production plants, the whole Western mass culture hydra would not spread like cancer all over the non-Western world.

I would say that in a way the more isolated, more remote villages were indeed living a *Krita Yuga*. When they became more modernized, they faced a deluge of commercials, commerce, market and consumption. They perhaps noticed that there would always be someone with more than they had. There would always be someone to sell what had been made desirable by commercials. Such knowledge traveled at the speed of light, even to the distant villages. They knew that there was a Honda motrobike with shiny chrome and a soft leather seat that would make them the king of the village. They knew there was Coca Cola, a beverage that promised a better world. They did not remember that they were paying for sugar and water that cost the extra money they had earned that day selling their crops. For a moment they saw the blue-eyed Aryan on TV. His life seemed to be enriched by the potion – why wasn't theirs? Then they returned to their cotton and paddy and dreamed about the

Honda, chewing gum, Marlboro and Heineken – all that meant the coming of *Krita Yuga* but in reality was perhaps a part of *Kali Yuga*, the last time, the time without control and time of change at a speed never seen before. It seems that nostalgia is inescapable, in Auroville-village relations, in Auroville, in the village, in Orientalism, Occidentalism, in anthropological theses or in life.

The most general imagined division exhibited in this thesis is the dichotomy of the East and the West. Somehow it seems to us so natural that we often do not even begin to question it. There is no pressure to question it as its unquestioned use often has no negative implications to us. It is easy and safe to call "us" Western and call "them" Eastern. There must be some practical reason behind the division and to some extent it must reflect something "real" in the world but it is mostly imagined, largely exaggerated, and to define the two sides in other than geographic terms is almost impossible.

Jack Goody has examined the relationship between the eastern and western parts of the Eurasian continent. According to Goody, the difference between the two is easily exaggerated, particularly if one wants to emphasize the history of the world in the last few centuries. In Goody's view the Western scholars have indeed overemphasized the differences at the expense of the Other. This has led to a distorted understanding of both the Orient and the Occident. Goody is not trying to make the whole world appear the same but to show that the societies of Eurasia have been formed out of the same mould, and that the differences, which are never very deep, are built upon a shared foundation. In Western discourse, rationality, Protestantism, modernization and capitalism are seen as almost interchangeable concepts. But "progress" seems to be a pendulum-like process, swinging from the East to the West and back. The West has had its few hundred years of economic and cultural hegemony, and it seems as if it is now the East's turn. It is futile to speak of cultural factors like "individualism" to explain progress in the West. In Goody's view it is more fruitful to go back as far as the shared Bronze Age and looking at history from then onwards, discussing why at certain periods the East seems to have been ahead of the West and at certain eras it has been the other way around. At any rate, oppositions like "our" individualism and rationality versus "their" collectivism and irrationality are highly inflated. Whatever the differences are, they are gradual, not essential.[732]

Can one divide humanity, asks Edward Said, into clearly different cultures, societies and histories, and survive the consequences humanly? Are the distinctions bound to "favor the home team?" Can terms like Western or Eastern be used justifiably and without polarizing the distinction? How different are the East and the West "in real life?" How do they exist? Are there any essential, core differences? Are the East and the West in any way bipolar or mirror-images? Or are they more like two hockey teams with their supporters in a match: all heterogeneous people who cannot be actually divided into two distinguishably opposite teams, not in any other way than making up the distinction, imagining it, dressing up the players, seeing two opposite goals, produc-

732 Goody 1996: 226–248.

ing team spirit, encouraging bipolarism and competition, finding and emphasizing differences, inventing opposites. This is not to maintain that people of the East and the West are mere inventions and only imaginary. It seems that there are some differences on the general level as, of course, also countless differences in detail. If "Western" means for example being industrialized, wealthy and individualist and so on, then one could say that many countries are not very Western. If "Eastern" means for example family values, collectivism and less capitalism, then some countries are more Eastern than others. However, considering the frequency with which these terms are used, it is surprising how little they have been defined rather than simply taken for granted in both popular and scholarly discourse.

"Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet," Kipling's verse appeared at the start of this thesis. It has been viewed as a prime example of Orientalist discourse producing the East/West dichotomy. However, Kipling continues in a hopeful manner which might one day be accepted also in both academic study and popular views of Indian and other non-Western societies in the area we call "the West":

"But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!"

YHTEENVETO

Tulkintoja Toiseudesta. Orientalismi ja oksidentalismi tamileiden ja eurooppalaisten välisissä suhteissa Etelä-Intiassa.

Orientalismi ja oksidentalismi

Tutkimukseni päämäärä, jonka esittelen ensimmäisessä luvussa, on tarkastella orientalismin ja oksidentalismin esiintymistä Intiassa. Olen soveltanut orientalismi- ja oksidentalismiteoriaa Etelä-Intiassa sijaitsevan monikansallisen Auroville-yhteisön ja yhteisön läheisyydessä sijaitsevan tamilikylän, Kuilapalayamin, suhteeseen. Tutkimukseni kulmakivi on Aurovillen ja Kuilapalayamin alueella keräämäni kenttätyöaineisto vuosilta 1999 ja 2003.

Tutkimukseni teoreettisen viitekehyksen muodostaa Edward Saidin vuonna 1978 julkaisema teos *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, jota käsittelen luvussa 2. Huomattavaa keskustelua aiheuttaneessa kirjassaan Said analysoi kriittisesti eurooppalaista orientalistista diskurssia lähinnä ranskalaisiin, englantilaisiin ja yhdysvaltalaisiin Aasiaa koskeviin teksteihin tukeutuen. Saidin mukaan länsimainen suhtautuminen aasialaisiin kansoihin ja kulttuureihin on ollut tiiviissä yhteydessä eurooppalaisen kolonialismin historiaan, minkä vuoksi orientalismi, diskurssi ”Orientista”, on konstruoinut pitkälti liioitellun, yleistävän ja eurosentrisen kuvan ei-eurooppalaisista kansoista.

Saidin orientalismin lisäksi käsittelen hänen ajatteluun oleellisesti vaikuttaneita Nietzscheä, Gramscia ja Foucault’ta luvussa 3. Nietzschen nihilistinen kuva totuudesta ”metaforien, metonyymien ja antropomorfismien liikkuvana armeijana” on Saidin orientalismikritiikin retorinen lähtökohta, jonka vaikutusta Saidiin on tosin myöhemmin ylikorostettu. Gramscin ajattelu ja varsinkin tämän käsitys hegemoniasta on puolestaan tarjonnut Nietzscheä vankemman pohjan Saidin lähestymistavalle. Saidin selkeästi merkittävin oppi-isä on kuitenkin ollut Foucault, vaikkakin yksilön valta ja vapaus suhteessa hegemoniseen diskurssiin on Foucault’lla huomattavasti pessimistisempi kuin Saidilla. Luvun lopuksi käsittelen orientalismikritiikin aiheuttamaa keskustelua sekä Saidin puolesta että häntä vastaan. Luvussa 4 käsittelen Orientalismin vastapainoksi antropologiassa ja sosiaalitieteissä vähemmän huomiota saanutta oksidentalismia eli ”Länttä” koskevaa diskurssia ja myös sen luomaa Itä/Länsi-dikotomiaa. Teoreettisen osuuden lopuksi tarkastelen erityistapauksena Intiaa koskevaan orientalismia luvussa 5.

Diskurssi Aurovillessä ja Kuilapalayamissa

Aineisto-osassa luvuissa 6 ja 7 esittelen aluksi Kuilapalayamin kylän ja Auroville-yhteisön. Kuilapalayamin kylän esittelyssä tarkastelen ensin tamilikulttuurin pääpiirteitä ja sitten informanttieni puheenvuoroihin nojautuen erityisesti kylän sosiokulttuurista muutosta ja kyläläisten asenteita siihen. Aurovillen esittelyssä käyn läpi yhteisön ideologian ja 35-vuotisen historian pääpiirteissään sekä tarkastelen tamilikyläläisten asemaa yhteisössä.

Kuilapalayamissa ja Aurovillessä ilmentynyttä orientalismia ja oksidentalismia analysoin muutamien esiin nousseiden teemojen kautta. Kuilapalayamin oksidentalismi, jota käsittelen luvussa 8, korosti Auroville-yhteisön merkitystä työllistäjänä ja edelleen työllistämistä pitkälti moraalisena kysymyksenä. Kuilapalayamilaiset arvostivat Aurovillen vaikutuksesta tapahtunutta elintason nousua, mutta useimmiten vieroksuivat yhteisön eurooppalaisten arvojen vaikutusta kulttuuriinsa ja varsinkin nuorisoonsa. Kyläläiset eivät juuri tulkinneet eurooppalaisia suoraan, vaan arvottivat heitä lähinnä Aurovilleen muuttaneiden kyläläisten kautta. ”Länsi” ja eurooppalaisuus olivat tarkasteltavissa tamiliaurovilleläisten käyttäytymisessä tapahtuneissa muutoksissa. Tamilien oksidentalismia käsitellessä tarkastelen myös Aurovilleen muuttaneiden tamileiden näkemyksiä, jotka toivat esiin muun muassa käsityksen tietynlaisesta kulttuurien rajapinnassa elämisestä. Rajapinta edusti useimmille tietynlaista liminaalitilaa, jossa jouduttiin kokemaan painetta molemmilta puolilta olematta koskaan ”oikeasti” kummankaan puolen edustaja.

Aurovilleläinen, hegemonisesti eurooppalainen orientalismi, jota analysoin luvussa 9, puolestaan näytti noudattavan hyvin pitkälti Saidin kuvaileman diskurssin suuntaviivoja. Aineistoni mukaan Aurovillen orientalismi vahvisti binääristä ontologiaa ”Idän” ja ”Lännen” välillä sekä, yhteisön monikulttuurisista ihanteista huolimatta, tukeutui voimakkaasti eurosentrisiin tulkintoihin tamileiden ja eurooppalaisten välisistä eroista. Merkittävinä orientalistisina elementteinä analysoin eurooppalaisten käsityksiä tamilikulttuurista yksilöllisyyttä ja kehitystä pikemminkin rajoittavana kuin mahdollistavana tekijänä verrattuna länsimaiseen kulttuuriin, joka toimi useimmiten edistyksen metaforana.

Aurovillen orientalismissa oleellinen osa oli myös kuviteltu tamileiden muinaisuus, essentialistinen käsitys, jonka mukaan nykytamileiden ydinolemuksessa oli tamileita määrittävää vuosituhantista muinaisuutta, joka tosin ajan kuluessa oli pitkälti degeneroitunut ”väärien” traditioiden ja ”liian modernien” tapojen nykytamiliudeksi. Yhtäältä havaittua residuaalista muinaisuutta arvostettiin, mutta toisaalta sen koettiin aiheuttavan tamileille vaikeuksia modernisaation suhteen. Nykytamilit nähtiin elävän suorastaan eri ajassa ja kärsivän kulttuurista aikaviipymää verrattuna nykyeurooppalaiseen elämään.

Viimeisen luvun yhteenvedossa käyn läpi Aurovillen ja Kuilapalayamin suhteen orientalistisen ja oksidentalistisen diskurssin ydinkohdat, suhteutan ne teoriaosassa analysoimaani kirjallisuuteen ja pohdin diskurssien muotoutumisen sosiokulttuurisia taustatekijöitä. Yleisemmällä tasolla pohdin ”Idän” ja ”Lännen” kohtaamisia ja usein dikotomiseen suhteeseen asetettujen käsitteiden mielekkyyttä.

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Interviews

Name, date of interview, gender (M/F), origin (I/E =Indian/European, American or Australian), residence (A/K/O = Auroville/Kuilapalayam/other), age group (1 = 20–29, 2 = 30–39, 3 = 40–49, 4 = 50–59, 5 = 60–). Information unknown = X. All interviews by author made in Auroville-Kuilapalayam area. Material in possession of the author.

Recorded audio by the author

Alfred, 120899, M, E, A, 3
Ambika, 050603, F, I, A, 2
Anna, 290799, F, E, A, 3
Anushiya, 270603, F, I, K, 5
Aravan, 090603, M, I, K, 5
Aravinth, 200503, M, I, K, 3
Arivalagi, 060903, F, I, A, 3
Arjun, 220503, M, I, A, 5
Balasingam, 220799, M, I, A, 1
Basim, 150703, M, I, A, 3
Bava, 070703, F, I, K, 1
Benjamin, 080803, M, E, A, 4
Chinnadurai, 020703, M, I, K, 1
Devanathan, 020703, M, I, K, 1
Devanesan, 100703, M, I, A, 1
Devi, 040703, F, I, O, 2
Eliza, 250799, F, E, A, 4
Ernst, 020703, M, E, O, 1
Eva, 130803, F, E, A, 2
Ezhumalai, 130503, M, I, A, 3
Franz, 270503, M, E, A, 3
Ganeshkumar, 030703, M, I, A, 2
Gnanaoli, 100703, M, I, K, 1
Hans, 220503, M, E, A, 3
Iniyan, 040703, F, I, K, 4
Jacob, 090803, M, E, A, 3
Jacques, 090503, M, E, A, 5
Jaisukh, 050899, M, I, A, 2
Jasmin, 010903, F, E, A, 2
Judy, 260799, F, E, A, 3
Kannan, 200503, M, I, A, 2
Kannappan, 090803, M, I, A, 5
Karamchand, 290603, M, I, A, 1
Karthik, 190703, M, I, K, 2
Kavitha, 070803, F, I, A, 2
Leela, 200503, F, I, A, 3
Lingappan, 210799, M, I, A, 3
Lisa, 220799, F, E, A, 4
Manprasad, 210503, M, I, A, 4
Mary, 130903, F, E, A, 1
Mayilan, 150803, M, I, A, 2
Moorthi, 160803, M, I, K, 4
Muthu, 190703, M, I, V, 2
Oscar, 230699, M, E, A, 5
Periyasivam, 190703, M, I, K, 1
Perumal, 190603, M, I, K, 2
Peter, 100803, M, E, A, 4
Rajiv, 130503, M, I, A, 2
Ramappan, 020899, M, I, A, 1
Rathinam, 090603, M, I, K, 4
Ravanan, 080703, M, I, A, 3
Rykaard, 150303, M, E, A, 4
Shirley, 210503, F, E, A, 4
Sundari, 070903, F, I, A, 2
Vallikai, 250503, F, I, A, 2
Velavan, 260603, M, I, A, 3
Vishnu, 100703, M, I, K, 1
Viveka, 190903, F, I, A, 1
Willem, 290799, M, E, A, 3

Recorded in field notes by the author

Alfred, 150503, M, E, A, 4
Entry Group, 170903, M+F, I+E, A, 1–3*
Kumar, 100603, M, I, A, 1
Lakshmi, 060903, F, I, A, 1
Mayilan, 300503, M, I, A, 2
Theepan, 120503, M, I, A, 2

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Govindan, 221098, M, I, A, 2
Kundran, 270304, M, I, A, 3
Mani, 201098, M, I, A, X
Nedumaaran, 270304, M, I, A, 1
Ulagarasan, 221098, M, I, A, 1

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Alfred, 010399, M, E, A, 3
Gauri 3/99**, F, I, A, 5
Imaran 3/99**, M, I, A, 5
Luc, 120399, M, E, A, 3
Sarah, 160399, F, E, A, 5
Shraddhavan 3/99**, F, E, A, 4

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