

# Interior horizons: an ethical space of selfhood in South India

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While interiority is typically associated with selfhood in the modern West, this article conveys the formation of an interior topography of selfhood in South India. A 'genealogy' of interiority, it is argued, would address the moral forces, ethical practices, and historical accidents through which such an internal space of subjectivity may be constituted. Focusing most closely upon the moral life of a single individual, the article charts a 'folding' inward of three forms of exterior life: collective histories of moral transformation, vernacular traditions of ethical conduct, and personal experiences of inhabited landscape, all of which work together upon the 'heart' as an interior terrain of ethical self-engagement.

Over the course of many months of fieldwork in the Cumbum Valley, a lush agrarian region in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, I developed a close relationship of counsel and friendship with an elderly cultivator named Ayyar Thevar. Poor, blinded in old age, widowed, and neglected by his children, Ayyar Thevar tried to ensure that I would not make the mistakes of judgement through which he felt he had ruined his own life. Our conversations were always anchored in elements of moral advice he deemed most suitable for me: a young man from abroad immersed in a foreign and often morally treacherous rural milieu. At the same time, these dialogues also yielded glimpses of how this elderly man had come over time to relate to himself in an ethical sense. 'The good and the bad are in this heart alone, this heart alone knows these', he said, gesturing toward his chest one July morning in 2005, as we chatted in the small thatched shack that his children had recently raised for him. He spoke not only of the nature of the heart, but of the way in which one could work upon its character and qualities: what one could do, for example, when one was suddenly struck by the recollection of misfortune:

Sometimes I think of this world ... 'These people have all died, all of this has gone, but God, I am still here'. If I think this, I sweat ... the mind catches fire, just like that, it boils. I get up and walk around, thinking about that boiling. 'What you [I say to myself], I have thought this thought [of my own suffering], but this is a bad thought. Let it go'. And just like that, if I slow that [thought] down, I come

back to myself. We should not think that. That thought is wrong. 'Go you [I say to my heart], go whichever way'. Go down one path. Don't go down many paths. Go along just one path.

Musing on the perils of desire, Ayyar Thevar had sketched an image of a kind of dialogue one could have with oneself. He had described the visceral pain that some intense thoughts and recollections could induce, and the danger they posed of estranging oneself from one's life in the world altogether. In such circumstances, one had to reflect upon these thoughts and feelings from a certain kind of distance: to judge them as bad or harmful, so as to free oneself from their hold and return to oneself. Such reflection depended upon an imagination of one's own heart and mind as a landscape of moral choice, as an interior space that could be occupied and navigated in the same way that one might pick one's way through a rural landscape of many paths. Although Ayyar Thevar had grown blind to the world with age, he had come to visualize himself with a profound and moving clarity.

All of this may be quite familiar to us, as modern heirs to a Western tradition of critical self-engagement. But from an anthropological standpoint, there is something rather odd and perhaps surprising in this very familiarity, in the interiority of selfhood to which this marginal figure from South India had testified. Anthropologists have long emphasized that 'the self', in a substantive sense, is an artefact of particular cultural, historical, and philosophical traditions. Many languages, Marcel Mauss had famously noted, for example, in his 1938 Huxley Memorial Lecture at Oxford, employ both first-person pronouns and verbal suffixes to qualify relations between subjects and objects of utterances (Mauss 1985 [1938]). An idea, however, of the self as an 'indivisible and individual' locus of rational consciousness and agency was one that Mauss attributed to a series of more particular movements in modern Western philosophical thought, challenging the notion that it could be taken as 'engraved since Adam in the innermost depths of our being' (1985 [1938]: 20).<sup>1</sup> Like many others since, Mauss had contended here that among other societies elsewhere in the world, personhood ramified outward rather than inward, into a social world of fluid names, ranks, and roles rather than an individual ground of personal integrity and subjective certainty. This article seeks, on the contrary, to grasp the making of an interior selfhood through other cultural traditions of self-engagement.<sup>2</sup>

I rely upon the premise that an anthropological approach to 'ethics' yields an effective means of grappling with this problem. In recent years, many anthropologists have addressed ethics as the project of remaking oneself as a moral being: the practical techniques through which individuals and collectives may engage their own acts, desires, and feelings as objects of cultivation and transformation (Faubion 2001; Hirschkind 2006; Laidlaw 2002; Mahmood 2005). To address ethics in this sense – a mode of scholarly inquiry greatly inspired by the later work of Michel Foucault (1990; 1997*a* [1984]) – is to take the domain of selfhood as an arena of transformative labour rather than one of discovery: to attend, that is, to the 'historical ontology' (Foucault 1997*b* [1984]) of particular forms of selfhood rather than to map the coordinates of their deep and abiding truths. In what follows, I focus upon ethical practices of the self in South India – such as the techniques to which Ayyar Thevar had alluded that July morning – as elements of a Nietzschean 'genealogy' of interiority, attesting to the contrary forces, histories, and accidents of experience through which selves may be invested with durable and workable depths. I argue that the constitution of an interior domain of selfhood in modern South India can be understood in relation to three overlapping and

moralizing forces: the colonial experiences that imposed Western modes of self-engagement most powerfully upon certain collective subjects of the region; the vernacular moral and ethical traditions that both prefigured and displaced these modern histories in significant ways; and the practices of quotidian life through which these and other forms of exterior experience may be ‘folded’ (Deleuze 1988) into an interior horizon of ethical selfhood.

I seek to elucidate these arguments by means of a particular method – by focusing upon the moral and ethical life of a single individual, namely the person with whom I began this article: Ayyar Thevar. Anthropological work on selfhood and personhood has often dwelt closely upon singular individuals to capture both the creativity and exemplarity of their lives (e.g. Biehl 2005; Crapanzano 1980; Desjarlais 2003). Here, I focus on how my elderly friend had sought late in life to remake himself as a moral subject. His account of a belated effort to moralize himself highlights the relationship between personal biographies and shared collective histories in the making of an ethical selfhood.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, I have written extensively about the community from which Ayyar Thevar hailed – the Piramalai Kallar caste of South India, notorious in colonial and postcolonial times for their putatively ‘criminal’ proclivities – and the myriad practices of virtue, habituation, and reform through which modern state agencies and Kallars themselves have sought to transform collectively their conduct and inclinations (Pandian 2009). Here, I focus upon how one individual who has inherited such experience came to struggle with his own heart, and through such a practice of ethical self-conduct came to fashion for himself an interior space of reflexive selfhood.

### For a genealogy of interiority

Selfhood in the West has long been imagined to concern an interior space of personal discovery, attention, and struggle. Against this image, many anthropologists have stressed the social, exterior, and impersonal dimensions of selfhood elsewhere, casting the idiosyncrasy of modern Western selfhood as ‘almost a truism’ (Taylor 1989b: 111). Philosopher Charles Taylor (1989a, 1989b) has argued that the sense of the ‘inner depths’ of selfhood so powerful and pervasive in the modern West has depended for its development upon the historical emergence of two kinds of ‘radical reflexivity’: a philosophical emphasis on rational self-control, and a religious and literary language of deep and essential ‘inwardness’. His meticulous history of this ‘moral topography’ – this spatial quality of moral selfhood – betrays, however, certain presumptions that we may query. Taylor suggests not only that ‘inwardness’ forms the ground for moral claims in the modern West – constituting ‘the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand’ (Taylor 1989b: 27) – but also that all human beings share a certain kind of spatial orientation toward the good. ‘To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space’, he writes, likening this orientation to the act of studying a map in the midst of a trek (1989b: 28). Locating the concern for such an exterior moral space ‘very deep in the human psyche’ (1989b: 28), Taylor’s history of Western interiority is ultimately caught between a historicizing imperative, on the one hand, and a naturalizing impulse, on the other.

An alternative approach to the formation of an interior selfhood is opened by Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of morals*. Rather than finding Western interiority to realize the moral promise of an essential and underlying spatiality of human nature, Nietzsche instead tracked the moments of accident, displacement, and reversal through

which certain selves may be invested with interior depths in the first place.<sup>4</sup> What Nietzsche named 'bad conscience', for example, arises when resentment of another is turned back into a resentment of oneself; it is through such a reflexive turn of will and instinct against themselves that the 'soul' opens up, he argues, as a deep and abiding interior space:

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward* – this is what I call the *internalization* of man: thus it was that man first developed what was later called his 'soul'. The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth, and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was *inhibited* (Nietzsche 1967 [1887]: 84).

For Nietzsche, the kind of being that comes to understand itself and the world from the standpoint of its own inwardness – the self at the heart of Taylor's reflexivity – is born of the force of a folding inward from without: interiority, in other words, is the terrain of moral selfhood established when certain kinds of individuals turn against themselves. Nietzsche sought to diagnose the consequences of such a reflexive turn: when it may be taken as a sick morality, and when it may promise instead the birth of new values (Laidlaw 2002: 316).

Nietzsche formulated these arguments in the late nineteenth century as a rejoinder to theological and metaphysical positions investing human advancement with the certitude of teleology. His use of a language of instinct attests to his engagement as well with diverse currents of evolutionary thinking, operating once again to affirm the contingency at work in the transformation of living beings (Moore 2006). Rejecting the premise that the development of moral faculties could be attributed to their intrinsic utility – like 'the eye being made for seeing, the hand being made for grasping' (Nietzsche 1967 [1887]: 77) – Nietzsche insisted instead upon a careful attention to the 'soil' (1967 [1887]: 82) or ambient conditions in which particular forms of moral and personal life might emerge, flourish, or disappear. His genealogical approach therefore emphasized an intimate relationship between interiority and exteriority, each of these dimensions remaking the other through an indefinite process of becoming.

The simple image of a fold, its interior depths formed by the turning of a surface against itself, may provide the clearest means of grasping the openness of this process. What one finds in Nietzsche's account of interiority, Foucault has argued, is a 'glittering exteriority that was covered up and buried': genealogy reveals that personal 'depth was only a game and a surface fold', an interior volume fashioned through the involution and creasing over of an exterior horizon (Foucault 1998: 273). Building upon such observations, Gilles Deleuze (1988) has suggested that ethics in Foucault's sense are best understood by means of this language of 'folding', arguing that the ethical practices that Foucault examined in the classical Western world – such as bodily exercises and pedagogic relations to others – should be understood as ways of transforming relations with an 'outside' into relations with oneself. 'Interiorization' here may have also involved 'a new way of being-in-the-world', of becoming aware of oneself as a part of cosmic nature (Hadot 1995: 211). Nevertheless, interiority and exteriority are rendered inextricable, fashioned in relation to each other.

Although these arguments of Nietzsche and his heirs have been elaborated in specific historical circumstances – and with particular Western problems in mind – I

would argue that this image of involuted interiors and exteriors is useful for the understanding of diverse forms of selfhood elsewhere. Its value lies in its twofold ability to account for the formation of inner depths without committing to the essential workings of a cultural or psychological schema, and without neglecting the significance of diverse social, material, and worldly engagements.<sup>5</sup> Genealogies of interiority promise to reveal the kinds of exteriority – embodied acts, social and pedagogic relations with others, inhabited environments, and ‘assembled locales’ (Rose 1996: 38) – folded into and forming the selfhood at stake. Recent anthropologies of ethics testify to the significance of such relations in various circumstances: to the efficacy of outward practices of prayer, discipline, and sermon audition, for example, in the cultivation of durable inward dispositions of piety (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). With respect to India too, one might call attention to ascetic endeavours to cleanse the soul by folding inward the purity of sacrificial fire (Laidlaw 1995); to idioms of religious devotion that turn inward interpersonal relations of love and service (Hardy 1983); and to quotidian practices of perfecting oneself in relation to the moral qualities of a lived environment (Pandian 2008b).<sup>6</sup>

Nietzschean genealogy addresses a *historical* ontology of selfhood: the social and historical conditions under which people may constitute themselves as particular kinds of moral beings, and the conditions under which they may become otherwise. Although many scholars of South Asia (e.g. Beteille 1991; M. Mines 1996) have sketched Indian modes of self-consciousness and self-reflection, I focus here upon the *making* of such a space of interiority through moral dissension and ethical struggle with oneself, as individuals come to ‘populate themselves with the feelings of others’ (Trawick 1992: 251).<sup>7</sup> I argue that certain forces are especially significant in the making of such interior relations with oneself in modern India. We may consider the consequences of the colonial encounter, which – as Ashis Nandy argued influentially – had provoked among many of its subjects a splitting of self against self through a ‘controlled inner schism’ (1983: 109). We may also examine native confrontations with the moral challenges of modern experience, such as the emergent ‘poetry of interiority’ in colonial Bengal that enlisted and reworked long-standing Indian literary and philosophical vocabularies of selfhood (Kaviraj 2001). Lastly, we may address the specific ways that these historical movements gain a foothold in more personal trajectories of experience. Through what quotidian acts, habits, and hopes are these histories folded inward to form an interior domain of selfhood? In what follows, I focus on these three genealogical dimensions with respect to the imagination and exercise of a single life in South India.

### A life to regret

Born into a modest agricultural family in the rural Cumbum Valley, Ayyar Thevar had worked as a cultivator for most of his eighty-odd years. The family had wealth and influence when he was a child, he told me: ‘We ate comfortably, and we lived well’. But his father had died while he was still young, and his mother had to sell off their livestock and parcels of their land bit by bit to marry off her several daughters and sons. Ayyar Thevar studied in the local village school until the fifth grade, when he too began to plough the dry upland soils south of his village for peanuts, sesame, millets, pulses, and other rainfed crops. Over many decades, he told me, he had seen the seasonal rains wash out the strength of this earth, leaving behind meagre and unpredictable yields. At first he found the work difficult and unappealing: ‘I did not

have the right inclination, to practise agriculture, to earn, to struggle' he told me. He was overcome at times by the desire to lie down and sleep even when he was ploughing, leaving the harnessed bulls standing idle in the fields. Recollecting such deeds with a wry and mournful laugh, Ayyar Thevar sketched the past of his life as an existence bereft of judgement.

I knew him as someone almost totally blind and mostly immobile, spending his days under the thatched porch of the grimy and disused village 'Reading Room' in the company of Mookiah Thevar, an irascible kinsman equally crippled by old age. I never found him venturing any further from his eldest son's home than this customary perch, gingerly tapping a wooden staff across the narrow packed-earth lane dividing these spaces. Doctors had seen in Ayyar Thevar's clouded grey eyes an advanced and incurable state of glaucoma; he insisted, however, that his optical nerves had atrophied due to a reckless indulgence in 'small pleasures' and a diversion of his vital energies from head to waist. 'Which name to say?' he said once when I asked about these affairs. He had taken several wives in quick succession as a young man, leaving one for another while engaging in countless other affairs on the side. 'I wandered here and there a lot', he admitted: 'I cannot say, I indulged that much'. Like many others in India, he understood the body to bear a limited reserve of vital fluids and energies; exhausting these without reflecting upon the consequences of his actions, he had let his eyes go to ruin.<sup>8</sup> 'It is because of my ignorance back then that I am in this half-life now', Ayyar Thevar said as we spoke one afternoon: 'With unseeing eyes, a dead man'.



Ayyar Thevar, July 2005.

For all of Ayyar Thevar's liaisons, he had wound up a widower too in old age, the last of his wives passing away some years ago, and he depended now upon the charity of his sons and daughter for his simple survival. His children, struggling with families of their own, were mostly disgruntled with his needs and bitter that he had failed to pass on much to them. Landless, as was he, they depended on the nearby forests and on agrarian wage labour for their livelihood. Ayyar Thevar felt that they begrudged him even the bowls of leftover rice that they would take turns sharing, and the few rupees he expected for his weekly tea and smokes were more difficult to come by. 'The house tells me to go, the graveyard tells me to come', he sometimes said with a sigh, as if preparing himself for an imminent death. From neglecting to help him bathe to offering no more than plain soured rice to eat, there were many subtle ways he felt that his sons and daughter-in-laws conveyed their indifference. 'Kick him out. Beat him. Go off and die!' – he felt that it was as if they had voiced such things.

This wounding, however, was something that Ayyar Thevar felt from them but also inflicted upon himself. 'I am ashamed to talk about all that I have done, Anandha', he told me. Recollected mistakes kept him awake at night with a sober sense of the 'good life' that he could have had if he had only acted with judgement in earlier years. This regret for an absence of judgement sometimes assumed poetic forms of expression:

'Jackal, what judgement? Desiring the fish in the water and dropping a fragrant bit of meat, why look then to the sky?'

'Listen madam, leaving aside a king to take the hand of a worthless fellow – is it not like that?' (Manikkam 1997).

The verse from the *Vivēka cintāmani*, a popular anthology of Tamil moral poetry dating back to the seventeenth century, presents a riverside exchange between a jackal and a young woman, one lunging mistakenly for a fish in the water while the other waits to meet a clandestine lover. What is worth emphasizing about Ayyar Thevar's recitation of these lines, gleaned from a print edition once owned by his friend Mookiah Thevar, is the subtle but crucial shift in the language of its utterance. '*Cantuvēn en puttiyai*', he would invariably say to open this verse, rather than '*campuvē enna putti*', as the print edition reads: from the dialogic question 'Jackal, what judgement?' to a reflexive form he took to mean 'I curse my own judgement'.<sup>9</sup> The dialogue portrayed by the verse, in other words, was interiorized in its reiteration, taken to stand for a critical relation to oneself. The heart emerged from Ayyar Thevar's interpretation as a locus of judgement both within and apart from oneself, an object of both address and struggle. 'The heart will keep going [wherever it desires]', Ayyar Thevar once had told me, sketching this organ as an interior locus of necessary restraint and control.

Like many other elders here, Ayyar Thevar found instances of failed judgement all around him. The porch where he spent his days faced a wide lane where men and women often gathered, drifting toward the tea stall, provisions store, temple courtyard, and shaded ground lying between nearby houses. He would listen as stories of boastful exploits and scandalous discoveries were eagerly told, and would call out with his own wry comments in the midst of quarrels and arguments. Mookiah Thevar shared not only verses and tales from his weathered bundle of religious texts, but also stories he would read aloud at various times throughout the day from

Tamil-language newspapers they had been passed. These narratives yielded both men means of connecting the moral problems they identified around them with the travails of a contemporary world. As one conversation meandered from talk of an upcoming village council election to the subject of Osama bin Laden, for example, Mookiah Thevar darkly muttered that there were ‘terrorists’ even here, while news of prostitutes hired to lure Indian government officials into corrupt dealings led Ayyar Thevar to muse on the familiar pitfalls of male desire. The religious discourses and daily papers alike supported an image of worldly relationships as rife with peril and temptation. ‘It is jealousy that is ruining this country’, Ayyar Thevar said to me one afternoon, lending a larger frame to the harsh feelings that had torn apart his own family. At the same time, however, I came to see the hope that the older man had come to invest in the nurturing of certain kinds of relationships.

‘Is it Anandha? Come *pā* ...’ Ayyar Thevar often called out at the sound of my voice. In spite of my evident youth, he addressed me with affection as ‘teacher’, acknowledging my vocation as a foreign-born research scholar. Our talks always took a contrary pedagogic course, each encounter yielding an occasion to warn me against the carnal pleasures of his own youth. He would lean in conspiratorially to whisper a warning about other young men in the village and their likely sexual liaisons. Or in the midst of a rambling conversation about ethics and politics, he would suddenly ask whether I drank liquor. He was convinced, with a confidence that I did not share, that I could restrain myself in a way that he had never been able. So as he shared some of his insights into forms of moral conduct – what he, like most others here, described as the *nallathu kettathu* or the ‘good and the bad’ of ordinary life – I began to see how he had come to relate to himself in an ethical sense. With age and maturity, with weakness and misfortune, he had turned against his own history to cultivate an interior topography of selfhood.<sup>10</sup> What I want to do now is to sketch some of the horizons of history, morality, and quotidian experience in relation to which this work upon the heart came to gain a belated force and intelligibility in his life.

### **A collective history of interiorization**

In the moral traditions of South India, ethical selfhood is a matter of both deliberate cultivation and inherited disposition. I found Ayyar Thevar on the Reading Room porch one afternoon worrying over the dispositions at work in his own domestic life: the quick and cutting words that his grown sons cast angrily at him, and the reflections these exchanges provoked about his own past tendencies. ‘There is our will (*cittam*), and also that of God’, he mused, explaining that in the moment before birth, we could petition the gods for a certain kind of life: that we be employed like police constables or government officials, that our families should flourish, or that the country itself should be well. But one would have had to develop qualities of patience and foresight in order to ask for such boons in the first place. To approach this encounter with the attitude that ‘It’s cooked enough, give [me] what’s there’ would yield only hardship. Puzzled by his language, I asked Ayyar Thevar to explain what he meant. ‘Rice on the stove’, he replied: he was speaking of those who could not bear the feeling of their hunger, who would insist on being fed – ‘Hey, I don’t care if it’s cooked, give it!’ – much before the cooking rice had swelled enough to feed everyone else. ‘This is a proverb’, he explained, adding that it had a social foundation: ‘There are people like this.’

The adage to which Ayyar Thevar turned sketches a temporal shortcoming in moral character, an inability to resist the tugs of the senses in the present and to forecast the likely consequences of capitulating to them. There was also a determinate social horizon to such projected failings; as he said on another occasion, 'Our caste: it slips up'. Ayyar Thevar was born into the Piramalai Kallar caste, an endogamous community of less than one million individuals living mainly in the southern villages and towns of the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu.<sup>11</sup> Although men and women from this community pursue diverse forms of livelihood with varying degrees of economic attainment and social respectability, they are widely understood to bear a stubborn and inadequate moral character or *kunnam* (Daniel 1984: 79-95) responsible for many of the kinds of problems that individuals such as Ayyar Thevar diagnosed in themselves. The subject of ethics here, in other words, must be understood as both individual and collective in nature; the interior histories of such individuals must be taken in relation to collective biographies of moral transformation and qualification.<sup>12</sup>

Popular discourse, for example, singles out Piramalai Kallars as bearers of an impulsive disposition. Kallar susceptibility to undue passion, sudden 'tension', and reckless violence is easily and routinely identified. 'They will change minute by minute ... they will suddenly take the knife', avowed a respectable middle-aged cultivator elsewhere in the Cumbum Valley. One retired Kallar teacher named Muthu attributed such disposition to an excess of *rōcam*: 'a high sense of honor, keen sensibility, [or a] quick perception of an indignity' (Winslow 1998 [1862]: 146). Brandishing a sickle in a quarrel, he suggested, a man from another caste might recall his wife and his children, or crops on fields still needing water or fertilizer. But a man of his own caste, he said with a rueful yet proud smile, would think only at that moment of plunging the blade into his enemy's neck. Such assessments present Kallars as a people locked in the immediacy and exteriority of the moment: as a population unwilling or even unable to deliberate on the consequences of desire and deed, or to reflect on the inheritances of the past that might otherwise propel a different way of engaging the present.<sup>13</sup> From this vantage-point, echoed in Ayyar Thevar's own image of uncooked rice, people of this one community appear especially to lack a vital inner distance between passion and action.

Such generalizing stereotypes can be engaged diversely: by attending to the quotidian practices that lend them substance, the images of selfhood that make them into forms of both condemnation and self-identification, and the histories of social antagonism that tie them up with collective entities such as castes. Here, however, we must also consider the abiding legacies of modern efforts to take this one community – the Piramalai Kallars – as objects of a particular form of moral policing. The word *kallar* literally means 'thief' or 'deceitful person' in Tamil, as state and public critics of the community have pointed out from the eighteenth century. Blamed for habitual crimes such as cattle theft, blackmail, and highway robbery by British colonial state officials, the entire Piramalai Kallar caste was designated a 'criminal tribe' in 1918. For the next three decades, all Piramalai Kallar men were fingerprinted, required by state officials to report for regular police roll calls, and prohibited from leaving their villages at all without prior and written permission, whether or not they had been convicted as individuals of any crime in the past (Pandian 2008a).

These extraordinary measures were founded on persistent judgements that Kallars as a whole could not foresee the outcomes of their desires and deeds: that they were volatile by nature, a community whose action in the world was rarely tempered by

inner reflection. A British surveyor in 1817 reported that men and women of the caste reacted with fury to the slightest injury, indulging in ‘the most violent revenge without any regard to consequences’ (Turnbull 1895: 10). And in 1832, a British revenue official likewise complained that the many Kallars inhabiting his district often acted ‘on the impulse of the moment’ to raid and revenge themselves upon others.<sup>14</sup> The spectre of such ‘violent and lawless habits’ – in the influential language of one senior police official (Mullaly 1892: 82) – ultimately authorized the designation of PIRAMALAI KALLARS as criminal by nature in the early twentieth century. The harsh strictures of the Criminal Tribes Act, and the diverse and forcible measures in ‘Kallar Reclamation’ that followed, were meant to cultivate among these individuals an internal capacity for hesitation, deliberation, and careful judgment; as one district revenue official closely involved with these endeavours wrote in 1923: ‘The object of the work is to wean the present generation of Kallars from crime as far as possible and to lead the rising generation away from the criminal habits and instincts of their ancestors’.<sup>15</sup>

The harsh strictures of the Criminal Tribes Act were lifted in 1947, the year of India’s independence from Britain. Its legacies, however, remain a powerful presence in many ways today: in recollections of familial histories of displacement, in playful and slanderous talk of reckless impulse and criminal deceit, and in habits of bodily conduct and moral orientations impressed upon the selfhood of its heirs (Pandian 2009). Ayyar Thevar spoke vividly of village messengers drumming down the street, announcing that a ‘Sub-Inspector is coming, masters!’ to all the Kallar men required to assemble for periodic inspections. His own mother’s father had been one of several convicted Kallar criminals settled by district police in a Kallar Voluntary Settlement on the outskirts of the village in 1917: ‘an offensive man, an angry man’, Ayyar Thevar said. The ‘white man’, in his imagination, had forced the Kallars to relinquish their ‘wickedness’ and become proper citizens, to leave behind their ‘rowdyism’ (*pōkkiri thanam*) and struggle instead to till the soil. Like many others, he understood the legal instruments, compulsory schools, and other colonial institutions of such reform as devices meant to open a reflective distance between tendency and deed. ‘Be good! Do good!’ teachers and constables would say, and the punishment and pain with which they enforced such dictates would have provoked the ‘ignorant’ people of that time to think about their own conduct: ‘Why is he doing this?’, he suggested they would have begun to ask of each other.

Ayyar Thevar sketched a history of largely unsuccessful reforms, describing this historical failure in a language that itself bore the traces of its history. When I asked him what he meant by his caste ‘slipping up’, for example, his reply opened into an image of desire itself as criminal by nature: ‘For me, still, that character full of lustfulness keeps staying with me. Weak judgment ... That is wrong. Criminality’. This image of ‘criminal’ desire recalls the many decades that putatively thievish Kallar inclinations had been harshly policed by the state, as does his attribution of unlawful wants to a failure of anticipatory judgement. Later in life, as he came to turn against himself, Ayyar Thevar did so on a moral terrain of selfhood opened up by these historical operations. At the same time, however, we must also note that this elderly man seated the problem of desire in a moral shortcoming of the ‘heart’ and an excessive indulgence of the appetites, echoes of an ascetic language of renunciation that had to do with much more than the belated traces of colonial power in contemporary South India. To chart fully the coordinates of this interior topography, then, we must also track the persistent force of vernacular moral tradition.

### On the ripening of the heart

Ayyar Thevar and his ailing friend and kinsman Mookiah Thevar called me over to sit with them on the stoop of the disused village Reading Room one afternoon, complaining that young men these days refused to heed the moral counsel of older men. Chats with these two always ranged widely, from the strictures of the colonial Criminal Tribes Act to contemporary crises of terrorism, from the biographies of Tamil saints to the baroque scandals of politicians. This afternoon, they lauded me for having a ‘heart’ deep enough to lead me there from a place as far away as America. Embarrassed by such praise, I tried to turn kindness into pretext for a question. *Ullam*, I said, echoing the Tamil word for heart that Ayyar Thevar had just used, and connecting this terms with other related ones: ‘*Ullam, neñcu, manasu, iruthayam ...* did each of these words name the same thing’ as far as they were concerned? ‘All of these are one’, he avowed in return, gesturing to his chest. ‘The heart is *ninaivu*’, he added; ‘*Ullathilē ninaivu vilaiyum*’. *Ninaivu* (thought, reflection, memory, imagination) ‘ripens’ in the heart: I was struck by this formulation. The verb *vilai* was associated, I objected, not with developing thoughts but with maturing crops. I pressed for further clarification. Looking then toward the place of my voice with clouded eyes, Ayyar Thevar held out a flattened palm, then reached to pull it upward with his other hand. ‘Reaping the sheaves, heaping them up, eating [them] – it grows just like that’.

Ayyar Thevar had gestured toward his *ullam*: a term, deriving from the Tamil term *ul* or ‘inside’, that names an interior, private, secret, or esoteric space (*Tamil Lexicon* 1982: 470). Like most other South Indian terms for the faculties of the self – derived from classical Tamil and from Sanskrit – *ullam* spans the distance between the English ‘mind’ and ‘heart’. The agency identified by this family of terms is responsible for capacities as various as thought, desire, memory, judgement, affection, and consciousness (Chennakesavan 1991; Halliburton 2002). Much scholarship in English – both in India and in the West – names it the ‘mind’. Ask a Tamil person in Tamil to point to the entity named by the English word ‘mind’, however, and one will often find a hand cupped to the chest rather than a finger pointing to the head. This ‘heart’ (as I call it for the sake of both simplicity and fidelity) may be taken as a faculty of judgement and discrimination, or the cause of dangerous and indiscriminate attachments. Its work may be conceived as one of retrospection, or the prospective struggle to distinguish right from wrong. It may be taken as essential to restraining the senses, or a fickle and wayward entity to be reined in itself. Interpreted variously, but always engaged, the heart is the most significant locus of ethical selfhood in South India (Pandian 2009).

Ethical exercise of the heart inherits and extends durable Indian traditions of engaging ‘interiority’ in the sense of an interior nature of moral selfhood. Classical Sanskrit philosophy named as *antahkarana* the ‘internal cause’ (Potter 1963: 171) or ‘inner psychical frame’ (Dasgupta 1975 [1922]: 113) through which the soul gained experience of the terrestrial world. The *antahkarana* could be divided into several faculties: in Samkhya philosophy, for example, *buddhi* as underlying will or disposition, *ahamkara* as the obstacle of self-awareness, and *manas* as means of synthesizing and reflecting upon sensory impressions (Larson 1979: 178–88). The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali consolidated these faculties into an image of the *citta*: an unsteady internal ‘awareness’ to be disciplined and directed toward liberation from the cycle of rebirth (Larson & Bhattacharya 1987: 27). For many centuries thereafter, this fourfold division – between *ahamkara*, *buddhi*, *manas*, and *citta* – yielded a persistent yet mutable

vocabulary for philosophical speculation concerning the interior nature of embodied individuals. Mobilized in ascetic renunciation, diverse theistic and non-theistic religious orders, and varied practices of virtuous self-conduct in courtly, monastic, and more quotidian environments (Ali 2004), this vocabulary continues to anchor plural ways of engaging oneself reflexively as a subject of ethics in India.<sup>16</sup> Across this diverse span, these interior faculties often maintain a basic ambiguity: binding the soul to the pleasures and delusions of earthly existence, on the one hand, but also enabling its liberation, on the other.

Literary traditions of amorous and devotional poetry yield another significant means of opening up and deepening an interior topography of selfhood in South India. Classical works of Tamil love poetry dating back to the first few centuries CE addressed the heart or *akam* as a figurative space, an ‘inner world’ or ‘interior landscape’ of feeling rendered through stylized aesthetic conventions of place (Ramanujan 1994: 104). Associating the pain of separation with the harshness of a desert landscape, for example, these works presented varied environments as metonymic expressions of the interior affective state of clandestine lovers (Ramanujan 1989). Selfhood also emerges from this literary tradition, however, as a scene of vacillation and strife, with its young men and women often addressing their own hearts with a sense of sorrow or frustration cast at a distance. ‘My heart (*neñcu*), whose place do you try to reach, thinking of the lover within the heart (*ullathār*)?’ asks one Tamil couplet in the fifth-century *Tirukkural*, its two overlapping claims upon the heart conveying the paradoxical sense of an interior faculty drawn away by the very object of its inward attention (Varadarajan 1949). Medieval poetic works of religious devotion would later extend this classical literary convention, as their protagonists scolded their own hearts for abandoning them for the thieving embrace of beloved gods (Hardy 1983).<sup>17</sup>

These literary and philosophical traditions persist as moral and ethical resources in contemporary South India, through local lineages of religious devotion and ascetic practice; diverse genres of oral poetry expressed and learned on courtyard stoops and working fields; and lessons on moral conduct gleaned from temple authorities, popular media, and schoolbook texts. Engaging themselves in relation to these moral inheritances, individuals here come to imagine themselves – and, more specifically, the interior space of their own hearts – in diverse and powerful ways (Pandian 2008*b*). A monkey leaping from desire to desire or a sparrow flitting from need to need, a mud pot threatened by the slightest fall or a hard stone resisting the most doleful entreaty, a coop to contain inexpressible feelings or an over-inflated tyre threatening to burst, a tape recorder retaining every impression or a river relinquishing all memories to its flow, an ocean of desires pushing in all directions or a sewer running with one black current, a temple housing a beloved object or a skulking thief stealing away another’s love, a bullock cart driven by an expert hand or a careening bus with failing brakes, a scrubby expanse of unkempt growth or a bottomless well of unknown depths: such are the ways in which people in the Cumbum Valley would sketch the nature of their hearts. Each of these images demands recognition as a distinctive and durable ‘moral topography’ (Laidlaw 1995: 274) of interior nature: as carrying forward, that is, a certain tradition of attributing pliable surface and workable depth to one’s own interiority.

Such evocations of the heart in South India are more than figures of speech or rhetorical self-presentation; each of these instances of an interior nature also elicits and sustains a particular way of working upon oneself in ethical terms, from the

stern restraint of desire demanded by a restless ‘monkey’ nature, to the ethos of caring sympathy with which one might explore the deep ‘well’ of one’s own inclinations. Take, for example, Ayyar Thevar’s image of a heart ripening in agrarian terms. Like most of these instances, this usage draws upon a discursive tradition. Tamil Saiva devotional poet Appar, for example, sang in the seventh century CE of ‘growing’ Sivahood within himself by using the ‘plough’ of truth, by plucking ‘weeds’ of falsehood, and by irrigating himself with the ‘water’ of patience (Pechilis Prentiss 1999: 166), terms echoed in similar form by numerous later Tamil texts and verses. And Pattinathār, the fifteenth-century Tamil merchant-turned-renunciant saint for whom Ayyar Thevar himself reserved his most explicit praise, composed the following in the fifteenth century:

With the axe of the *namacivaya* mantra, cutting at the root this deceitful sensual body of five organs, making fertile and ploughing well, sowing the seed of Siva’s manifest form, I plucked the crowded weeds, I raised a crop of Sivam (Kalyanasundaram 1998: 145).

Ayyar Thevar may not have been familiar with this particular verse, but one may discern in his language of a ripening heart the fragmentary echoes of such a tradition in ethical self-work.<sup>18</sup> His debt to such a tradition, in other words, depended less upon a knowledge of its literary foundations, and more upon the resonance of its images and arguments with the demands of quotidian life. He described the domain of *ninaivu* (thought, memory, and imagination) as visceral in its sensations and dangerous in the forms of affection and attachment that it propelled. Although he held that individuals were endowed by God with moral qualities, Ayyar Thevar also implied that one could work to ripen or refine one’s own thoughts through the pursuit of moral habits: through a disciplined avoidance of the bad – any harmful ‘seed of desire’ – and a careful association with the good. This interior possibility could be conveyed again in organic and proverbial terms: ‘*maram murrināl vairam, manitan murrināl putti [buddhi]*’, he once said – ‘If a tree matures, [the result is] heartwood; if a man matures, [the result is] judgement’. Such claims of his concerning the maturation of *buddhi* extended the concerns of durable religious and philosophical traditions in the region by bringing them into close proximity with the moral and material orientations of a rural existence.

Ayyar Thevar doubted prospects for such maturity in a moral world of jealousy and deceit; these insights had come only lately to him, and they stood as little more than a melancholy vision of the life that could be cultivated and enacted under more promising circumstances. At the same time, though, we must also acknowledge that this image of a possible inward ripening was crafted in the midst of a close engagement with just this prospect in a material and inhabited world. Ayyar Thevar had spent most of his life cultivating the fields of the Cumbum Valley: ‘folded’ into his heart were not only the language and resources of a moral tradition, but also the vicissitudes of an agrarian livelihood and its landscape of practice. In the final portion of the paper, therefore, I want to consider more closely this exterior world of rural experience, and how such space itself may be turned inward to help fashion an interior landscape of selfhood.

### Interior horizons of exterior life

I found Ayyar Thevar notably dejected one afternoon, pondering his neglect and likening himself to the old livestock of the village, often quietly driven off for sale in

distant markets for beef. ‘What we did was wrong’, he said nevertheless, blaming himself again for his difficult condition. I was reminded of the ‘savage nature’ (*kāttu putti*) that Kallar men and women here often attributed to themselves. This familiar phrase elicited from Ayyar Thevar related ways of characterizing Kallar nature – ‘Antagonism ... roughness ... rugged and rough ...’ – until he settled upon a mode of comparison he found most suitable: ‘like that mountain’, he said, gesturing eastward with his hand toward a horizon he could no longer see. Confused by the analogy, I asked him to explain. ‘You see a woman walking down the street, and you want to have her’, he replied; ‘You know someone has a lot of property stored up in his house, and you must have some of it for yourself. [Desire] like the bulk of [that] mountain.’<sup>19</sup>

As always, there were many ideas that Ayyar Thevar had compressed into these terse comments. He had evoked an ethics of measured desire that many in the village spoke of and sought to exercise in their appetites, habits, and relations. He conveyed a sense of criminality as a trafficking in things, taken here to concern women and material possessions alike. His language affiliated Kallar misconduct with the ‘savage’ condition of marginal, uncultivated spaces. But by gesturing outward towards a hillslope on the perimeter of the settlement’s upland fields, Ayyar Thevar had also pointed inward toward the related quality of an interior terrain. To liken desire itself to the topography of such a space, in other words, was to sketch the coordinates of a landscape of selfhood. By ‘landscape’, I do not only mean that the heart could be identified as a kind of interior space, but that this space could be imagined, engaged, and traversed in several specific and related ways: as visible topography of contrary qualities; as terrain of labour, transformation, and possible improvement; and as domain of recollected practice and experience.<sup>20</sup> This is how we may find in Ayyar Thevar’s claim a folding inward of inhabited environment as interior landscape.

Desire comes to resemble the mountains ringing environments such as the Cumbum Valley, for example, only by evoking the familiar qualities of a certain kind of space. Ayyar Thevar’s comparison gestures toward the material and cultural space of the *kātu*, the wild and marginal uplands long imagined in the Tamil countryside to haunt and even threaten the life of a settled agrarian order (Ludden 1996; D. Mines 2005). It also echoes the many ways in which the unsettling nature of Kallar castefolk is closely associated here with the savage, primitive, and even brutal qualities of such uncultivated terrain. I have written elsewhere, for example, of how Kallar men and women in the region took one particular proverb – *karattu kāttukku murattu manvetti*, or ‘A rough spade for a rugged landscape’ – to stand metonymically for the necessary roughness of tools to work the rugged uplands, but also for their own coarse and recalcitrant character (Pandian 2009). To characterize desire in these terms is to introject within oneself a series of ambient associations: to sketch a jagged and unyielding topography of the heart, adamantly confounding and resisting the levelling work of the toughest spade. As Ayyar Thevar himself explained with a gentle laugh on another occasion, ‘Anand, our people, the Thevars, since the time of the gods, have had a little rough character’. Such associations seek without a rationale for the persistence of excessive desires within: upon the terrain of the most stubborn peripheries of a cultivated environment.

Engaging the heart with a language of agrarian cultivation, however, also implies that this interior terrain may be submitted to a labour of transformation. Ayyar Thevar had tilled the rugged uplands of the Cumbum Valley for decades, grappling with

seasonal rains, uneven soils, and wild animals stealing down from the adjacent mountains. Despite such difficulties, he insisted that no terrain could be taken as 'bad' land unsuitable by its nature for cultivation. "Bad land" is within our hands alone', he told me: clear it of weeds and bushes, fertilize it for strength, build bunds around its edges to hold in the soil, plough it well, and with rain, it would yield. Such relations of cultivation could also be folded inward to tend the qualities of a rough and undeveloped heart, Ayyar Thevar suggested, by sketching an instance of moral pedagogy. 'What man, why are you this way? Come, have a coffee', a man of good quality might suggest to a man of low character, with the intent of improving him. The latter should respond with understanding and receptivity – 'Yes, our friend has something to say, let me listen and understand' – rather than spurning him with words like: 'Who are you? Get away! Why are you talking to me?' One had to imagine oneself as liable to improvement and counsel from others in order to make possible a certain kind of moral self-cultivation. Imaging desire itself as a rugged mountain a few months later, Ayyar Thevar marked both the appeal and the limits of such cultivation: he had failed to invest himself with a necessary cultivability.

Agrarian cultivation had borne a certain temporality for Ayyar Thevar, prospective hope followed upon by either enjoyment or frustration, and ultimately happiness or sorrow depending upon the results of one's labours. The body itself would later recall these feelings associated with a crop, stomach and heart together returning the joy and sadness of varying yields. But the anticipation, satisfaction, and regret of agricultural livelihood could be folded into the heart in a more subtle way as well, through the work of retrospection. When we talked, Ayyar Thevar sometimes recalled the agrarian field songs he had sung as a young man, modulating a grainy voice of melancholy beauty:

The field too is fallow,  
the plough too is short,  
the plough bulls are old,  
I'm pining out in the *kātu*

'If you ask what this is', he said explaining these particular lines one afternoon, 'it is the life that I told you: scarcity came to me, cattle diminished, everything diminished'. Although many years had passed since these lines were uttered amidst the landscape they evoked, his disappointment in the present remained inflected none the less by this image of agrarian trials: 'I am thinking about that still, singing, sitting, my eyes spoiled, begging for rice from my children'. Such songs once served as devices of seduction in the upland fields, he admitted, capturing the affections of women working nearby. Turned inward rather than outward now, they fashioned the heart itself into a landscape of loss, resonant with the travails of rural life.

## Conclusion

This article has sought to convey an interiority of selfhood in South India without falling back upon an essential ontology of the self in cultural, psychological, or philosophical terms. I have pursued this project by attending to the domain of ethics, and in particular, the ways in which diverse forces, histories, and relations may be 'folded' inward to constitute a durable yet mutable interior domain of ethical subjectivity. Focusing most closely upon the life of one individual in South India, I have charted the

folding inward of three forms of exterior life: collective histories of moral transformation, inherited traditions of moral conduct, and quotidian engagements with a material and social world. However forceful and durable, these moral resources in themselves do not guarantee the formation of particular kinds of interiority. In his own estimation, for example, Ayyar Thevar had led a heedless life, and only in the wake of spiralling misfortunes late in this life did these resources return to invest him with the depth of a discerning 'heart'. My effort constitutes a Nietzschean 'genealogy' of interiority insofar as it has taken such accidents of circumstance seriously. If the interior self has a nature, I have tried to suggest, this nature comes into being only through such chance trajectories of encounter, convergence, and displacement.

The approach taken here may work to unsettle some of the customary truths that anchor concepts of selfhood in South Asia and elsewhere. 'It has become almost axiomatic in anthropology to note that while European and North American selves are said to be autonomous and contained within fixed boundaries, South Asian selves are sociocentric, permeable, and even, at times, transpersonal', observes Langford (2002: 247). These axioms, troubled too by Langford, present an intriguing echo of Taylor's description of the uniqueness of Western inwardness as itself a 'truism'. To investigate the depths of interior selfhood as folded effects of exterior engagements is to confront a rejoinder to both sets of verities: self-relations in the West may not be as fully and exclusively interiorized as we often presume, and they may even resemble forms of interior selfhood fashioned in places that are easily assumed to have no such thing. The genealogical dimensions working to constitute such interiority will no doubt vary with the circumstances of their operation: we may find that in other situations, for example, ritual practices of prayer, relations with family and friends, biomedical regimes, or mediated forms of expression may carry more weight than I have granted them here. Even so, the moral forces and cultivated dispositions nurtured in the realms of politics, ethics, and quotidian practice – as one might outline the three dimensions of the argument developed here – would likely always be at stake in some fashion. And in attending to such forces, we may find evidence of both destructive and productive relations with oneself, their moral quality depending most upon the milieu of their exercise and its mode of habitation.

I spoke last with Ayyar Thevar on 11 July 2005. We talked then, as always, of the heart and its call to lead a certain kind of existence, but I bid him goodbye with the faint yet unmistakable feeling that I might not see him again. On the phone from the United States four months later, I learned that he had consumed poison and taken his own life. I cannot say why he did this: whether this was an act of physical defeat, moral despair, or some other more affirmative pursuit of freedom. And in a sense, the space of selfhood that I have sketched may appear to have closed with an end to this one life. But I write with the conviction that we may also find an opening here into a broader topography of ethical selfhood. Ayyar Thevar's life testifies to the many creative if painful ways that individuals may fashion for themselves a space of reflexive interiority, and to populate that space with the plural teachings, cues, and reminders of others. The weight of this interior terrain may have grown too heavy for him to bear. We nevertheless glimpse the reach of its horizons far beyond the boundaries of an individual selfhood, toward an ethical engagement with a shared world of moral experience. As Ayyar Thevar had made his own failure in that world a warning for me, I can do little more now than to seek to extend the lesson of his life somewhat further.

## NOTES

Research for this article was conducted in India in 2000-2002 and in 2005, with the support of the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation, and the University of British Columbia. I am grateful to Veena Das, Elizabeth Davis, Naveeda Khan, Bhrigupati Singh, the students in my Spring 2008 'Anthropology of Personhood' seminar, participants in a February 2009 discussion of the article in the Department of History at Johns Hopkins University, and the editor and anonymous reviewers of *JRAI* for their incisive comments concerning these materials. This article is dedicated to the memory of Ayyar Thevar, to whose wisdom I am indebted.

<sup>1</sup> Mauss's lecture was manifestly concerned with the category of the 'person', which he had sought to distinguish from the category of the 'self'. While the notion of a self as a speaking 'I' is widely present in many linguistic and cultural situations, Mauss observed, it is only recently and peculiarly in the Christian West that this self is identified with both consciousness and personhood. The category of the person in this sense 'is formulated only for us, among us', he wrote (1985 [1938]: 22), arguing at the same time that we find a more expansive and distributed sense of social personhood among peoples of many other times and places.

<sup>2</sup> On 'interiority as the source of moral choice' in modern Western thought, and in relation to other conceptions of interiority in the history of Western philosophy, see Hand (2003: 424).

<sup>3</sup> In resonant terms, Das writes of 'individual biography' as 'the terrain on which the outside is folded to form the interior of the individual' (1994: 53).

<sup>4</sup> For an insightful discussion of Taylor's 'Nietzsche problem', see Shapiro (1986).

<sup>5</sup> Like Rose, I seek here to 'write a genealogy of subjectification without a metapsychology' (1996: 37): that is, to account for the making of an 'inside' through an involution of the 'outside', rather than presuming its existence as prior ground. This is not meant, that is, as an exercise in psychological anthropology or an attempt to fashion an ethnopsychology.

<sup>6</sup> For an account of Nietzsche's relevance to Jain ethical practice in India, see Laidlaw (2002). Brobjerg (2004) gives a careful accounting of Nietzsche's own readings of Indian religious and philosophical texts at successive phases of his intellectual life.

<sup>7</sup> While it is important to address the social and 'transactional' quality of personhood in India, as Marriott (1976) has argued, we must not neglect the interior space of an ethical selfhood in which such persons may come to relate to themselves.

<sup>8</sup> One may detect here the traces of a widespread Indian concern for the unhealthy effects of an imbalance of bodily *dosas*, typically translated as 'humors', but, as Langford suggests, better understood as forces, processes, or principles that bypass 'the conceptual split between body and world altogether' (2002: 29). In what follows, I argue that such reasoning inherits both enduring Indian traditions and more contemporary histories of moral and bodily concern.

<sup>9</sup> There is no verbal form in Tamil that sustains such an interpretation, but Ayyar Thevar had likely assumed that the verse he quoted had relied upon a literary term unfamiliar to him.

<sup>10</sup> On aging Indian bodies and particular histories of split selves, see Cohen (1998: 211-13).

<sup>11</sup> The Piramalai Kallars are one of the most important endogamous subcastes of the Kallar caste, a community of several million individuals dispersed throughout southern Tamil Nadu. For a classic ethnographic account of the Piramalai Kallars, see Dumont (1986). 'Thevar' is an honorific title taken by Kallar men, and used more generally to refer to people of the caste.

<sup>12</sup> Both Fanon (1967 [1952]: 11) and Elias (1994 [1939]) seek to account for the relation between an 'ontogeny' of the individual and a historical 'sociogeny' or 'sociogenesis', respectively.

<sup>13</sup> Day, Papataxiarchis, and Stewart (1999) provide examples of particular groups of people who may be seen to live in the present moment, identifying this temporality of experience with the social condition of marginality. Although the Kallars may be taken as marginal in the same terms, the specificity with which immediacy of conduct is attributed to their conduct attests to the operation here of a more particular principle of difference. See chapter 2 of Pandian (2009) for an account of the historical changes through which Piramalai Kallars came to be identified with such a distinctive – even racially so – moral and practical nature.

<sup>14</sup> Viveash to Quarter Master General, 22 September 1832. Madura District Records, volume 4680, year 1832. Tamil Nadu State Archives (hereafter TNSA), Chennai, India.

<sup>15</sup> J.F. Hall, D.Dis. No. 1973-23-C-1/18/2-1923 in Law (General) Department G.O. No. 2683, Mis. Series, November 8, 1923, TNSA.

<sup>16</sup> On *putti* understood as 'disposition that is expressed through active, decisive consciousness' in the moral lexicon of Tamil villagers, for example, see Daniel (1984: 90-1).

<sup>17</sup> Shulman describes the 'shattered innerness' of such poetry, expressed in 'tones of plaintive self-reproach and poignant hunger for the divine persona that has entered the self, *as if* from outside, and then somehow disappeared into the stony depths inside' (2002: 132).

<sup>18</sup> On fragmentary transmission in South Indian moral 'tradition', see Pandian (2008b). I argue here that such traditions persist through inheritances of authoritative foundations for moral argumentation, conventional narratives of one's own nature, and embodied forms of practice. I also emphasize that certain genres of Tamil literary production have long sustained essential forms of moral claim and ethical self-engagement in South India, finding echo and expression in the present through diverse modern media such as films, textbooks, and political discourse.

<sup>19</sup> Despite this example's gendered quality, the problem of unrestrained desire and its potential restraint is conceived in the region as addressing both men and women, although there is wide disagreement with respect to how the desirous nature of either ought to be understood.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of these overlapping themes with respect to English constructions of landscape, see Matless (1998).

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## Horizons intérieurs : un espace éthique pour être soi dans le Sud de l'Inde

### Résumé

Bien que l'intériorité soit habituellement associée à la notion de soi dans l'Occident moderne, l'auteur décrit ici la formation d'une topographie intérieure du soi dans le Sud de l'Inde. Il avance qu'une « généalogie » de l'intériorité tiendrait compte des forces morales, des pratiques éthiques et des accidents historiques susceptibles de créer cet espace interne de subjectivité. En examinant de très près la vie morale d'un seul individu, l'article trace les contours d'un « repli » vers l'intérieur de trois formes de vie extérieure : histoires collectives de transformation morale, traditions vernaculaires de conduite éthique et expériences personnelles d'un paysage habité, qui se rejoignent au « cœur » d'un terrain intérieur d'engagement éthique sur soi.

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