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Between Marginality and Universality: Present Tensions and Paradoxes in French Colonial Cultural Heritage, Civilizing Mission and Citizenship in Puducherry, India

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Abstract

Combining historic and ethnographic approaches, this article analyzes the current production of colonial heritage in Puducherry, the former capital of French India. The aim is to explore the tensions and paradoxes that manifest themselves in postcolonial processes of marginalization and universalist claims surrounding the production of colonial heritage. Practices of heritage conservation and awareness have a colonial as well as postcolonial history of civilizing mission and claims to universal values, which create tensions in which some perspectives and positions are univerzalised, while others are marginalized. Importantly, this field extends beyond that of

heritage itself to encompass a larger set of universalizing claims on cultural, moral, aesthetic and political values. Puducherry, as a marginal colony of what in the context of India was a marginal colonial power, presents an interesting case of double historic marginalization and resulting postcolonial dynamics, as elements of this marginality recur in the present production of its heritage. A history of claims for universal values remains at play in the production of Indo-French colonial heritage surrounding Puducherry; although the dynamics of who is making claims on such values change in the postcolonial context. The ongoing processes of heritage conservation and attempts to produce 'heritage awareness' about the Indo-French heritage of Puducherry show how this heritage not only concerns issues such as political independence, social memory, tourism, economic and urban development, but also turns on conceptualizations of citizenship and heritage as civilizing mission, caught up in historically changing patterns of post/colonial relations and identities.

Introduction

The production and preservation of heritage is part of both historic and contemporary forces which, as Michael Herzfeld has termed it, "seem to suffuse the entire globe with an increasingly homogenous set of cultural, moral, aesthetic and political values" (Herzfeld 2004, 2). Herzfeld points to the paradox that with the promotion of tradition and heritage, the particular itself is universalized, and that along with this paradoxically homogenizing celebration of diversity, an increasingly homogenous language of culture and ethics is manifesting itself as a hierarchy of value, globally ramified as authoritative common sense. Here, "some attitudes appear to have become universal after all", from the values of heritage conservation and associated aesthetics, to efficiency, civil society, human rights, cooperation and tolerance (Herzfeld 2004, 2).

Herzfeld pursues the interlacing cultural and political processes of marginalization and universalist claims in the global hierarchy of value as they play out in practice especially in Greece – a country at once perceived as backwards and marginalized in present political and economic affairs, and celebrated for its overshadowing past which continues to serve as a source of European heritage and identity. More recently Herzfeld has also investigated the production of heritage in Thailand, which presents the cryptocolonial case of a nominally independent country, which, while never ruled by a European colonial power, has nonetheless been subject to European cultural control (Herzfeld 2016). While thus addressing the present global hierarchy of values from outside the empirical context of strictly colonial settings and histories, Herzfeld (2004, 2-3) crucially points to the colonial genealogy of this hierarchy of values, which was promulgated across the globe by the European colonial powers.

With a view to explore some of the tensions and paradoxes that manifest themselves in postcolonial processes of marginalization and universalist claims surrounding colonial heritage, this study addresses the current production of colonial heritage in Puducherry, the former capital of French India. Here I use the term 'production' deliberately to indicate that heritage, whether tangible or intangible, is never simply present as an objective remain from the past which is to be protected, interpreted or placed in hierarchies of value. Rather, the act of selecting and framing something as heritage is itself a form of cultural production; a process of identity construction (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 131-76; Smith 2006). From this perspective all heritage has an element of inventedness directed by present perspectives. Consequently, it is not my aim with this article to identify particular claims on heritage in Puducherry as being either 'genuine' or 'spurious', but to trace the historic trajectories and conceptual patterns which shape these claims, and with them the claims on a global hierarchy of value.

While India currently constitutes the world's largest democracy and a global economic

power on the rise (Panagariya 2008; Brosius 2010), and France comprises a core European country and the most universalist of former colonial powers (Schor 2001; Constantini 2008), the case which is investigated here can be argued to present a double example of historic marginalization. Puducherry, as a colony held by the French, developed a marginal political, economic and cultural status vis-à-vis the overarching hegemony of British India; and elements of this marginality recur in the present production of colonial heritage in Puducherry. The status of marginality applies no less to the erstwhile colonial power, France, which was not only a marginal colonial power in the context of India, but also struggles to maintain its global position and historic claim on universal values today. This, in turn, also impacts on how claims are made on the heritage of the colonial engagement between France and India.

The article explores how this complex (post)colonial legacy impacts on both claims for universal values and processes of marginalization that are expressed in the contemporary production of Indo-French heritage associated with Puducherry. It is based on a field study carried out in Puducherry in August–September 2015, which included interviews with local residents, scholars and heritage activists. The first two sections of the article outline patterns in the colonial history and postcolonial revival of Puducherry's French heritage. The last two sections discuss associated universalist claims for heritage in the context of civilizing mission, heritage awareness and conceptions of citizenship, which have a more general theoretical relevance.

Puducherry as French India: a history of marginalization

Latecomers to the international East India trade which developed in the 17th century, the French were the last European power to establish settlements on the coasts of India, following in the

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footsteps of the Portuguese, the English, the Dutch and the Danish. By treaties with local rulers, the French succeeded in establishing five main settlements (*comptoirs*) and a series of smaller trading posts (*loges*) in India from 1668 onwards, to carry out trade in coveted goods such as spices and textiles. The chief of these French settlements, established in 1673 on the basis of a pre-existing town then known in Tamil as Puducherry, was located on the Coromandel Coast; the East Coast of Southern India. During French rule it became known as Pondichéry.

The French became the main challengers of the English attempt to emerge as the dominant European power in India. Under the aegis of governor general Joseph Francois Dupleix, who served in 1742-54, an active policy of power expansion through alliances with local rulers marked an intensive period of ambitions of French empire in India. This posed a serious threat to the English and led to repeated military conflicts, as the French sphere of influence swiftly extended to cover a vast part of India, especially in the south (Das 1992). Hence, during the mid-18th century the distinct possibility emerged that India could fall under French control.

The town of Pondichéry itself became an active element in colonial power politics, not only as a node in trade and administration and as a military fortification, but also through a conscious politics of impression management with the townscape as its medium. Here imposing architecture and a distinct regularity in the urban layout and principles of construction served to impress both local rulers and rival European powers (Chopra 1992).[1] Correspondingly, Pondichéry was razed to the ground following its capture by the English in 1761, in the course of the Seven Years War. The ensuing Treaty of Paris in 1763 finally saw

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[1] The basic town plan, however, was laid out by the Dutch during an occupation in 1693-9, in a pattern which was completed by successive French governors (Deloche 2004).

the English gain a position as the dominant European power in India. The conditions of the treaty confined French control to the original five *comptoirs* and 12 *loges*. Pondichéry was soon rebuilt, but as far as its position and ambitions in India were concerned, France never recovered from the defeat (Das 1992). Driving home the diminished status of the French as a marginalized colonial power in India, Pondichéry saw three substantial English occupations between 1778 and 1816; all occasioned by Anglo-French hostilities playing out outside of India.[2] The last occupation resulted in the 1814 Treaty of Paris, which formally concluded the Anglo-French rivalry with France accepting English sovereignty in India, after which the French, territories remained in peace till their decolonization in the 20th century (Miles 1995, 4-5).

Changing fortunes notwithstanding, throughout their existence the French possessions in India were subject to a relative geographic, political and economic insignificance as compared with greater French colonies such as Indochina or Algeria. At a symbolic level they nonetheless remained important to France (Magedera and Marsh 2005; Marsh 2011, 2007, 29-37). This ambiguity in status and significance is well captured in the way in which the grandiloquent denominations *L'Inde française* ('French India') and '*Les Indes*' ('The Indies') were applied to cover what was in reality a set of minor, geographically isolated and highly disparate territories reaching an extent of just 508 square kilometers in total (Magedera 2010). In French pro-colonial debate surrounding decolonization in the 20th century, these possessions were wistfully referred to in a sentimental discourse of grandeur, as "the last confettis of the empire of Dupleix" (Decraene, French original quoted in Marsh 2011, 3). Recent scholarship nonetheless concurs in emphasizing the very practical marginality of the French possessions in

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[2] These occupations took place in 1778-83, 1793-1802 and 1803-16, and were occasioned by Anglo-French involvements in the American Revolutionary War, the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars, respectively.

India in the 19th and 20th century. For instance, sociologist William Miles points out that "French India survived as a quiet anomaly" (Miles 1990, 253), and historian Kate Marsh delivers the tart summary that "Pondichéry was, effectively, the capital of nowhere" (Marsh 2007, 207); "an anachronistic hangover from the Ancien Régime" (Marsh 2011, 3).

When British India obtained its independence in 1947, the territories of the two still remaining and more marginal colonial powers, France and Portugal, became a political anomaly. President Nehru was keen to eliminate them as he embarked on the process of consolidating the new, independent Republic of India (Neogy 1997, Arpi 2005). From an Indian perspective, "the last confettis of the empire of Dupleix" had become "foreign pimples on the map of India" (Nehru, cited in Guard 1950, 15). Once again, the significance of the French territories was first and foremost symbolic, if strongly so; now also from an Indian perspective. Geographically small compared to the vast Indian subcontinent, the French territories had a total population of around 300,000 in the census of 1951; an insignificant figure set against independent India totaling around 436 million (Marsh 2007, 30). Whereas the Portuguese eventually had to be dislodged by military intervention in 1961, France realized that, as matters stood, it had no future as a colonial power in India and chose the diplomatic option of negotiating a peaceful transfer of its Indian territories.

After an initial symbolic goodwill gesture where France ceded its 12 (in practice utterly insignificant) *loges* to India in August 1947, the negotiations between the two governments turned protracted. They were complicated by concerns for both wider international relations and the local situation in the French territories – as well as by internal political disagreements and instability in the French government (Marsh 2007, 33-7; Neogy 1997; Arpi 2005). India did apply some pressure to prompt France to finalize the negotiations, most notably through an economic blockade from 1949 to 1954, which demonstrated the complete dependence of the

French territories on India for basic supplies such as foodstuffs and electricity. Nonetheless, Nehru also remained sympathetic to the idea of retaining a positive relationship with France.

As Nehru expressed it in 1947, in keeping with a wider Indian elitist intellectual history of using French culture as a counterpoint to British cultural dominance (Berthet 2006): "Pondicherry is a window through which France and India could communicate. We will value this window onto France as a way of developing our cultural relations with that country. We have looked at the world through British spectacles for too long. We want our youth to acquire a more universal intellectual training that only French culture can give us" (cited in Weber 1997, xxi). Similarly France – even while dragging its feet in the negotiations – relished the idea of retaining a cultural, if not political, influence in its erstwhile territories (Arpi 2005). These concerns were to materialize in the continued postcolonial existence of local French medium educational institutions, and in the establishment of a new French research institution, The French Institute of Pondicherry, which was set up in Pondichéry in 1955 (India, Ministry of External Affairs 1956) (figure 1).

Adding to the social complexities of postcolonial cultural relations in the former French territories in India, their decolonization also created a local minority of French citizens with ethnic Indian background. The population was given the opportunity to opt for retaining French citizenship upon the legal cession of the territories to India in 1962. In spite of the inevitable uncertainties associated with choosing a foreign nationality this option was taken by 6,252 persons, causing France to establish a consulate to continue catering to its local citizens (Miles 1990, 1995).

Once again highlighting the marginalized status of the French territories in India, even the gaining of their independence was predicated on more significant world events taking place elsewhere. By 1954, France finally found itself ready for a settlement of transfer with India,

having now dealt with the more pressing political issue of recognizing the independence of the former Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia). However, as hostilities broke out in Algeria during the same year, the French National Assembly left the Treaty of Cession of its Indian territories unratified, fearing the signal that further decolonization would send in this tense situation. While a *de facto* transfer of power to India did take place in 1954 as agreed, the cession of the French territories to India was only finalized *de jure* in 1962, when the Algerian war had come to an end (Marsh 2011, 3; Weber 1997). Subsequently the history of the diplomatically negotiated settlement of the transfer was nonetheless used to bolster the myth of French republican fraternity in France (Marsh 2011, 4; Weber 1997, xx). From Indian perspectives, too, a narrative of French fraternity has been perpetuated in later historiography, in overt contrast to the intransigent approach of Portugal as well as the history of the impact of British imperialism (Mathew 1999, ix; Miles 1995, 57).

Colonial and postcolonial constructions of the identity and past of the French Indian territories and their capital have been discussed from both French and Indian perspectives with emphasis on a range of historical as well as sociological and literary contexts (e.g. Sen 1958; Miles 1990, 1995; Das 1992; Weber 2002; Annousamy 2005; Magedera and Marsh 2005; Marsh 2008; Rai 2008; Malangin 2015). However, the heritage development which has been going on with increasing pace in recent decades, notably in the capital, has not hitherto been the focus of investigation outside of publications concerning the colonial period architecture which is now sought to be preserved (e.g. INTACH Pondicherry 2004). Heritage in Puducherry has become a central issue. It encompasses the upholding of political and cultural identities as well as tourism development, and practices and values concerning the conservation of buildings and awareness of the colonial past. The rest of the article unfolds the present heritage development in Puducherry, which is predicated on negotiations of its history

of marginality and the postcolonial tensions and paradoxes implicated in a global hierarchy of value with claims to universalism.

Postcolonial development and revival of colonial heritage in Puducherry

With their cession to India the former French territories remained one political and administrative unit, which was named the Union Territory of Pondicherry.[3] In 2006 the name formally reverted to the precolonial Tamil designation Puducherry; the name used in the rest of the article. However, it is still commonly referred to as Pondichéry in French and Pondicherry in English, both by visitors and by many residents. To complicate matters further, Puducherry may refer to several geographical entities, Thus, it denotes the Union Territory of Puducherry, which encompasses 492 square kilometers and had a total population of 1,244,464 at the most recent 2011 census. This territory spans the four geographically disparate districts and former *comptoirs* of Mahé, Yanam, Karaikal and Puducherry (figure 2). Puducherry is also the name of the capital. The Puducherry metropolitan region is an urban agglomeration which spans 71.9 square kilometers and has a population of 657,209 (Census of India 2011).

During the French rule the capital comprised the much smaller area of the colonial French 'boulevard town', which still constitutes the city center and is essentially what a city map of Puducherry for tourists will show (figure 3). This area is around 2 square kilometers in size, and is bounded by four boulevards where once lay the outer limits of the city's

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[3] The exception is the northernmost *comptoir*, Chandernagore, which was located in the Indian nationalist hotspot of West Bengal, adjacent to the metropolis and former British colonial capital Calcutta (now Kolkata) and was always in a marginal position vis-à-vis the distant Puducherry. Chandernagore voted to join the newly independent India in a public referendum and was ceded already by 1951. Hence it never became part of the new union territory (Miles 1995, 160-3; Neogy 1997, 176-8).

fortifications (INTACH Pondicherry 2013, 6).[4] While understanding the production of heritage surrounding Puducherry requires some contextualization at the larger levels of the union territory and the entire capital city, the discussion in the following will primarily focus on the boulevard town. This is the area which has become subject to the most intensive interests in (post)colonial heritage development.

As a precursor to understanding the present heritage development in Puducherry, it should be noted that its French identity has been restaged more than once in the postcolonial period. While concerns for the preservation of Puducherry's built heritage took off in the 1980s, followed by a heritage tourism development which began in the 1990s and intensified in the new millennium, the first postcolonial movement towards emphasizing Puducherry's French identity occurred for political reasons from the end of the 1970s.

Following its decolonization, the political integration of the new union territory with India led to a swift administrative process of Indianization. This has caused some to claim that "[w]ithin a span of fifteen years the essence of French heritage had disappeared" (Annousamy 2005, 193, translated from French; see also Rai 2008, 114). If the materiality of Puducherry's French townscape was not subject to overt postcolonial iconoclasm it was certainly symbolically reappropriated in a process of Indianization, exemplified by the renaming of Rue Dupleix as Jawaharlal Nehru Street. Meanwhile, English superseded French as the *lingua franca* for administrative purposes and as the major foreign language spoken in the territory, while daily communication was – as before – largely carried out in the regional languages in the different parts of the territory, such as Tamil in the capital.

While French educational and research institutions, the consulate and a long-established branch of Alliance Francaise in the city of Puducherry remained, a substantial part of the

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[4] Since the boulevard town is not an official administrative unit population data is unavailable.

Francophone population have left for France or for other French territories across the globe after the merger with the Republic of India. Thus, while the community in France which has its roots in Puducherry is estimated to encompass 50,000 persons (Rai 2008, 177), just about 6,500 French citizens currently reside in the Union Territory of Puducherry; the majority of these in the capital.[5] As they constitute an ever-smaller part of the population, Francophiles have continued lamenting their feeling that the special character of Puducherry has diminished after the merger (Miles 1995, 28-9, 85).

Ever since the transfer of the former French territories to India, the question of their dissolution as a single administrative unit and the incorporation of the geographically disparate parts of the union territory into their ethnically and linguistically similar neighboring states has been subject to speculation. Yet when the question was raised in 1979 by India's then Prime Minister Morarji Desai, opposition in Puducherry was fierce (Miles 1995, 84-6). This resistance was however not led by Francophile elements of the population, and the sentiment was shared by immigrants from other Indian states who had settled in Puducherry in large numbers after the merger. Analysts thus agree that it was economics, rather than cultural sentiments, which were behind the response. The primary cause was that union territory status implies substantial subsidies from the central government which have put the Union Territory of Puducherry in a privileged economic position compared to its neighboring states (Miles 1995; Annousamy 2005; Rai 2008). Indeed, in 2015 Puducherry had the highest per capita income in India after Delhi (The Hindu 2015). Understandably, this is a situation which the local population and Puducherry's government have been loath to change.

With the realization that a political identity as a separate union territory could not last without claims for a separate cultural identity to underpin it, a political cause for claiming the

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[5] French Consulate of Puducherry, pers.com. 11/9 2015.

French heritage and arguing for a distinct historic identity in Puducherry had been launched in 1979. French elements in Puducherry which had been deemphasized after independence were now again highlighted. For instance, a statue of Dupleix which had been removed from a prominent public position to be deposited at the French consulate was once again placed in public view on Puducherry's beachfront (Annousamy 2005, 170; Rai 2008, 22, 114; Jørgensen 2017) (figure 4). Similarly, today the presentation of "Puducherry culture" on the webpage of the Government of Puducherry emphasizes that "Puducherry was the erstwhile colony of France, so the influence of French culture is evident on the architecture, cuisine and lifestyle of the people of Puducherry" (Government of Puducherry n.d.-a). Such official claims of a thriving French legacy notwithstanding, the condition of the French heritage of Puducherry remains subject to contestation concerning its impact on present historic identity and awareness. Its preservation has faced challenges in the course of contemporary demographic and economic developments, even as the French heritage has occasioned a strong interest in the context of tourism development.

After the merger with India, the city and the wider Union Territory of Puducherry experienced an intensive process of urbanization and economically motivated migration both from the surrounding state of Tamil Nadu and from other parts of India. The attractions were its growing economy, favorable tax conditions, and relatively better urban infrastructure with efficient provision of amenities such as electricity and potable water. This process was underpinned by the Central Government of India, which invested heavily in the development of Puducherry to gain public support and ensure its successful integration into the Republic of India (Sundarajan 1995, 127-133). The present city of Puducherry is an urban conglomeration where only the small boulevard town stands apart as a visibly distinctive entity which architecturally reflects the history of French rule, in the form of a townscape framed in an oval

grid structure. Like the layout of other Indian colonial towns, the boulevard town was separated into a so-called 'White Town' where the Europeans resided, and a 'Black Town' for the Tamil population (figure 3). While the buildings in the White Town reflected French architectural styles, the Black Town was characterized by a mix of Tamil vernacular and French architectural elements. These two parts of the boulevard town are separated by a canal and have retained marked differences in architecture till the present.

The colonial period built environment of the White Town has, initially more by chance than by design, been well preserved because it has remained a quiet area characterized mainly by government offices and residences for wealthier segments of the population. Until recently there has been little business development and a limited need for new construction at a larger scale. The Black Town (now referred to as 'the Tamil Town') has seen more change. The residents have continued to demolish old buildings, in favor of erecting modern and economically more attractive apartment blocks with extra space that can be rented out, and to open businesses which attract more bustle and traffic. This has created a higher population density and an urban landscape that visually resembles many other Indian cities.

Ironically, the atmosphere of quiet provinciality which has remained in the historic center of Puducherry from the period of French rule converts the legacies of a marginal existence to an asset in heritage and tourism development. Puducherry's provinciality is manifest for instance in the possibility of negotiating the streets safely by foot or on cycle, which is a rare phenomenon in the fast developing contemporary Indian cities. Since 2002 Puducherry has been marketed intensively to Indian city audiences with the slogan "Peaceful Pondicherry" (now Puducherry) and the added tagline "give time a break" (Chandran 2002, np). Thus the old capital of French India is promoted as a destination that provides an opportunity to take a break from the hassles of Indian modernity (Magedera 2015).

In the context of heritage and tourism marketing the presentation of history outlined by the Government of Puducherry (n.d.-b, np) focuses markedly on the French element:

A trip to Puducherry is like a journey in time with a vibrant present celebrating its interesting past. 'History (…) factually started with the arrival of the French (…), who founded the town and built it in its present form, during the two and a half century [sic] they occupied it'.

Concurrently, the French boulevard town – first and foremost the White Town with its more notably French ambiance – has become central to the government's heritage and tourism development. The Department of Tourism (n.d., np) straightforwardly describes the "French past and heritage" as "a very good marketing platform".

The idea of using the French connection in Puducherry as a 'brand' and selling point in tourism has caught on more widely, to the extent that references to French culture become empty signifiers; a strong, if vaguely defined Puducherry brand. For instance, local shops with names such as '*Boutique du Kashmir*' or '*Boutique du Orissa'* are marketing handicrafts from northern states with no intrinsic relation to either France or Puducherry itself (figure 5). Meanwhile, the continued presence of French institutions and of a minority of inhabitants with French citizenship notwithstanding, the preservation of a French cultural legacy in Puducherry has become increasingly precarious. The living memory of French rule is receding as the people who experienced it are aging and dying, and an increasing part of the population is constituted by immigrants who have different historic backgrounds. Meanwhile, ironically the increasingly strong tourism development, which has seen annual tourist numbers in Puducherry rise from 0.8 million in 2001 to 1.4 in 2015 (Department of Tourism, Puducherry 2016) now makes it

tempting for developers to crowd the White Town with new hotels, tourist shops and apartment blocks, threatening to displace the provincial atmosphere and the historic architecture which provided the initial attraction.

Heritage and citizenship: 'heritage awareness' as a new civilizing mission

The promotion of Puducherry's French heritage in touristic and political discourse notwithstanding, heritage conservation is not always a priority in practice. In 2014, for instance, headlines in local news proclaimed that the 144-year-old town hall, a prominent landmark in the White Town which had fallen out of use, abruptly collapsed and was beyond repair (Varma and Prasad 2014). The continuing disappearance of elements of Puducherry's colonial period built environment has resulted in the creation of several NGOs which advocate for the conservation of the built heritage in the old French boulevard town. Even as interests in the promotion of cultural heritage as an economic pursuit are growing in the Government of Puducherry, both the government and the population of Puducherry are thus subject to attempts at inculcating what is commonly – here as elsewhere – called "heritage awareness" (e.g. Nyaupane and Timothy 2010). Here a particular understanding of heritage values is intended to counter practices of disregard in the form of insufficient maintenance or downright demolition of buildings deemed by activists to constitute heritage. Exploring how the pursuit for 'heritage awareness' is playing out in contemporary Puducherry provides an entry point for discussing the processes of universalizing claims and marginalization which go on in the production of the city's (post)colonial heritage.

     The earliest NGO to promote 'heritage awareness' in Puducherry was INTACH Pondicherry, created in 1985 as a chapter of the Indian National Trust of Art and Cultural

Heritage which was established in 1984. It began its career by collaborating with staff at the local *Ecole Francaise d'Extrême Orient*, a French indological research institute. By 1995, together they had completed an inventory of 1,800 buildings in the boulevard town which they held to have heritage value, with the ambition of generating both public and private interest in their conservation (INTACH Pondicherry 2004, 5). The documentation process was increasingly coupled with fundraising for restoration projects carried out by INTACH architects, and associated activities such as production of publications and signage to generate public interest in the architecture and history of Puducherry.

In 1993 *les Amis du Patrimoine Pondichérien* (Friends of Pondicherry Heritage, FPH) was created by a small group of French and Indian individuals with historic connections to French India. This organization likewise engaged in supporting built heritage in Puducherry, by raising funds for restoration projects and presenting awards for well-kept heritage buildings. FPH is still active, but is now turning its attention more to the other former French *comptoirs* which are subject to less attention than Puducherry. Meanwhile, INTACH Pondicherry has built a position for itself as a team of expert interlocutors in the heritage field, who are consulted in both public and private restoration and development projects sponsored by the local and central government as well as with international funding (figure 6). Nonetheless, by 2008 over 700 of the buildings inventoried in 1995 had disappeared (INTACH Pondicherry 2008, 12). Following the dramatic collapse of the old town hall in 2014, a new local heritage organization, People for Pondicherry Heritage, was formed to build public awareness and to increase the pressure on the government to conserve heritage. The outcome has been the staging of public cultural events and petitions, including the arrangement of an annual heritage festival in Puducherry from 2015 onwards.

Notwithstanding the existence of several organizations working for heritage in

Puducherry, the pursuit of heritage conservation is far from a mainstream movement in India. The institutionalization of state-sponsored legal built monument protection, which remains in operation today in the guise of institutions such as the Archaeological Survey of India, has a colonial genealogy, dating back to the nineteenth century (Menon 2015). Attempts at generating wider public support for heritage protection, and for extending conceptions of heritage beyond legally protected structures such as national monuments, are a much more recent phenomenon. Since the 1980s, a network of heritage organizations bringing together the nongovernmental and the governmental sector has begun to develop in India. Yet today heritage conservation largely remains an interest pursued by a well-educated, urban and cosmopolitan elite (Hancock 2008). This history is also reflected in the stance of heritage activists in Puducherry. As one local conservationist expressed it during an interview, lamenting the limited concern for heritage in Puducherry, "[We lack] awareness and [assigning] the importance [of heritage] the French or the Europeans have about it; they do protection, you know, we still have a long way [to go]".[6]

The wider implications of this discourse of 'heritage awareness' are worth pursuing analytically; not least because the term is so frequently used by heritage protection agencies across the globe with little critical interrogation of the implications (Jørgensen 2014, 271-8). At its most basic and widely understood level, heritage awareness can be taken to imply knowledge that something – a building, an entire townscape or some form of cultural practice – is connected with a particular past and has a corresponding value assessment (Nyaupane and Timothy 2010, 227). Pointing to the strong moral dimensions of the implied value system, unawareness is frequently referred to in terms of a "lack" (Nyaupane and Timothy 2010, 226);

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[6] This is also reflected in the limited membership reported by the leaders of the organizations that aim to preserve Puducherry's heritage. While their activities may have a wider following and support (e.g. People for Pondicherry Heritage had gathered around 4,000 followers on Facebook within its first 8 months of existence), the formal membership of INTACH Pondicherry, which uses membership fees as one way of garnering support, is around 200 persons, while FPH currently has around 10 members.

even as "mindlessness" (Moscardo 1999).

The rhetoric of an almost moral obligation to take an interest in Puducherry's past and its built remains, for old-time residents and immigrants alike, recurred in interviews with people engaged in enhancing 'heritage awareness' in one way or another. As one member of The Historical Society of Pondicherry expressed it, "Anyone has a duty to get interested in the history of this town to some extent (…) because you should know, what is the place where [you] live". Indeed, the rhetoric surrounding 'heritage awareness' in Puducherry mirrors that of prominent international heritage conventions such as the Venice Charter and the World Heritage Convention, which emphasize not just a national responsibility for heritage conservation, but also a wider "common responsibility" and "duty" to protect heritage (ICOMOS 1965, preamble; UNESCO 1972, § 4 and 6.1; Falser 2015, 14).

The call for 'heritage awareness' does not stop with the exhortation for taking an interest in knowledge of the past and the way it has shaped the present. It extends to a demand for action which implies the construction of a larger moral community with particular heritage values. This is evident in the way in which one local conservation architect diagnosed the situation in Puducherry:

All these are old buildings (…) from the French period, more than 150 years, (…) many of them, being government buildings (…) are not well maintained (…), that's the big challenge, (…) heritage restoration is not always the first priority. [We have to] push and prod the government. (…) There is a lack of civil actions, civil society (…), ultimately you blame politicians for everything, but (…) if you create enough pressure, ultimately politicians (…) [will be] *forced* to listen; there's obviously a lack of political movement for any of these issues. (…) People are so (…) cynical about

politics and people just go on with their daily lives.

The logic behind the impetus for the building of 'heritage awareness' is a deficit model where the people targeted are found wanting and in need of guidance (cf. Merriman 2004). More than this, the implications of such remarks extend beyond the immediate context of the quest for building conservation. They relate to contexts with implications on a greater scale: Namely conceptualizations of appropriate forms of governance and citizenship.

This is a dimension which needs to be brought more strongly out in critical theoretical discussions of 'heritage awareness'. What is being called into question here, as a lack of agency concerning heritage protection is criticized, is at once the government's ability or intention to deliver proper governance, and the population's agency, individually, as proper citizens, and collectively, as a proper civil society. At stake in the attempt to promote 'heritage awareness' are thus universalizing claims for "the foundational categories and values of political modernity" (Hancock 2008, 95).

The fact that heritage is closely related to governance, for instance in the sense that a modern state is expected to document and safeguard a formally designated heritage to uphold its legitimacy (Handler 1985), and that heritage practice itself is a form of governance (Winter 2015, 998), are well established points in heritage studies. However, the question of how heritage ties in with conceptualizations of and demands for agency in terms of civil society and citizenship deserves more dedicated research. The topic is important: Citizenship can broadly be understood as a set of transactions and negotiations concerning rights, entitlements and privileges, as well as duties and obligations (Watt 2011, 283). It concerns rights to participate in politics, but also more than this. It includes civil, socioeconomic and cultural rights to participate in the public sphere and "moral and performative dimensions of membership which

define the meanings and practices of belonging in society" (Holston and Appadurai 1996, 200).

In the context of Puducherry – and contemporary Indian urban development more widely – the issue of citizenship and heritage is perhaps even more salient. Cities, with their complex concentrations and inevitable mixing of heritage and ethnicity, generate uncertainties about many aspects of citizenship, such as communities of allegiance, forms of organization, inclusiveness, ethical foundations and signifying performances (Holston and Appadurai 1996, 187-8). Several authors have also pointed out that in India, with its stratified and multiple publics, civil society and citizenship in the substantive rather than merely formal sense are not equally accessible to everyone. Rather, these tend to be dominated and shaped by a smaller well-educated and bourgeouis elite, which attempts to extend its own values as normative in the public. This process is also shaped by histories of colonial rule and associated universalizing hierarchies of progress and civilization (Chatterjee 2001; Bhandari 2006; Watt 2011).

The issue of multiple publics and differential interest in, or access to define heritage was reflected in interviews with heritage activists in Puducherry. As one of them expressed it, "while it is felt that it is only the French precinct [here: the White Town] which is more – what they call the *elite* part of town, we are the only ones who are interested (…), we wanted the entire boulevard area (…) to be *as* involved in this movement – creating a sense of (…) awareness". Yet from the perspective of the 'heritage awareness'-raising organizations in Puducherry it is clear that there are also right and wrong ways to engage with the heritage of the city. Ironically, this issue is raised even though the heritage that is celebrated is one of cultural blends and mutual appropriations in the form of the Franco-Tamil cross-cultural impacts on the city and its built form (INTACH Pondicherry 2004, 3). For instance, in its guidelines INTACH Pondicherry cautions against certain popular ways of appropriating French

heritage: "a number of new constructions that have come up in the old town in the name of 'French style' (…) are mostly misunderstood applications or a local understanding of 'European baroque' features. (…) Also there is a tendency among the people to adopt French style even if the building is in the Tamil town" (INTACH Pondicherry 2004, 35, 79). Thus, in the quest to create 'heritage awareness' it is not enough to engage with the city's heritage – it has to be done in the right way.

The European origins of the template for heritage protection and associated values that are promoted in Puducherry were clearly apparent from this study, as indeed elsewhere in India (e.g. Menon 2015; Jørgensen 2014, 176-7; Hancock 2008, 92-5). For instance, conservation architects compared the work of INTACH to the tradition of the British Arts and Crafts Movement; and local heritage organizations expressed their wishes that India had heritage legislation comparable to that in France, or heritage institutions comparable to the National Trust in the UK. Of course, the observation that the present globally propagated ideals of heritage preservation are derived from European (and frequently Eurocentric) values with a claim for universalism is not new (e.g. Smith 2006; Herzfeld 2004); but their postcolonial negotiation merits further investigation.

The concept of heritage and its preservation has a longstanding role in the relationship between colonial powers and colonized territories, as part of a professed civilizing mission. In this discourse "'the to-be-salvaged pasts' of the colonized" bolstered colonialist claims of representing and propagating universal values, which simultaneously served to underpin claims for the legitimacy of colonial rule (Falser 2015, 4; Swenson 2013). Many emerging postcolonial states have since engaged in similarly legitimizing projects defining their own canons of cultural heritage, thereby engaging not only in national and often distinctly anti-colonial identity production (Marshall 2008), but also restaging the civilizing mission of

heritage preservation as self-civilization (Falser 2015).

In the case of the contemporary NGO efforts to preserve heritage in Puducherry, a project of civilizing mission remains palpable; even visible in a comment in INTACH Pondicherry's guest book, where a visitor from the UK in January 2003 left the remark: "Delightful to note that Indians are at long last beginning to respect their history and legacy. I hope you will be able to educate and civilise the politicians and government." Continuities in a wider tradition of heritage and civilizing mission notwithstanding, a distinct irony here is that the heritage to be salvaged is not, as so often in colonial period examples from across the world, the remains of supposedly extinct or near-lost civilizations of the colonized but (to a considerable extent, if not exclusively) the remains of a defunct colonial power. In this respect, shifting postcolonial patterns of power, identity and marginalization appear to be at play in the re-making of heritage in Puducherry.

Postcolonial paradoxes: Indo-French heritage, citizenship and changing claims for universal values

Heritage and citizenship are complex concepts in postcolonial Puducherry. As already discussed, the question of how much French heritage remains in Puducherry is a contested issue. Similarly, the universality of a supposed legacy of French values is both claimed and called into question. The heritage and citizenship produced with a point of departure in Puducherry's colonial experience are complicated by processes of historic change and exchanges between multiple publics, which encompass not only the local or national scale, but also the transnational, implicating France as well as India. Perhaps no example can better serve

to demonstrate the tensions and paradoxes associated with the postcolonial contestations of heritage, universal value and processes of marginalization surrounding Puducherry than the local French citizens of Tamil ethnicity.

This is a very diverse community, spanning people who have never visited France as well as those frequently travelling between France and India; and people who scarcely speak a word of French as well as the perfectly Francophone (Rai 2008, 120). A pride in French citizenship is nonetheless pervasive. It has become a prized asset and source of some envy in the decades following decolonization, as the French citizenship includes economic benefits such as pensions exceeding those available to citizens of India. French identity is communicated strongly in collective contexts, such as every year when Puducherry's French community engages in public celebrations of Bastille Day. Similarly, institutions such as the *Foyer du Soldat* – the meeting house for an aging group of former French servicemen – proudly display French symbols, from the French *tricolore,* to the bust of Marianne with the motto "*liberté – egalité – fraternité*". Individually, Frenchness is communicated in a diverse range of daily practices, from verbal markers such as referring pointedly to "my country, France", to wearing finger rings with the colors of the *tricolore*, or insisting on dining with cutlery in the European style rather than eating with the fingers as is the common practice in India (figure 7). If Frenchness tends to be overcommunicated amongst French *Pondicheriéns*, as they are often called, this undoubtedly relates to the precariousness of French heritage and identity in postcolonial Puducherry. It is also affected by what other analysts have identified as a lingering fear amongst Puducherry's French – but culturally also very Tamil – community: that of being abandoned by a France caught up in postcolonial introspections on tensions concerning immigration and national identity (Miles 1990, 1995; Rai 2008, 44, 120).

In one interview a French Muslim woman, originally from Puducherry and now returned

after living in mainland France and in other parts of the former French Empire, overtly drew both heritage and a history of claims for universal values into her reflections. This came out in critical observations on the recognition of her French identity and the current political climate in France:

> More and more in the political field we hear speech against 'the foreigners'. Even in my case, the case of my family (…) from a community that has long-time links with France. Being in France – a country of human rights – I could not accept discrimination. (…) They have completely forgotten – it is very important to be a country of human rights. This heritage they have completely put aside.

Here, a different heritage altogether is called upon: Not the colonial heritage expressed through the townscape of Puducherry, but the heritage of citizenship, and simultaneously, of empire.

In this critique of unfulfilled universalist values there is a subtle irony predicated on the distinct history of universalist and civilizing aspirations of France in the colonial context. The French revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in 1789 set in motion the institutionalization and export of a set of newly developed and supposedly universal values. These were not only professed to provide an enlightenment capable of developing and perfecting humankind, but were simultaneously also underpinning both national and global universalist ambitions of France as a great nation and *République coloniale*. The very term 'civilizing mission', which was applied in various guises by different nineteenth century European colonial powers, is derived from the French concept of '*mission civilisatrice*' (Falser

2015, 9).[7] The extent to which French colonial policies of assimilation and propagation of values with universalist claims succeeded can be questioned (Miles 1995, 147), but contemporary postcolonial claims such as those made by the woman above demonstrate that they have had some effect. Only here, the universalist aspirations propagated abroad in the context of past empire have come back to haunt France, as voices from the erstwhile empire hold France to account for a heritage it has claimed for itself and for them, but may to some extent fail to practice.

A defining characteristic of the production of heritage surrounding Puducherry and its wider connections between India and France, in terms of human links, material remains, values and cultural practices alike, is that it is set in a history of decline: A decline of French empire, and of France as a nation state in the present world order, not just in terms of the "colonial fracture" of immigration debate and postcolonial memory (Laforcade 2006), but also in terms of global economic development. Hence the history of the colonial marginalization of Puducherry is far from the only process of marginalization and changing trajectories of universalizing aspirations to be reckoned with in the current context of (post)colonial heritage-making surrounding Puducherry. As a professor at Pondicherry University diagnosed the local situation:

> The enthusiasm for the French language has declined. (…) The *Lycee* [French high
>
> school] earlier had so many students and maintained connections with French culture

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[7] Indeed, Falser notes that in the globalized civilizing mission following the post-WWII development of the United Nations and the new Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 by the UN in Paris, the attempt to universalize heritage protection followed closely, first through the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1956), and later through UNESCO's universalist Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), on which he opines, with direct reference to heritage as civilizing mission, that "it can be no coincidence that the [UNESCO] headquarters were located in the capital of France" (Falser 2015: 13).

[but student numbers decline]. France itself is declining. There is less opportunity for people to get jobs [in France]. Refugees are also turned away – it's the policy of immigration. Even French Romas are exported. Only here we think of the *tricolore* and '*liberté*, *egalité* and *fraternité*' – it is all out of ignorance!

Indeed, in terms of its heritage of universalizing aspirations, France evinces some decline: In the current economic crisis, funding for the soft power of cultural influence associated with everything from research to education and cultural collaboration abroad has been cut back (Lane 2013, 5-6). Even the contemporary French image of France in India is that of a straggler trying to catch up with economic opportunities in a global power on the rise (Magedera 2010, 338; Wieder 2013).

In promoting its French colonial heritage, ironically Puducherry is now able to claim for itself, and for India, a position of political power and independence, as well as moral high ground. As one local conservationist expressed it:

Pondicherry is a very peaceful place, (…) and India *is* by and large a very tolerant nation, also, (…) unlike the British or the Portuguese there was no real battle in Pondicherry. (…) The French *chose* to leave and [otherwise] they would have been anyway thrown out, so (…) the relationship has remained (…) *agréable*, as they say in French. (…) Nehru had the wisdom to tell them that, (…) we could have told them to pack off; Nehru in fact said that 'I want Pondicherry to remain a window of culture open towards France'.

In some respects it thus seems that the dynamics of who is making claims on a heritage of universal values have been reversed in the postcolonial context.

Conclusion

If "heritage politics reinforces a worldwide hierarchy of social, political and (…) cultural values" (Herzfeld 2004, 205), then this simultaneously sets the stage for an evolving field of tensions and paradoxes. The negotiation of the processes of marginalization and claims to universal values associated with this process is subject to colonial as well as postcolonial dynamics, which need to be interrogated. The production of French colonial heritage surrounding Puducherry presents itself as a continual unfolding of tensions between claims made on universal values and processes of historic, cultural and political marginalization occurring at different levels of scale, from the local to the transnational. Puducherry's history as a marginal colony sets the stage for universalizing processes of civilizing mission which encompass postcolonial contestations of how to preserve and be aware of heritage; how to act as a citizen in this process, and even how to be French.

The case of Puducherry shows how claims to a particular set of European-derived universalizing values and associated practices of civilizing mission remain at play in the contemporary production of colonial heritage, even as power relations change in the postcolonial context. Here, the associated processes of marginalization take new directions, positioning the remains from a former colonial power in decline as relics in need of being salvaged by a self-confidently independent India.

If Puducherry was marginal as a French colony, then it is precisely this legacy, now deemed "quaint and charming" (Masthan 2015, np), which it capitalizes on today to claim a

distinct heritage and a separate identity as a union territory. Its growing tourism economy and process of postcolonial political identity making is much more concerned with an Indian audience than with France. However, this far from means that France is not also implied in postcolonial identity productions rooted in Puducherry. Claims on the Indo-French heritage continue to speak to a history of French colonialism and aspirations to universal values which haunts debates on memory and postcolonial fracture in France. Here, ironically the French from Puducherry, even while at risk of being marginalized in contemporary definitions of Frenchness in France, can assert their French heritage by upholding the claims on universal values which France self-consciously propagated as a colonial power, in a time when some of those very values are seen as flagging in France. Meanwhile, as India forges ahead of France in the postcolonial world order, new claims on the global hierarchy of values are made through NGO-driven projects of self-civilizing mission, which extend from heritage conservation to wider claims on universalizing values.

Crucially, Puducherry is much more than a colonial museum, as shown by the continual tensions between its urban development and heritage conservation. Here patterns of marginalization and application of civilizing mission reinsert themselves in claims for universal values. The quest for 'heritage awareness' extends beyond heritage conservation to encompass larger issues of defining proper governance, citizenship and civil society, thereby posing questions of who is included and excluded, who makes the definitions, and who informs the values and practices behind them. These are processes in need of further research. As Tim Winter has emphasized, "heritage will continue to be folded into new political relations as it is further embedded in debates and initiatives around sustainability, human rights, urbanism, intercultural dialogue and so forth" (Winter 2015, 1012). This makes it crucial to pay critical

theoretical attention to these dynamics, in Puducherry and beyond.

Acknowledgments

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