

# Postcolonial perspectives on colonial heritage tourism

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## **POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON COLONIAL HERITAGE TOURISM: The domestic tourist consumption of French Heritage in Puducherry, India**

### **Abstract**

This ethnographic study explores postcolonial Indian perspectives on the production and consumption of the former French colony Puducherry as a destination for colonial heritage tourism, asking: how does colonial heritage capture the imagination of domestic visitors, and what are the rationales amongst local residents and authorities that promote this destination for its colonial heritage? It demonstrates how the use of Puducherry's French legacy is a postcolonial phenomenon which has been a product of Indian interests. A central argument is that we need to investigate the postcolonial complexities of restaging colonial heritage in tourism without assuming a simple dichotomy between tourists from former colonial powers and formerly colonised countries, which has often formed the baseline of postcolonial tourism research.

**Keywords:** postcolonialism, colonial heritage, French India, Puducherry, Pondicherry, domestic tourism

### **INTRODUCTION**

Colonial heritage is becoming an increasingly popular tourist attraction internationally. Correspondingly we have seen growing research attention to the question of how tourism “both reinforces and is embedded in postcolonial relationships” (Hall & Tucker, 2005a, 2). Focus has been directed to the implications of this particular postcolonial relationship on critical issues ranging from cultural representation to economic development and attendant power relations between former colonial powers and former colonies (e.g. Cheer & Reeves, 2015; Hall & Tucker, 2005b; Teo, 2001; Wong, 2013). In this burgeoning field of critical postcolonial tourism research, most academic discussions study colonial heritage as a phenomenon consumed by tourists from former colonial powers. While this is a valid pursuit, indeed one which I myself have engaged in in previous research (Jørgensen, 2013), there is an inherent problem in making this the default perspective. In the push to research the practices and imaginaries associated with heritage tourists from the former colonial powers we should not forget the domestic tourism perspectives in the former colonies. In spite of its indubitable cultural and economic significance, domestic tourism has been subject to a tradition of scholarly neglect compared to international tourism, which has caused critics such as Singh (2009, 3) to characterise it as “the largest, and most unaddressed, proportion of the tourism ‘iceberg’” in research, especially in regions such as Asia. Further, neglecting domestic tourism potentially reproduces a problematic essentialising view on the former colonies as destinations that are passively consumed only by foreign tourists. As pointed out by Keen and Tucker (2012, 101), “the world of tourism is changing as increasing numbers of people from ‘non-western’ countries (often former colonised sites) become tourists. (...) [T]his clearly raises the need to pluralise the tourist

gaze". Yet surprisingly, although they visit the same destinations and often far surpass foreign tourists numerically, the ways in which domestic tourists in the former colonies are targeted and respond to the utilisation of colonial heritage as a resource in tourism has been all but neglected in postcolonial tourism research (Park, 2016).

The question I wish to pose is: how does colonial heritage attract and capture the imagination of domestic visitors, and what are the rationales amongst local residents and the authorities that promote a formerly colonised destination for its colonial heritage? My ambition in this article is related to that which has earlier been evinced in pioneering work such as *Tourists at the Taj* (Edensor, 1998), where the focus was turned from understanding and theorising the typical tourist as being by default white and European, to engaging with the question of how non-western visitors practice tourism and understand symbolic sites. Postcolonial studies have long called for critical approaches that challenge essentialised post/colonial relationships (Ashcroft et al., 1995; Bhabha, 1994). Equally, criticisms have been made that current knowledge in tourism research remains predominantly colonial in outlook, and in need of epistemological decolonisation that decentres Western perspectives (Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Park, 2016). This study aims to theorise colonial heritage tourism from a postcolonial perspective which, *pace* Chakrabarty (2000), 'provincialises Europe' by foregrounding domestic tourism perspectives. The article will explore postcolonial Indian perspectives on the production and consumption of the former French colony Puducherry as a destination of colonial heritage tourism. In spite of the importance of India's multifaceted colonial history and the increasing restaging of its colonial heritage in the tourism industry, colonial heritage tourism in India has been subject to a limited number of studies. Similarly, Henderson and Weisgrau (2007, xxvii) have noted that the question of how tourism intersects with travellers, entrepreneurs and residents of tourism destinations in India has received surprisingly little coverage. This study is intended to go some way towards alleviating these oversights.

## HERITAGE, TOURISM AND POSTCOLONIALITY

Tourism during the colonial period has been theorised as underpinning a range of colonial agendas, such as promoting and reaffirming European modernity, high culture and imperial identity, as well as symbolising colonial power and projecting exoticism onto local peoples, whilst also creating micro-spaces of European 'home' and comfort in the colonies (Furlough, 2002; Jennings, 2003; Ravi, 2008). Similarly it has been pointed out that in the postcolonial period domestic tourism in former colonies has served to underpin political identity narratives about the postcolonial state, which serve their own ideological purposes, often emphasising narratives of resistance to European colonial powers (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2008; Patil, 2011). Meanwhile, the assumption in postcolonial heritage and tourism studies has been that of a fundamental divide between tourists from the former colonial powers and the former colonies. For instance Graham et al. (2000, 94) posit that "in postcolonial states, the principal dissonance is between new national identities based upon revised and unifying heritage values, and tourism economies, which perpetuate colonial heritages in order to sell them to visitors from former metropolitan countries who recognise their own heritage in them."

It has frequently been suggested that for tourists from the former colonial powers, heritage tourism and the keeping alive of memorials of colonialism constitute a form of nostalgia, enabling empire, as it were, to be revisited one last time, again and again; "love at last sight" (Burton, 2001, 217; see also Buettner, 2006; Cheer & Reeves, 2015; Peleggi, 2005). Presumably though, that is not

the motivation for tourists from the former colonies when they visit destinations in their own country marketed on the basis of colonial heritage. The research which has been carried out on the role of colonial heritage in tourism marketing discourse and narratives in India still questions what happens in actual practice. Further, it assumes a lingering ambiguity or tension: "Has the Indian public overcome its resentment towards its past as a colony to the point that individuals are interested in experiencing the lifestyles of its former oppressors?" (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008, 804). Here as elsewhere, Tucker and Hall's call (2005, 187) for investigating in further depth how the practice of tourism engages the colonial past remains as valid now as when it was written more than a decade ago.

In existing postcolonial tourism research an antagonistic relationship to colonial heritage, constructed along the lines of former colonial powers and formerly colonised countries continues to be assumed. As Cheer and Reeves (2015, 160) frame it: "While the attraction for travellers and citizenry from former colonising countries is typically to imbibe in the splendour of a bygone era, at a local level, loathing concerns the righting of historical grievances centred on the loss of sovereignty and self-determination under colonial rule". In this analytical perspective we see an echo of traditional theoretical approaches in postcolonial studies, which originated in the analysis of binaries between coloniser and colonised, self and other (Said, 1978). However, postcolonial studies have evolved to problematise such simple binaries and address the complexities which are implied in postcolonial identities and relations (Ashcroft et al., 1995; Bhabha, 1994; Keen & Tucker, 2012). Homi Bhabha (1994, 37-39), for instance, has pointed to the inherent instability of all cultural expressions and identities, especially in the postcolonial condition. Through the concept of Third Space, whose productive capacities he locates in its post/colonial provenance, Bhabha emphasises the importance of locating the production of culture in spaces of in-betweenness, hybridity and ambiguity, which carry the potential to elude the politics of polarity (ibid.). Framing the social memory implied in colonial heritage tourism, it may similarly help to step away from the polarities implied above, to approach this postcolonial context from the perspective of what Michael Rothberg (2013, 372) has called 'the multidirectionality of memory'; "a dynamic in which multiple pasts jostle against each other in a heterogenous present".

Studies in postcolonial heritage have emphasised the importance of taking account of the often complex interweaving between postcolonial and colonial heritage and memories, and of the ambiguities that may arise from the ongoing processes of relating to these in both discourse and practice (Chadha, 2006; Marschall, 2008). Commenting on postcolonial ambivalence in the relationship with colonial remains, for instance Chadha (2006, 348-49), paraphrasing Bhabha's conception of colonial ambivalence, argues that "the postcolonial mind mimics the colonial psyche, for it appropriates whatever it deems fit and discards the colonial unwanted". In critical postcolonial tourism studies, too, it is necessary to look beyond the assumed binaries between subject and object, coloniser and colonised. In particular, we need to attend to the dynamics of contemporary tourism practice as those formerly conceptualised as the objects of tourism have increasingly become tourists themselves (Keen & Tucker, 2012, 102). *Pace* Chakrabarty's (2000) seminal work on decentring colonial histories as the implicit framework for analytical categories in history and social sciences, 'provincialising Europe' in colonial heritage tourism research implies stepping away from a Eurocentric or colonial perspective on the concepts used to frame the analysis, to explore how this decentring can renew tourism knowledge from a domestic and postcolonial perspective.

## STUDY METHODS

This study is grounded in an interpretive phenomenological paradigm: Using a grounded theory approach to the analysis, it aims at identifying dominant themes and narratives in the presentation and experience of Puducherry's heritage as they emerged from a range of qualitative data, and capturing multiple perspectives with their complexity and potential tensions (cf. Edensor, 1998; Park, 2016). The findings are based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Puducherry during August-September 2015. They are also part of a much longer ethnographic research engagement with the city, which I have visited several times from 2007 in the course of three research projects, all related to contemporary uses of colonial heritage (Jørgensen 2014; 2017; 2018). The fieldwork was focused on understanding the contemporary heritage and tourism development in Puducherry, and involved 46 in-depth qualitative interviews with residents and representatives from the heritage and tourism sector in Puducherry. These data provided access to government, private and third sector perspectives on the ongoing development, as well as residents' experiences of it. Analysis of promotional material targeting tourists, including tourism marketing campaigns and regularly issued free information booklets, distributed throughout Puducherry, further served to identify recurrent themes in the way Puducherry's heritage is presented. So did observations of the physical presentation of Puducherry's small colonial city centre (see fig. 1), which is represented as the quintessence of the city's Indo-French heritage. Participant observation on tourism practices was focused on uses of this urban space. This ranged from following the manifold casual uses of spaces such as Puducherry's popular seaside promenade in the city's French quarter, 'the White Town', to participating in the more structured presentation of the city's heritage found in guided tours. These observations showed what captured tourist interests, and provided opportunity for having many less formal conversations with tourists (a more transient group with less time to spare for in-depth interviews) about their motivations to visit and their experience of Puducherry. To add volume to the data from my interactions with tourists, all comments on "Things to do" for Puducherry entered on TripAdvisor until the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 were reviewed. This provided further opportunity to analyse which elements of the touristic experience of colonial heritage in Puducherry capture the visitors' imagination, and how.

## PUDUCHERRY: FROM FRENCH COLONY TO TOURIST DESTINATION

While it is not as widely known as the all-dominating history of British colonialism in India, or even the Portuguese colonialism which is still associated with the popular tourism destination Goa (Gupta, 2009; Wilson, 1996), India also has a significant history of colonial engagement with France. Like many other European powers, France established footholds in India to participate in the lucrative East India trade which developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. By treaties with local rulers France acquired a series of settlements along the coasts of India from 1668. Puducherry, a town on South India's east coast, was acquired in 1673 and became the capital of French India under the frenchified name Pondichéry (known as Pondicherry in English). Though latecomers, the French were soon vying with the English to become the dominant European power in India. In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century under the rule of the ambitious Governor-general Joseph François Dupleix, it appeared a distinct possibility that India would fall under French control. Military conflicts ensued, in a complex pattern of alliances with local rulers, until the English established their dominance by a decisive victory in 1761.

Subsequently French India was curtailed to a handful of geographically isolated settlements totalling just 508 km<sup>2</sup> (Das, 1992). In this marginalised state it remained till after the decolonisation of British India in 1947, when the continued quest of President Nehru for India's complete independence from European colonial powers made it evident to France that its time as a colonial power in India had to end. A transfer of the French territories to India was negotiated and realised de facto in 1954, with final legal ratification in 1962 (Neogy, 1997).

Following their decolonisation the former French territories were declared a union territory of India, which was named after its capital. In 2006 the name officially reverted to the precolonial denomination, Puducherry. Both internationally and in India it does, to a considerable extent, remain known as Pondicherry, and hence this colonial name continues to be found in tourism promotion material where it has the potential appeal of referring to something more immediately familiar to the audience. Naturally the public authorities – including Puducherry's Department of Tourism – use the present official name, as I will do in the following. My focus here will be on the capital city rather than on the entire union territory. A striking factor is how, in some respects, the city of Puducherry has become more French following decolonisation than it was before. A decade prior to the decolonisation of the French territories in India, the head of the French Indian public school system passed the following critique of the capital:

Who is the French traveller disembarking at Pondichéry for the first time who does not experience a true disappointment? (...) Not a [French] newspaper stand, (...) no café, pastry shop or French hairdresser, and we've been there for close to three centuries! (...) [A] Frenchman passing through feels almost as homesick in [this] oldest French Colony than if he were travelling in a foreign country (Josselin, 1943, in Miles, 1995, 109).

Present-day tourists, however, need feel no such deprivations: Puducherry provides an abundance of all things French. “*Le Café*”, the renovated colonial port office on Puducherry's seafront, which opened as a government-operated café in 2008, offers quintessentially French items such as *pain au chocolat*, *quiche*, and *madeleines*, as well as traditional South Indian dishes. Likewise the regularly issued booklets that market the city to tourists overflow with offers such as “a French breakfast in Pondicherry” (The French Concept Restaurant, 2013, n.p.), demonstrating that a wider range of cafes, restaurants and bakeries have taken up the provision of dishes associated with France, from *croissants* to *steak frites*. The term ‘French’, names in the French language, or use of French symbols such as the Eiffel tower grace a wide range of local businesses, from beauty parlours to clothes shops. Even something as mundane as the bottled water that is produced by a local government-owned corporation carries the French name *Eau de Pondichéry*, thus contributing to the production of an ambience with distinctively French connotations.

Dubbed “the French Riviera of the East” (Arya et al., ND, n.p.), Puducherry has seen a marked revival of its French colonial heritage in recent decades. Not least the well-preserved colonial townscape of the city centre has drawn attention from the 1990s, leading to a quest for planned conservation, first by NGOs and research institutions (INTACH Pondicherry, 2004; Jørgensen, 2018), but increasingly supported by the Government of Puducherry, which has realised the tourism potential of the colonial French heritage. In the context of India this is an exotic legacy that provides Puducherry with a distinctive place identity which is used as the unique selling point to market the city in tourism (Town and Country Planning Department, Puducherry, 2007, 96-97).

Private businesses have followed suit and added critical mass to the development of Puducherry as a French heritage destination: Since the creation of *L'Orient*, the city's first 'heritage hotel' opened in 2002 by the Indian hotel chain Neemrana in a restored building formerly housing the French Directorate of Education, several heritage hotels and guest houses have been established in restored buildings dating to the period of French rule. This development occurs especially (though not exclusively) in the part of the old colonial city centre which remains known as 'the White Town'; that is, the area where the French part of the population used to live, as distinguished from 'the Black Town' (nowadays called 'the Tamil Town') which housed the local population. **[Insert fig. 1 (see caption after list of references)]**

Tourism in Puducherry has demonstrated solid growth since the formation of Puducherry's Tourism Department in 1992. Trends are recorded only at regional level, although it is readily acknowledged that the capital is the primary tourism destination. In 1992-2001 the estimated average growth rate in Puducherry's tourism (including foreign as well as domestic visitors) was 5.1% (Tata Economic Consultancy Services, 2003, 2); and in the new millennium Puducherry has seen tourist numbers rise from 498,919 registered arrivals in 2001 to 1,403,345 in 2015. Growth rates peaked at 22.6% in 2007, but even after a slump following the global financial crisis the growth rate was 10.4% in 2015 (Department of Tourism, Puducherry 2017). Breakdowns in foreign visitors by nationality are not available, but my interviews with people employed in Puducherry's tourism sector did bear out that they perceive French visitors to constitute the majority of foreign tourists. Similarly, I was often greeted with a polite "bonjour" by residents when moving about in Puducherry, as many, until they find otherwise from conversation, assume by default that a European-looking visitor is from France. While Puducherry thus holds greater attraction as a tourism destination for visitors from France than from other foreign countries owing to interest in its French colonial heritage, the vast majority of tourists in Puducherry are domestic. In 2015 1,297,192 registered visitors were Indian, against 106,153 foreigners (Department of Tourism, Puducherry, 2017). There is nothing extraordinary in this – governmental statistics across India show that domestic tourism figures continually dwarf those of foreign tourist arrivals (Henderson & Weisgrau, 2007, xxxi). This constitutes a strong argument for having a closer look at practices and images associated with the domestic tourism.

The continual growth in Puducherry's domestic tourism is due to a concerted effort by both Puducherry's government and private tourism operators to draw more such tourists. Sustained tourism marketing campaigns led by the government have targeted upmarket visitors from major urban hubs in the region, such as Chennai (the capital of the adjacent state Tamil Nadu, formerly known as Madras) and Bengaluru (the capital of Karnataka, formerly known as Bangalore). The focus has been on developing Puducherry as a favoured weekend destination for young professionals looking for a break from their hectic daily life (Chandran, 2002; Kannan, 2006). The strategy has worked: Tourism has become one of the key drivers of Puducherry's economy. In 2015 A. K. Singh, the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry, declared tourism "the largest service industry for generating employment and spurring economic growth" (cited in *the Hindu*, 2015, n.p.). In a wider perspective this development ties in with the general economic growth which India has experienced following its economic liberalisation reforms in the 1990s, which also caused tourism to be identified as a priority for economic investment across India. Simultaneously the growing urban Indian middle class with disposable income has enhanced the market for domestic tourism, and has consequently formed a strategic focus in the tourism sector (Hannam & Diekmann, 2011, 17, 20; Henderson & Weisgrau, 2007, xxx). As any city needs a unique selling point behind its tourism strategy to lend it "an instantly

recognisable place-image amidst the welter of tourism representations" (Edensor, 2007, xvii), Puducherry has taken to promoting its French colonial legacy. Thus it is utilising its colonial heritage to achieve the "production of difference" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, 52) which is necessary to convert a location into a tourism destination. In India, where the British colonial legacy is the predominant historical background, the heritage of more marginal colonial histories can emerge as a factor lending localities a unique identity in a tourism perspective (Jørgensen, 2014, 228-232). But how is the colonial French heritage of Puducherry presented to these domestic Indian tourists, and what do they make of it?

### **CONSUMING THE COLONIAL POWER: THE FRENCHNESS OF PUDUCHERRY AS AN ATTRACTION FOR INDIAN TOURISTS**

The place of French heritage in the promotion of Puducherry as a domestic tourism destination is readily illustrated by a popular governmental tourism campaign which was launched in 2002 in Indian business and news magazines, proclaiming the key message: "Pondicherry. Very French. Period." (Chandran, 2002, n.p.). Coupled with this tagline, a series of images showed photos of middle-class, cosmopolitan-looking yet distinctly Indian individual tourists, inserted in time-traveller style into reproductions of old French watercolours. These cheerful-looking visitors, camera and tourist gaze poised, appear undetected as they observe the historic French settings. The longer body text accompanying the images drove the message further home: "A holiday in Pondicherry offers a colonial French experience. It's the closest you'll ever get to being there. And then." (Kumar, ND, n.p.). Clearly, in Puducherry overt references to the history of French colonial rule are as heavily promoted on the domestic tourism market as they might be to any overseas visitor. This situation is far from universal in former colonial settings: For instance, in her incisive analysis of practice amongst tourist guides in the former Portuguese colony Macau in China, Cora Wong notes that very different narratives are presented to tourists, depending on their national background. While foreign visitors are informed about Macau's colonial history if they express an interest, guides almost totally eschew any reference to it amongst Chinese visitors, because mentioning a history of foreign rule implies an embarrassing loss of face from a Chinese perspective. As she further observes: "not a single reference to 'former colony' or 'colonial rule' was found in the material released by the government" (Wong, 2013, 920).

One reason that colonialism is more readily acknowledged in Puducherry is that making a claim to a distinct identity based on the history of French rule is politically expedient in terms that reach beyond and predate the tourism development. Emphasising the French connotations of Puducherry was not a priority to the local government immediately following decolonisation. However, by the end of the 1970s strong local resistance emerged when the central government proposed dissolving the union territory of Puducherry and merging its geographically disparate districts into their ethnically and linguistically similar neighbouring states. Since the history of French rule was the sole cause of the creation of Puducherry as a postcolonial political and administrative entity, this legacy now became emphasised as a factor bestowing a distinct identity that justified the continued existence of the union territory (Annousamy, 2005; Jørgensen, 2018). That a similar claim of a distinct French identity should later emerge in the tourism development of Puducherry is, from this perspective, no surprise. Postcolonial politics may imply a multidirectionality of memory (Rothberg, 2000), in which postcolonial cultural identities and memories of colonial relationships are produced by dynamics which have no simple one-way relationship with the colonial past. As Bhabha (1994, 35)



argues with reference to his concept of Third Space, “[t]he enunciation of cultural difference (...) is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated, and translated (...) in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic”. But how do Indian visitors from *outside* of Puducherry approach the French colonial legacy and what is made of it in practice?

The attraction of Puducherry to domestic visitors mirrors the image in tourism campaigns. As one tourist from Chennai (Nanali, 2015, n.p.) defined “the essence of Pondicherry” on TripAdvisor: “A French presence in a foreign shore (...) the French quarter (...) stand[s] out in contrast to the native culture. Somehow looks like teleported from France”. The distinctive colonial period built environment of the city centre, as well as the more recently promoted French tourism ambience capture the tourist imagination and underpin the effect of producing Puducherry as a little piece of France in India; yet at the same time a ‘France light’ which stands halfway between French and Indian culture. If colonialism implied a process of mimicry in which the colonisers required the colonised to become recognisable others, “subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, 86), then in the Third Space of tourism in postcolonial Puducherry the process and attendant ambiguities of producing this cultural difference cuts both ways. Tourist comments on TripAdvisor are quite revealing in this respect. At the same time as Indian visitors frequently remark both on Puducherry at large and individual tourist attractions, such as the Catholic churches, that “when you visit this place you will feel you are not in India.....just like [E]urope” (Deepakchoudary1997, 2016, n.p.), European visitors can state the reverse. For instance a German tourist remarked upon visiting a local church: “For us from Europe, this (...) is very different to what we are used to” (Judith4054, 2016, n.p.). The effect, from the perspective of both domestic and foreign tourists, is that of an environment which is quintessentially in-between; different enough to be interesting as a tourism destination, yet recognisable enough not to appear threatening.

A pattern also observed by Wong in Macau repeats itself in Puducherry as a colonial heritage tourism destination: Namely a predilection to focus on more innocent ideas of “cultural exchange between the East and the West” (Wong, 2013, 920) in the way the place is promoted and consumed. Rather than framing the touristic interest of Puducherry in terms of particular historic events or relationships associated with the colonial period, it is a particular set of tangible and intangible cultural outcomes of the colonial encounter that take centre stage. These are notably the mix of French and Tamil vernacular architecture in the city centre, the availability of French food and drink, and other cultural signifiers of Frenchness such as uses of the French language on street signs and amongst the local population. In spite of the historic framing, for many Indian tourists Puducherry seems to lend itself as much, or more, to contemporary cultural encounters than to encounters with a colonial past. As one visitor from Chennai stated on TripAdvisor after visiting Puducherry’s Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus: “Got to know more about [C]hristianity and their preachings and their religion. Good place to explore.” (Chhallani, 2016, n.p.). More overtly postcolonial narratives concerning intercultural and interreligious understanding and unity in diversity also come up, as in this comment on one of the city’s temples by another visitor from Chennai: “this temple is dedicated to the goddess Shakti. While [the] Sri Gokilambal Thirukameshwara Temple combines Indian religious practices and French tradition, the Kanniga Parameswari Temple blends Tamil and French architecture. [I]t will teach how to respect other religions” (Ravikumartalara, 2014, n.p.).

Thus, even as it is marketed for its colonial heritage, exploring the past in the sense of engaging with narratives of past historic events is not necessarily the focus of a touristic visit to Puducherry,

which is first and foremost presented as a cultural encounter between East and West, or Tamil and French culture, made manifest in both its built and intangible culture. As a French woman who owned a bar in Puducherry explained regarding the domestic tourists, while acknowledging that she, too, found Puducherry easier to navigate because it constituted a mix of East and West:

It's *in-between* and that *makes* it possible (...). [T]his place actually attracts young Indians very much and *there* you can find a nice interaction, they are very curious, they ask questions, but they already have an education, (...) they want to go abroad or they went at least one time (...). [Here] they have the best café they can have in all South India, and they want to try (...) – they feel they are part of something that is a little bit more than their daily experience, (...) – for them also it's a midway thing, you see.

In this respect the promotion and consumption of Puducherry in tourism fits well with observations that in recent decades “India’s middle class represents a growing consumer group that is increasingly integrating and blending more westernised lifestyles with aspects of domestic culture” (Hannam & Diekmann, 2011, 101). The ways in which items such as French food and drink are presented as heritage in Puducherry speak to this context, as the following reflections will exemplify.

The consumption of alcohol is one recurrent element in the touristic consumption of Puducherry. While this may not seem particularly striking perceived in the context of tourism practices worldwide, it has its distinct context in Puducherry, where it links to the heritage of French rule in two ways. One is a legal issue: As already explained, following its decolonisation, Puducherry became a union territory rather than a state. Beyond a closer relationship with the central government of India, one consequence of this administrative status is a regime of lower taxes. This results in lower alcohol prices than in neighbouring states – and, consequently, in massive government revenues from excise taxes on the higher volume of alcohol that is consumed (the Economist, 2016). However, this is far from the only reason that Puducherry as a tourist destination is associated with alcohol to an extent which makes a local restaurant’s advertisement for cocktails capture the sentiment perfectly with the slogan “Taste the spirit of Pondicherry” (Le Chateau, 2015, 3). The *way of consuming* alcohol in Puducherry is a key part of the attraction – and this constitutes the second way in which alcohol ties in with experiences of a French cultural heritage. Local residents themselves readily emphasised to me that for them, as for the Indian tourists who are increasingly attracted to Puducherry, consumption of alcohol was a part of what is associated with Puducherry’s French culture. As the owner of a local tourism bureau explained: “When you compare our lifestyle with nearby Tamil Nadu [the neighbouring state, sharing Tamil culture with Puducherry] (...) we have [alcoholic drinks] like wine – (...) that is part of our culture, but we don’t drink too much because we are social drinkers.” Another resident, a pensioner, further explained on this cultural contrast:

[T]hat developed the tourism (...). There is not in other places – in Tamil Nadu – places where you can drink pleasantly, openly; (...) they always drink clandestinely in small rooms, closed; here in Pondicherry they can drink freely, that sensation is there. [Thus] the government (...) get[s] a lot of taxes; there are *many* hotels here, they are *all full* on weekends.

Drinking as a tourist attraction in Puducherry does not compare to the 'hard partying' associated with Goa (e.g. Wilson, 1996) although local residents pointed out that many tourists do drink more than what is good for them. The feeling of having licence to enjoy a cocktail in a restaurant, or going out to drink beer openly in a café without being frowned upon, with its attendant sensation of freedom and cosmopolitanism, is itself an attraction for Indian visitors in Puducherry, set against the social rules which apply elsewhere across much of the country. In India consumption of alcohol is widely held to be a disreputable practice best not engaged in, certainly not in public; and while rules vary between different states, the taxation and control of alcohol consumption is often strict – to the point where some states have forbidden it entirely, just as the question of prohibition has been recurring in Tamil Nadu (Deepalakshmi, 2016). In this respect Puducherry as a domestic tourist destination is promoted as a cosmopolitan environment characterised by greater freedom in cultural habits, distinctly rooted in its French colonial history. As one young resident of Puducherry summarised when asked about his idea of lasting colonial impacts: "India got the railway from the British and we got the drinking culture from the French". Goa achieved popularity amongst Western tourists from the 1960s because its 'Portuguese-ness' set in India signified it as "a less socially confining place for relaxation" (Gupta, 2009, 139). Puducherry is, in certain respects, using its French colonial heritage in a similar way on the *domestic* tourism market, as attempts are made to attract visitors by portraying a cosmopolitan and – with moderation – free heritage rooted in French colonialism.

Assessing the cosmopolitan lifestyle aspirations that can be found in India's growing middle class, Brosius (2010, 16) has observed that "it is not so much a question of *what* is consumed but a question of *knowing how* to consume it". One example which she emphasises is, precisely, alcohol, the consumption of which as a practice devoid of social stigma she associates with "the cosmopolitan classes" (ibid.); that is, those with aspirations of a more globalised or transnational, yet still distinctly Indian outlook. In this context – and in wider perspectives, as illustrated above, *pace* Bhabha's concept of Third Space, – a touristic visit to Puducherry can thus be perceived as an opportunity for domestic visitors to practice cosmopolitan attitudes in a setting characterised by both cultural familiarity and difference. As van der Veer (2002, 15) points out, "[c]osmopolitanism is often seen as a liberating alternative (...). However, one does want to ask (...) on what terms one engages the Other." This is relevant not least because, as Brosius (2010, 28) emphasises in her discussion of cosmopolitanism and Bhabha (1994) does in his concept of Third Space, dealing with otherness has implicit reference to selfhood. So if Puducherry is presented and experienced as a space of otherness, then how is this space framed?

The theme of cosmopolitanism or 'East meets West' is far from the only conventional staple of tourism representations which, with a twist, can be encountered in Puducherry. Since 2002 Puducherry has been marketed intensively to Indian city audiences with the remarkably long-lived slogan "Peaceful Pondicherry" (now Puducherry) and the tagline "give time a break" (Chandran, 2002, n.p.). An irony here, compared with the frequently criticised restaging of colonialist exoticising imagery in tourism in former colonies (Bandyopadhyay & Morais, 2005; Phukan & Rajan, 2009), is that in the depiction of Puducherry as a place where 'time stands still', the image is not one of the otherwise frequently repeated trope of 'timeless exotic India' (e.g. Battacharyya, 1997; Edensor, 2007; Jørgensen, 2014, 220-223). Rather, it is that of a former colony which has been subject to arrested development because the provincial town of what was then Pondicherry lost developmental pace compared to the surrounding British and later independent India during French rule. In the words of the owner of a local French restaurant:

[A]fter Southeast Asia became more favoured [in French strategic interests] (...) Pondicherry went into [a] kind of slumber, and they kept it. So (...) we can talk about the provincial way of living (...), some kind of provincial, you know, feeling of love of living. This is Pondicherry's (...) important character.

Thus, rather than presenting Indian people and culture as a timeless or premodern tourist attraction, as critiqued by Bandyopadhyay and Morais (2005, 2016), it is the French colonial legacy that constitutes the timeless past to be visited.

The touristic image promoted in Puducherry is that of an opportunity for the busy, cosmopolitan Indian tourist to escape the stress and trappings of Indian modernity by stepping into the heritage dating from the colonial past of Puducherry (Jørgensen, 2018). This corresponded with the tourist practices I observed in Puducherry, where I met many young urban professionals who cheerfully declared that visiting 'peaceful Puducherry' was intended as a relief from the hustle and bustle of their busy metropolitan lives in Chennai and Bengaluru. As one woman from Bengaluru explained during a government-operated bus tour of the distinctly quieter Puducherry, "the traffic in Bangalore is like hell!" The French colonial setting is marketed as not just being outside of time, but also "quaint and charming" (Masthan, 2015, n.p.), and hence as a legacy posing no historic threat. Its allure is that of a setting which is attractively exotic from an Indian perspective, and which can be found well-preserved for touristic consumption while postcolonial Indian culture and society seamlessly continues to percolate around it. In the words of a local resident, a retired civil servant:

The White Town has preserved more or less its quiet aspect, not much (...) traffic, not much of high buildings, they are coming up, but not much, but the *rest* of the town is like any other town in South India.

The same experience is expressed by tourists, as in this comment left by a tourist from Bengaluru on TripAdvisor: "The entire area near the beach gives you a feel of French colony. (...) Other than this (...) Pondicherry is just like a normal town" (Jaiswal, 2016, n.p.). Hence, postcolonial India and its modern development remains the implicit framework in which the French colonial heritage of Puducherry is experienced – by residents and tourists alike. How deep, though, does the acknowledgement of Puducherry's colonial history go in the context of tourism, and what mechanisms are at stake in the production of the 'quaint and charming' French heritage?

## **POSTCOLONIAL AMBIVALENCES AND THE PRODUCTIVE REMEMBRANCE AND FORGETTING OF COLONIAL LEGACIES**

Puducherry has become a well-known tourism destination for the urban middle-class domestic visitors whom tourism campaigns have continued to target. Indeed, when I asked such tourists how they got the idea of coming, they asserted that Puducherry was a destination that people in cities such as Chennai and Bengaluru were widely aware of. Clearly, the campaigns to market Puducherry for its French heritage have worked, yet at the same time the awareness that has been generated about the French heritage has its limitations. For instance, domestic tourists can often be found taking enthusiastic group photos and selfies in front of an imposing statue of the French Governor-general Dupleix, which is located on the southern side of Puducherry's popular seaside promenade. However, when asked what they knew about the person who the statue commemorated, many

would produce only vague answers that it was "a Frenchman"; or their knowledge would not go further than the fact that the name of this character was Dupleix, and that he had served as governor of Puducherry – information which can be read on a plaque mounted on the monument. Awareness that Dupleix was a key figure in the complex historic patterns of rivalries between the French, the British and local Indian rulers in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and that in the course of his rule he came close to establishing a French empire in India was not readily forthcoming from the majority of domestic tourists whom I talked to, in spite of their frequent engagement with the monument. But then, outside the context of identity politics and tourism development in Puducherry, the marginal French colonial legacy in India has had limited public interest, as reflected in the response of one very recently arrived visitor from Bengaluru whom I met in Puducherry's botanical garden, located just outside of the colonial city centre. Asked what he knew about the city he told that he had heard that it was distinctive because it was a former French colony – though adding quickly, tentatively: "It was French – wasn't it?"

A particular process of productive remembrance and forgetting is at stake in producing Puducherry as a tourist destination drawing on its French colonial heritage. In their analysis of narratives in tourism promotion in India, Bandyopadhyay et al. (2008, 790) have pointed out that while trade and popular media often emphasise "nostalgic experiences of a sanitized colonial history", government accounts reflect a narrative of national identity building which emphasises resistance against colonial powers. In the tourism promotion issued by the Government of Puducherry, however, one will not see the references to colonial atrocities which Bandyopadhyay et al. (2008, 799-800) find so vividly described in the former British India. Just as Wong (2013) notes for the promotion of Macau as a tourist destination, the reference to controversial historic events during colonial rule is limited in Puducherry. This is not because the history of French rule in Puducherry has no negative aspects: Examples include slavery and shipping of indentured labourers, and even more recent histories of violent events such as the shooting and killing of at least 12 persons to break up a strike of local cotton mill workers in 1936, to whom the laws on trade unionism in France had not been extended (Malangin, 2015, 82-87, 130). Unsurprisingly, local social memory in Puducherry as well as the historiography of the French rule is more complex and multidirectional than the image which appears in tourism promotion. While many residents whom I interviewed expressed notions that French colonialism in India had been more humane than British colonialism, and several expressed pride in their French heritage, it has also been observed that there are two competing narratives on French colonialism and decolonisation in India: one (the more prevalent) of intercultural respect and fraternal Indo-French relations, and one of French colonial domination and Indian resistance (Jørgensen, 2017; Miles, 1995, 57). How, then, should we explain the current promotion of Puducherry's French colonial heritage as a tourist attraction in the context of wider discussions about colonial heritage in India as a negative or ambivalent phenomenon (e.g. Chadha, 2006; Hannam, 2006)?

With reference to tourism in Goa, which draws on the local Portuguese colonial heritage to create a distinct setting to attract both domestic and international tourists, in much the same way that Puducherry does with its French heritage, Pamila Gupta (2009, 136) makes the claim that "[c]ertain historical aspects are purposely taken up and put on display, while others are conveniently forgotten and relegated to the archive. This very process itself is a form of neocolonialism". While relegating this to a footnote, Gupta (2009, 134n36) makes it clear that she considers Puducherry to be an instance of the same type of development. "[T]ourism", she claims, "functions as a form of neocolonialism" (ibid, 135). The argument that tourism constitutes a form of imperialism or

neocolonialism that recreates dependency along colonial patterns and exploits destinations and their cultures in terms of both economic development and cultural representation is well-rehearsed in academic literature, within as well as outside the context of colonial heritage tourism (e.g. Britton, 1982; Crick, 1989; Fisher, 2005; Kothari, 2015; Nash, 1989). However, this is an interpretation that I take issue with in the context of Puducherry. As Joan Henderson (2001, 256) suggests with reference to the promotion and uses of built colonial heritage in Malacca, Penang and Singapore, “such arguments may be misplaced (...). Although questions of commodification do arise, agency is not necessarily exercised by neocolonial forces”. Similarly, in her analysis of the promotion of heritage in postcolonial Hong Kong, Tracey Lu (2009) points to the use of urban built heritage from the colonial period as an active element in local identity claims and attempts to resist ongoing sinicisation processes imposed by China. Such examples alert us to the fact that the present meanings of colonial heritage are not just a product of colonial histories, and that their promotion should be understood in the context of postcolonial dynamics. As Keen and Tucker (2012, 100) have suggested in a similar bid to step away from the conventional binaries and embrace a more complex perspective in research on postcolonial tourism, “it may be that colonial discourses and narratives are being utilised not as an element of disempowerment but rather for the purpose of an entirely other *postcolonial politic*”.

I partly agree with Gupta, since I would assert the same analysis for Puducherry as she does for Goa when she states: “Regarding its perceptions of Goa (...) South Asian appropriations of exoticism suit its own postcolonial historical and cultural requirements” (Gupta, 2009, 126). Just like Goa, Puducherry’s difference within India is relational, as it can be understood only in relation to the British, who set themselves up as the colonial norm in India (Gupta, 2009, 128, 130; Magedera, 2010). The very marginality of these colonial legacies not only sets the stage for their postcolonial exoticisation in a tourism context, but also makes it possible to promote them in tourism and regional identity politics without contradicting the master narrative of the Republic of India as constituted against its British colonial history. Evidently the legacies of marginal colonial powers are, even from a government perspective, sufficiently safe in their relative historic insignificance to be promoted for what domestic tourists may nowadays refer to as “colonial charm” (e.g. Senarayana, 2014, n.p.). Certainly the representation of colonial histories is selective in this context; but in promoting and consuming Puducherry as a tourist destination drawing on its history of French colonialism the selection is done according to postcolonial Indian interests, rather than constituting a neocolonial attempt at pandering to the nostalgia of tourists from the former colonial power.

## CONCLUSION

We have long recognised the need to theorise colonialisms as fractured and pluralistic projects which differ according to their cultural and historic contexts and the agents involved (Bhabha, 1994). Similarly it is time to look further into the complexities of restaging colonial heritage in a postcolonial tourism context from a perspective that does not assume a simple dichotomy between tourists from the former colonial powers and tourists in the formerly colonised countries. A key contribution of this study is that of challenging and decentring the prevalent approach in tourism research, which conceptualises colonial heritage tourism from this essentialising perspective on post/colonial relations. By foregrounding the often neglected domestic tourism perspectives on producing and consuming colonial heritage, I have argued for the need to theorise colonial heritage tourism from a

postcolonial perspective which works to pluralise the tourist gaze and 'provincialise Europe' in tourism studies.

This study has explored the process and practices of using French colonial heritage in Puducherry's tourism development, demonstrating how the promotion of the French legacy is a postcolonial phenomenon which has been a product of Indian rather than French interests. Beginning with the realisation of the political expediency of restaging the French identity of Puducherry in territorial identity politics dating to the 1970s, interests in tourism development followed on from this after the economic liberalisation of India in the 1990s, largely serving a domestic tourist market. Reflecting on the decolonisation of French India in 1962, which left France with continuing economic and political commitments to a local minority of ethnic Indians who opted for French citizenship, William Miles (1995, 10) has suggested that "France's decolonization of India (...) created an extraordinary countercolonial situation in which the former colonizer is exploited much more heavily than the formerly colonized". The Indian touristic consumption of Puducherry's French colonial heritage might be perceived as yet another way of exploiting the colonial legacy, in a way which, in spite of the limited portrayal of the history of French rule that leaves out its more unpalatable aspects, is more postcolonial than neocolonial.

While postcolonial societies tend to have an ambivalent relationship with their colonial heritage, official as well as popular attitudes to heritage also change over time as its management and uses depend on psychological as well as political and economic factors (Marschall, 2008, 349). John Western (1985, 348) has posed an interesting question on post/colonial urbanism, which might equally be asked in the context of colonial heritage tourism: "one wonders how long it takes and under what conditions for a colonial monument to be divested of its threat to the once-colonized?" As time passes and India consolidates its postcolonial identity, it may be perceived as more acceptable for Indian tourists to consume the heritage of former colonial powers. It is not surprising to see marginal colonial legacies, such as that of the French rule, as those that have been most strongly promoted in this respect, as they do not interfere with the continued importance of national identity narratives constructed around resistance to British colonialism (Jørgensen, 2013). Eventually, however, similar dynamics might come to present themselves in the context of India's British colonial heritage, too – a trend which Bandyopadhyay et al. (2008) already identify from tourism promotion in trade and popular media in India, if not for state media. In May 2017, *the Observer* could announce that an Indian businessman in the UK had bought the East India Company to redevelop it as a brand with "a new spin – the company's story can now be cast as the ultimate victory of the immigrant over his colonial past" (Doshi, 2017, 23). Here, as in the touristic consumption of Puducherry's French heritage, we are perhaps seeing a trend that 'consuming the colonial power' marks a postcolonial neutralisation of the former colonial powers. It could be understood as a taking over of control where the formerly colonised strike back not by denouncing histories of empire, but by redefining and using their legacies according to their own postcolonial purposes. Relegating colonial heritage to a sphere of domestic tourism where it is framed as 'quaint and charming' can in this perspective be read as a signal that colonialism is understood as being over and posing no further threat, so that its legacy is safe for consumption, having been superseded by postcolonial Indian historical agency and identity-making.

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**Caption for Fig. 1:** Puducherry's city centre, which has retained many buildings dating to the colonial period as well as its basic colonial layout with a 'White Town' and a 'Black Town', and streets organised in a grid pattern, has become subject to increasing tourism in recent decades. (Map courtesy of INTACH Pondicherry).