

**Transgressing the Boundaries of the Nation:  
Decolonization, Migration, and Identity in France/India, 1910-1972**

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## Introduction

“On est un peu bâtard, on est étranger partout.”  
[We are sort of like bastards, strangers everywhere]  
-Sam, 62-year-old Pondichérien living in Paris, 2008



Figure 1: *Alliance Française*, Pondicherry, India (Photo taken by author, 2008)

The *Alliance Française de Pondichéry*, a French language and cultural center, is located on Rue Suffren, a quiet street in the heart of the European Quarter of Pondicherry (see Figure 1). On endless hot days, typical in this city by the sea in southern India, women and men come and go from the vivid yellow building, wearing a mixture of Indian and Western clothing, carrying French language text books and reading materials for their classes that take place inside. The building looks as if it could be in France, if not for the small touches of Indian life that surround it. The picture you see here, captured from a balcony across the street from the *Alliance*, shows a small statue of a South Asian woman, the reds and blues of her sari chipped and faded from years of exposure to intense sunrays and monsoon rains. The woman looks out at the *Alliance* with her arm in

the air, perhaps in the act of dancing, a typical motif for South Asian figures like this. She stands, in her traditional clothing, engaged in a South Asian cultural practice, outside the doors of the *Alliance*, permanently immobile, gazing down at the doors that lay open to the promise of France and the Western world.

Although the *Alliance Française* is an institution that has locations throughout the world, including 16 sites in India, this particular location in Pondicherry is a vestige of the colonial period, established when France controlled Pondicherry as one of five colonies they held in India until 1962.<sup>1</sup> I offer a reading of this image here to illustrate the relationships between France, India, the French-Indian colonies, and French-Indian peoples, the overarching topic of this work. The *Alliance Française* was founded in Paris in 1883, with the goal to promote (and export) French language and culture, a mission that fit nicely with the global visions of the newly formed French Third Republic (1870-1940), which sought to establish France as a major world power, in direct competition with England and the English Empire.<sup>2</sup> The *Alliance* was to serve as a global cultural embassy, open to anyone who wished to benefit from engaging with French culture and language, the language of modernity and of civilization.<sup>3</sup> The global network of *Alliance* locations would become, in the eyes of the original architects, islands of French civility floating in a sea of ancient rituals, barbaric customs, and pre-modern cultural practices.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the five French colonies, Chandernagore, located near present-day Kolkota, joined the Indian Union in 1949. The other four, Pondicherry, Yanam, Mahé, and Karikal, would fully and officially join India 1962.

<sup>2</sup> François Chaubet, "L'Alliance Française ou la diplomatie de la langue (1883-1914)" *Revue historique* 306(2004).

<sup>3</sup> The mission to construct a unified French identity, within the hexagon as well as throughout the Francophone world, was of significant importance to the leaders of the Third Republic, as detailed in Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

Given the modernizing mission of the *Alliance Française*, it should come as no surprise that the *Alliance* in Pondicherry, a city that once served as the headquarters of the French colonies in India, is located on a street named after a French admiral, Pierre André de Suffren (1729-1788), who fought for French interests against the British in India in the 1780s, a period that saw the French try to overtake the British East India Company for control of territory and trade in South Asia. Rue Suffren, one street amongst many in Pondicherry named after French figures responsible for colonizing the land in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, is itself located in what was once called the *ville blanche* (white town), the area of Pondicherry separated from the *ville noire* (black town) by French colonial administrators in the 1770s. The spatial segregation of Pondicherry, first by racial categories in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, and eventually by affiliations of nationality (French, British, Indian -- all designations still tightly intertwined with race), in the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries, contributed to the construction of a colonial society that, along with debates about and practices of colonial citizenship, destabilizes many of the most accepted histories of colonial categorization, colonial identity formation, and the causes and consequences of decolonization in South Asia. This work seeks to explicate the many ways that colonialism and decolonization in French India complicates understandings of the relationships between colonizer and colonized.

The *Alliance Française* is just one example of the institutions created by the French government in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century to promote the “mission civilisatrice” (civilizing mission) on a global level, as the public face of the colonial policy of assimilation, the belief that with enough hard work and schooling in French language and

culture, any colonial person could become, one day, French.<sup>4</sup> In French India, where, beginning in the 1880s, non-European subjects had the opportunity to become French citizens, the question of “being French,” both before and after decolonization, was wrapped up not only in the question of knowing the French language or being able to recite the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*, but in the politics of caste, religion, regional languages, Indian nationalism, and racial identity. Despite the long history of citizenship being granted to colonial subjects in French India, this work will show the many difficulties French-Indians faced *as* French-Indians, in France, independent India, and, during the colonial period, in French-India.

Above the photo that began this introduction, I offered an epigraph, spoken by a South Asian man, who is also a French citizen, a Pondichérien who left India for France to exercise his rights of citizenship. In this quote he says, referring to French-Indians as a group, “We are sort of like bastards, strangers everywhere.” These words, referring to the difficulties that French-Indians have had in the wake of decolonization, reinforce the image of the woman outside the doors of the *Alliance Française*, the image of a person, seen, by characteristics of dress and skin tone, as an Indian, looking into life as a French person, but never actually being able to experience it.

The presence of South Asians in France is certainly not limited to persons originating from the former French colonies in India, yet, many South Asians with whom I have spoken, who have lived in or visited France, note that when they meet a new

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<sup>4</sup> On French assimilation policy, see the now classic Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890 – 1914* (1961; repr., Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005). On the many exclusions that undermined these policies, see Alice Conklin, “Colonialism and Human Rights: A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa,” *American Historical Review* 103 (1998); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

French person, the first thing they will enthusiastically say to them is “You must come from Pondicherry!” Despite the minimal size of the French colonies in India – together, the five disparate colonies totaled just 500km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of just over 300,000 in 1951 – people in France knew about them. The colonies in French India have occupied, and continue to occupy, the French imagination in many ways that have influenced the post-colonial relationship between France and India.<sup>5</sup> In this dissertation, I set out to address the question of how the colonial relationship between France and India has influenced, and in many ways continued in, the post-colonial lives of the numerous and varied populations that at one time or another, in their estimation or according to the regulations of a state institution, belonged to the geographic space called *l’Inde française*. To these ends, this work connects the *discourse* of decolonization with the *lived experiences* of decolonization, specifically within the domain of community formation/dissolution and the migrations fomented by the end of empire.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Nationalism and Decolonization***

Nationalist historiographies have often argued that once colonies were liberated, and often before, the people within the colonies organically and systematically *became* passionate patriots of one homeland over another.<sup>7</sup> While this was certainly true for

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<sup>5</sup> On the origins of French imaginings of India, see Jackie Assayag, *L’Inde fabuleuse: Le charme discret de l’exotisme français (XVII<sup>e</sup> - XX<sup>e</sup>)* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2000); Kate Marsh, *India in the French Imagination: Peripheral Voices, 1714-1815* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> My use of discourse here, and throughout, is based on the Foucauldian concept of discourse, as the interaction of power and knowledge production. Thus, I use “discourse” to describe language, both oral and written, and images employed by the colonial state (France, England) and the independent state of India after 1947. For reasons that will be explored in later chapters, the discourse of decolonization was produced almost entirely by the state(s). Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, trans. A.M. Sheridan-Smith, (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> As Partha Chatterjee has written, “As the new institutional practices of economy and polity in the postcolonial states were disciplined and normalized under the conceptual rubrics of “development” and

certain segments of the population, especially for those who held positions of power in the liberation movements, for many people in the colonies, becoming a nationalist, or assimilating into the newly independent nation, was much more complicated than it has been portrayed. The need for nation-states to construct and ignite nationalist fervor amongst a diverse and often resistant populace was not limited to the colonies, and has been, in fact, a foundational experience of modern state-building, a process that has been documented by historians and Political Scientists for decades.<sup>8</sup> Yet, there has been very little discussion of how colonial peoples from all strata of colonial society were caught between two or more competing discourses of nationalism, between the nationalism of the imperial power and that of the anti-colonial movements, between, in many ways, the nation and the state. The primary reason this has not been explored in the context of South Asia is that imperial nationalism, particularly of the British, discouraged colonized people from adopting a British nationalist identity.<sup>9</sup> French imperial policy, in contrast, was for a time predicated on a policy of assimilation in the colonies, a process that, as many historians have shown, often failed.<sup>10</sup> However, as will become evident throughout this work, the small size of the French-Indian territories combined with the colonial tensions between France and England that played out in India led to the construction of a

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“modernization,” nationalism was already being relegated to the domain of the particular histories defined by the unprepossessing contents of colonial archives.” Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 3.

<sup>8</sup> On France, see Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*; Laird Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the ‘Mythic Provinces’: the Reconfiguration of Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918-1920,” *French Historical Studies* 23 (2000). On India, see Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Gorman, “Wider and Wider Still?: Racial Politics, Intra-Imperial Immigrations and the Absence of an Imperial Citizenship in the British Empire” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 3(2002).

<sup>10</sup> On French assimilation policy, see Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial*; On the many exclusions that undermined these policies, see Alice Conklin, “Colonialism and Human Rights: A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa,” *American Historical Review* 103 (1998); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

colonial culture that addressed questions of imperial nationalism in ways that deviated from the norm. Exploring the history of French India during the era of decolonization allows us to look at the complex understandings of home, homeland, nation, and belonging that were pushed and ruptured at the moment of decolonization in French India.

Historians of France and historians of India have both glossed over the question of decolonization in French India, partially because there seems, from the surface, to have been very little anti-colonial struggle in the territories. Discussions of the decolonization of India are centered around either the question of anti-colonial nationalist movements, such as those instigated by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, and the movements' leaders, most prominently Mohandas K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru of the Congress Party and M.A. Jinnah of the Muslim League, or the issue of the partition of India, the real legacy of decolonization in South Asia.<sup>11</sup> Major works on French decolonization focus primarily on Algeria, West Africa, and Indochina, often placing the territories of French India as a footnote to the much larger and violent struggles in the more prominent French colonies.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, in the most recently published works on global or comparative decolonization, French India is mentioned only in passing, usually as an example of the struggles independent India faced after the departure of the British

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<sup>11</sup> There are hundreds, if not thousands, of books and articles on M.K. Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah, as well as the Congress Party and the Muslim League. For a good recounting of many of them, see Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 2007. On partition, see Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2002); Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Martin Thomas, Bob Moore, L.J. Butler, *Crises of Empire: Decolonization and Europe's Imperial States, 1918-1975* (London: Hodder Education, 2008); Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

in 1947, or as an issue of some importance to the French in the matter of the decolonization of Indochina.<sup>13</sup>

The period of decolonization often serves as the marker of transition between the colonial and the post-colonial period, creating a temporal, political, and cultural space that demarcates the end of one period, and the beginning of another. Decolonization was, of course, neither a uniform nor complete process.<sup>14</sup> The lack of uniformity was because every imperial power dealt with every colony in a different way, based on a variety of factors having to do with the history of the colonial relationship in conjunction with the future of international diplomatic relationships, a subject that will be explored in later chapters. However, it is important to note here that the importance of fostering positive relationships between nation-states, in this case between France and India, at the time of decolonization allowed colonialism to linger into the post-colonial world. Based on a discourse of “mutual respect” and “friendship” born out of what was portrayed as a *positive* colonial relationship, French and Indian leaders came to an agreement that would allow French India to remain French India, without the colonial authority of the French Empire. Unlike other colonial relationships, including between England and India and France and Algeria or Indochina, which fomented strong and vocal anti-colonial nationalist movements that ostensibly precluded the maintenance of the colonial order in

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<sup>13</sup> For example, in Martin Shipway’s *Decolonization and its Impact*, the French-Indian territories are mentioned on two pages (21, 64), and in both instances, only as a side note to the larger story. Martin Shipway, *Decolonization and Its Impact: A Comparative Approach to the End of the Colonial Empires* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008). In the recent Thomas, Moore, Butler book *Crises of Empire* (2008), which compares the histories of decolonization from British, French, and Dutch sources, Pondicherry and the other French- Indian territories are not referenced a single time.

<sup>14</sup> Decolonization was not complete in the sense that it is not clear any land, people, or culture has been “fully” decolonized, that is, stripped bare of any colonial influences, institutions, or relationships. For one of many collections on the cultural longevity of colonial relationships, see Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

the post-colonial nation, the decolonization of French India was to be, in the words of Maurice Schumann, at one time the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, an “intelligent decolonization.”<sup>15</sup> Schumann made this statement in 1947 when he arrived in Pondicherry to discuss the future of French India with Indian officials. France was desperately attempting to avoid the wave of decolonization begun with the departure of the British from India, and Schumann admitted they hoped to remain in India to show that unlike the British Empire, the French Empire remained strong, and, also unlike the British, rational and popular with the colonial subjects and citizens.

There is a growing body of literature of histories of post-colonial migrations, although many of the strongest voices documenting the post-colonial experience have come from novelists, artists, and filmmakers.<sup>16</sup> Yet, many of the debates about national and ethnic identity and of geographic space and belonging, the discourses that propelled people and ideas across borders and into new homelands, remain the unexplored history of decolonization, largely as these histories have been relegated to the history of migration, separated from the internal politics of the nation-state usually associated with decolonization.<sup>17</sup> Decolonization, as a political term, refers to the end of formal empire, of the leaving of an imperial power from a colonial space, usually in terms of economic

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<sup>15</sup> “Entretien avec M. Maurice Schumann,” *Centre d’information et de documentation de l’Inde Francophone* (CIDIF)38 (2008): 155. Schumann traveled to Pondicherry, the center of French India, in 1947, at the time of India’s independence from England, to discuss the future of French India with Indian officials.

<sup>16</sup> For examples of novels addressing the post-colonial experience in France, see Azouz Begag, *Le gone du Chaâba* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986); Mehdi Charef, *Le thé au harem d’Archi Ahmed* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983); Faiza Guène, *Kiffe kiffe demain* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2004). See also Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney, eds., *Post-Colonial Cultures in France* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>17</sup> On colonial migration to France, see Neil MacMaster, *Colonial Migrants and Racism. Algerians in France, 1900-62* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997); Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006); Benjamin Stora, *Ils venaient d’Algérie. L’immigration algérienne en France 1912-1992* (Paris: Fayard, 1992); Paul A. Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race and Nation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

and governmental issues. The South Asian historian Ajit K. Neogy has written the history of the decolonization of French India according to the diplomats and politicians involved in the “end of the Empire.”<sup>18</sup> He follows the transformation of several French-Indians from “French” to “Indian” as the question of belonging to either France or India was debated – arguing that most French-Indians who were not *métis* (mixed-race) recognized that their *true* homeland was India, not France, an argument that works well with the desired political outcome of decolonization, as Pondicherry and the other territories were eventually incorporated into India. What the political narrative is missing is the deep ambiguity that permeated French India both before and after 1947, as the question of national belonging became increasingly important. It is within this ambivalence about national belonging, and the states’ (both France and India) violent reactions to this ambivalence, a question I take up in Chapter 3, that exemplifies the problem of relying solely on state-based sources for the history of decolonization. For this reason, I have looked to memoirs, letters, editorials, novels, films, and biographies in addition to a wide variety of government documents, from France, India, and England, to explore the many changes brought on by decolonization, in an effort to push the question of decolonization beyond issues of international relations and state formation.

A recent (2010) issue of the *American Historical Review* included a forum on “The State in South Asian History.”<sup>19</sup> Todd Shepard, a French historian who has written extensively about decolonization and French history, contributed an essay to this forum that looks at the various interventions South Asian history has made into how historians

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<sup>18</sup> Ajit K. Neogy, *Decolonization of French India: Liberation Movement and Indo-French Relations, 1947-1954* (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> “Forum: The State in South Asian History,” *American Historical Review* 115 (2010).

of all geographic fields approach their subjects.<sup>20</sup> This is perhaps most notable, Shepard suggests, because it has not happened before that a non-Western field of history has influenced the discipline in such a systematic and paradigm changing way. The lively and (sometimes) productive debates between the Subaltern Studies Collective, which, at its foundation, has advocated for a ground-up approach to historical research that moves away from the history of the elites and political institutions, with traditional Marxist histories and the more empire-focused Cambridge School approach to South Asia, have reshaped how many scholars across the disciplines have approached the study of colonialism, empire, and non-Western histories.<sup>21</sup> While the tensions between these schools of thought are many, a fundamental question that has caused division is that of agency. The Subaltern Studies Collective has raised many questions about the roles assigned to certain colonial actors in our retellings of colonial history, and fundamentally, whom historians single out to speak for the colonized.<sup>22</sup> This problematic extends to the history of decolonization - as Shepard demonstrates in the forum, as well as in his own book *The Invention of Decolonization* -- the history of decolonization is not only a story of empires and nations, but is also about people and movement.<sup>23</sup> Bringing together

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<sup>20</sup> Todd Shepard, " 'History is Past Politics'? Archives, 'Tainted Evidence,' and the Return of the State," *American Historical Review* 115 (2010).

<sup>21</sup> Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *American Historical Review* 99 (1994); Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Dipesh Chakrabarty, "A Small History of Subaltern Studies," in *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). On the tensions between Subaltern Studies and the Cambridge School of History, see Nicholas Dirks, "The Burden of the Past: On Colonialism and the Writing of History," in *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

national-histories, in terms of both methods and material, is an important step in rethinking colonial and post-colonial categories of analysis.

There has been, over the past two decades, a divisive tension in French history around the question of state borders and national historiography. The history of the French colonies and the French Empire has only been an object of study for the past two or three decades, and has thus been seen by many French historians as a field both separate and marginal to the study of France. Because of the placement of colonial history on the periphery of the nation, historians of colonialism have concentrated on arguing the importance of understanding the colonial empire as an integral element of French history. Historians of French colonialism have insisted that the French Revolution cannot be fully understood without exploring the Haitian Revolution, that the study of Vichy France and the French Resistance is incomplete without understanding colonial policies throughout the Empire, and that the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century France cannot be complete without exploring the influx of non-white workers to France during the First World War.<sup>24</sup> Important works have shown that the Republican idea of equality, fraternity, and liberty, when exported to the colonies, was based on a foundation of exclusions, including racial, ethnic, and religious prejudices.<sup>25</sup> One of the primary questions in the historiography of empire, and thus at the base of this work, is, who is a

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<sup>24</sup> On Haiti, see Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution & Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); on Vichy and the colonies, see Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadalupe, and Indochina, 1940-44* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); on race in France, see Tyler Stovall, "The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War," *American Historical Review* 103 (1998).

<sup>25</sup> Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Patricia M.E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London & New York: IB Tauris, 1999).

French subject, and who is not?<sup>26</sup> In the case of French India, can one person be both French and Indian at the same time? Indeed, it is impossible to understand the history of French India without looking at the French Empire as an entire system, as the people of the French colonies often traveled from Indochina to Algeria, from Paris to Pondicherry.

### *Post-Colonial Migrations*

The question of belonging anchors this work, inspired by the many historical agents and actors who have wrestled with their positions and placement in a changing world. The “end of empire” initiated the re-bordering of nations, states, and territories, a process that physically and emotionally affected the people that dwelled on those lands, often fomenting migrations as former colonial subjects went searching for a home to replace the one that disappeared with the drawing of new borders.<sup>27</sup> The literature scholar and cultural theorist Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan has equated the idea of diaspora with the “space of the hyphen that tries to coordinate, within an evolving relationship, the identity politics of one’s place of origin with that of one’s present home.”<sup>28</sup> The people of French India, as well as in other colonial societies, often dwelled in this “space of the hyphen,” living their lives on the edge of several different cultures, heritages, and communities, well before decolonization appeared on the horizon. Over the course of nearly a decade (1954-1962), the long process of decolonization, marked by diplomatic negotiations, changed the map of what was French India. For some people, this meant

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<sup>26</sup> An influential approach to this subject from a broad perspective is Patrick Weil, *Qu’est-ce qu’un français? Histoire de la nationalité française depuis la Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> I place “end of empire” in quotes to signify the instability of the idea that empire actually ended with decolonization.

<sup>28</sup> Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Meditations: Between Home and Location* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): xiii.

that their homeland, French India, disappeared, leaving them juridical foreigners in an independent India.<sup>29</sup> The major French language newspaper in Pondicherry, founded in 1944 and still in production today, is named *le Trait-d'Union*, a French literary term that means hyphen, or link. Underneath the masthead, the mission of the monthly newspaper is furthered with the phrase, « organe de l'amitié franco-indienne » (The Voice of French-Indian friendship). While there has never been one homogenous French-Indian community, in India or in France, or throughout the substantial French-Indian diaspora in Vietnam, Réunion, Mauritius, and now France, the *Trait-d'Union* has been a site of discussion and debate about what a French-Indian community may look like, or represent, within the larger space of India or of France, particularly following decolonization, when the French-Indian diaspora became centered in France.

The political scientist William F.S. Miles, who has written one of the few books about the post-colonial period in former French India, has argued that unlike most post-colonial subjects, French-Indians have benefitted from the colonial relationship with France.<sup>30</sup> The men who served as soldiers for the French military during the two world wars are paid pensions, whether they live in France or India; French-Indians continue to work in France, and to bring their French salaries back to India, creating what Miles identifies as a new class, one that is resented by others in the community who do not have access to European jobs and wealth. Miles suggests that this had led to a system of “countercolonialism,” or “the possibility that post-independence materialism may

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<sup>29</sup> Those people living in French India at the time that the Treaty of Cession was signed (1956) were given the option to be French or Indian citizens – this was true for French-Indians who had origins in France and well as those of Indian origin.

<sup>30</sup> William F.S. Miles, *Imperial Burdens: Countercolonialism in Former French India* (Boulder, CO. & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995).

actually be constructed in favor of the formally colonized.”<sup>31</sup> The idea of “countercolonialism,” of the colonized subject turning the tables of the colonial system to benefit the colonized, assumes that the society in question was clearly divided into the colonizer and the colonized, a very persistent but contested dichotomy in most colonial situations, and mostly irrelevant in French India, due to long history of “Indians” holding French citizenship in the French-Indian colonies. Against the thesis of Miles, this work will move away from thinking in terms of compartmentalized relationships to understand how belonging was understood during the colonial period, decolonization, and the establishment of post-colonial spaces.

The relationships between space and nation-states and space and national belonging are explored throughout this dissertation as each chapter looks at varying “sites of colonialism”: in Chapter One, I will look at the genealogy of racial thinking in French India, while Chapter Two will examine how imperial border making changed the relationship between people and geographic spaces. In Chapter Three, I look at the period between the independence of India from British rule in 1947 and the initial departure of the French in 1954. During this period, when the future of French India was uncertain, discussions about who belonged to what nation, race, ethnicity, and family flowed throughout French India. In this chapter, I look at these discussions of inclusion and exclusion by examining constructions of the family, the citizen, and the goonda (or outlaw). In Chapters Four and Five, I look at the transition from colonial to post-colonial, and explore what decolonization actually meant, to the French-Indian population, as well as Europeans looking for a continued relationship with the non-West.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.,11.

Following these people and spaces throughout the long transition from colonial to post-colonial will allow us to ask the question, in the last two chapters, where does colonialism dwell after the geographic space of the colony is gone? By looking at the history of former French India as well as French-Indians in France during the period of decolonization, I will show how colonialism, as a practice, an ideology, and a way of living, continued on into the era of post-colonialism. Throughout the pages that follow, I ask the question, was it possible to be an anti-colonial nationalist, if all modern nation-states are in some way imperialist, i.e. desirous of obtaining and assimilating more land and people?

Partha Chatterjee has suggested that by the 1970s, Third World nationalism, the nationalism that ruled over the former colonies, had “become a matter of ethnic politics, the reason why the people in the Third World killed each other.”<sup>32</sup> Third World nationalism, an outgrowth of anti-colonial nationalism, was perceived as not the same as Western or First World nationalisms, but was instead a corrupted version, watered down and misunderstood by the leaders and people of the “developing world.” Of course, the latter nationalisms were based on the former, the Western form of nationalism standing as a model and foil for the anti-colonial nationalisms of the decolonizing world. By looking at the decolonization of French India, I will show how imperial identities during the colonial period were accepted and adjusted by colonial peoples, and how the negotiation of national identities transgressed the many boundaries of race and ethnicity for a period of time. For the many populations who fell under the label of French Indian, the idea of “becoming French” or “becoming Indian” posed a series of problems, based not on the

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<sup>32</sup> Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 3.

particulars of French or Indian nationalism as cultural and politically separate categories, but on the notion of nationalism itself. The questioning of dominant narratives of nationalism was practiced throughout India *and* throughout France; it was not limited to small colonial pockets, like those found in French India. However, because the success of decolonization has been represented primarily by the success of independent nation-states, the movements towards non-state formations of self, community, and society during the rupture of decolonization have been lost to the dominant narrative of post-colonial state formation.<sup>33</sup>

The importance of the nation-state as space for historical research remains, despite several decades of work questioning the utility of nation-states for critical analysis in a variety of the social sciences and humanities.<sup>34</sup> While the decline of the nation-state has become a popular topic in discussions of contemporary processes of globalization, the borders of nation-states have reached new levels of militarized security and the migration of peoples from the “global south,” largely from former colonies, to the “global north” is now more dangerous than ever before.<sup>35</sup> A primary example of this paradox lays within Europe: while the Schengen Agreement, which created the borderless Schengen Area in Europe, promised a certain amount of free mobility to participating European Union (EU) members, it also led to the Treaty of Lisbon, which “reformulated

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<sup>33</sup> Todd Shepard, “ ‘History is Past Politics’?”, 481.

<sup>34</sup> Masao Miyoshi, “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State,” *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993); Jean-Marie Guéhenno, *The End of the Nation-State*, trans. Victoria Elliot, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003); James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> For instance, see Peter Andreas and Thomas J. Biersteker, eds., *The Rebordering of North America: Integration and Exclusion in a New Security Context* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Mable Berezin and Martin Schain, eds., *Europe Without Borders: Remapping Territory, Citizenship and Identity in a Transnational Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

the Schengen agreement and initiated policies on border checks, asylum and immigration.”<sup>36</sup> As Riva Kastoryano has argued, the creation of a borderless European Union necessitated a discussion about how the EU nations could strengthen their collective border against flows of immigration, largely from former colonies and other Third World countries.<sup>37</sup> In a recent edited collection on the histories of post-colonial migrations, Frederick Cooper noted that “the men and women” who left the former colonies to live and work in Europe are truly “postcolonial people,” as they, unlike those who wanted to distance themselves from the colonies and colonial culture, seek to “preserve memories of a place and of a certain kind of past, to obtain recognition for alleged accomplishments and suffering.”<sup>38</sup> Recognizing that former colonial peoples have sometimes been resistant to erasing their pasts, for reasons of collective suffering or collective recovery, or for the very practical purpose of maintaining and recreating community, is of foundational importance to understanding the fabric of the contemporary world.

The moving subjects of colonial and post-colonial history are often moving targets for historians. Just when you think you have found a way to pin them down at a certain time or place or to a specific mode of thinking or political ideology, they reappear in direct contradiction to their initial placement and/or persona. The people who inhabited the French-Indian colonies constantly challenged the surface logic of colonialism, a mode of governmentality marked by binaries and strict hierarchies, by contradicting the very categories meant to control them. For this reason, you may find that in the following

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<sup>36</sup> Riva Kastoryano, “Negotiations beyond Borders: States and Immigrants in Postcolonial Europe,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 41 (2010): 80.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Frederick Cooper, “Postcolonial Peoples: A Commentary,” in Andrea L. Smith, ed., *Europe’s Invisible Migrants*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003:169.

chapters, the person who you thought you knew has changed completely, a person who once called him or herself a French-Indian may find themselves a British-Indian the next day, or simply a Frenchman, or, in another move, a Indo-Vietnamese person. This dissertation is concerned with the movement of peoples - as immigrants, as visitors, as tourists - both within and beyond the understandings of the imperial and the post-colonial nation-state, and the methods the state has used to control these movements. As Radhika Viyas Mongia has argued “the blurring of the vocabularies of nationality and race is a founding strategy of the modern (nation) state and, as such, it should be impossible to inquire into the modern state without attending to its creation in a global context of colonialism and racism.”<sup>39</sup> The subjects that move throughout the pages of this dissertation will show how racialized ideas of nationality become stronger during the colonial period.

### ***French India/French-Indians/The French in India***

Categories are important for understanding and analyzing a historical situation – it is often necessary to identify who believes in one thing, and who may believe in an opposite thing, to clarify the importance of one ideology over another. Still, static categories can be dangerous. As the historian Gary Wilder has written, by making links between France and her colonies, historians of colonialism risk “reenact[ing] that which they are supposed to explore: the incorporation of overseas territories into a republican metanarrative.”<sup>40</sup> The alternate danger is taking for granted the opposite, that, for

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<sup>39</sup> Radhika Viyas Mongia, “Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport” in Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003): 196.

<sup>40</sup> Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 205.

instance, a person in French India, if not French, must be Indian. Throughout this dissertation, you will encounter references to “French-Indians,” “the French in India,” “créoles,” and “Pondichérians.” These categories will sometimes, by necessity, overlap, simply because the person or people in question changed their location, their nationality, or their self-identification. In every instance of categorization, I have done my best to take my cue from the subject him/herself - the fluid nature of these subjects will show how categories of national belonging are often limited and narrow, and suggest ways that we can destabilize these categories.

While scholars have worked for the past four or five decades to break the cycle of reproducing the dominant narratives of Western history, the writing of “colonial” history has often been plagued by a fundamental reliance on the tools that the nation-state gives to us. From the organization of colonial and state archives, which are most often dedicated to documents that were important to the maintenance of the state, to census data and the limits of language and availability of written testimonies, historians of colonies, empire, and post-colonialism are severely limited by the available material. “The ghosts in the archive” that historians of the colonies often talk about haunt us outside of the archive, as well.<sup>41</sup> While many have claimed that their research serves to “bring the past back to life,” some of the ghosts that live among us were never actually living. French-India as a geographic space, the land in modern day India once ruled by the French Empire, was a physical space that can still be seen on maps, marked by signs and, in the present day, heavy amounts of tourist nostalgia for “French-India.” But what

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<sup>41</sup> Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

of the “India” that existed in the imaginations of the French, or the “France” that existed in the minds of the Indians?

“French India” as a geographic space is a place that once existed, and still does to the extent that nostalgia for the colonies continues to circulate, through the promotion of tourism in the former colonies.<sup>42</sup> There are “French-Indians,” although this moniker is employed to describe a range of people: those people of Indian origin who chose to retain French citizenship at the moment of transfer (1962), those people of mixed French and Indian heritage, almost all whom migrated to France at the moment of transfer (1962), as well as the people of French origin who have migrated to former French India, since 1962 (although for the most part, these people have retained their French citizenship and since they have migrated to India to either join the Aurobindo Ashram or the quasi-utopian experimental community of Auroville, they are more likely to consider themselves “citizens of the world,” or, Aurovillians, than either French or Indian.)<sup>43</sup> The importance of understanding the history of migration between metropole and colony is reflected in a growing body of literature on this topic.<sup>44</sup> While academics and activists alike are working to elucidate the complications of post-colonial migrations to the metropole, there has been very little written about post-colonial emigration from Europe. In fact, as Nancy Green has argued, there has been very little work done on the question of any type of

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<sup>42</sup> On colonial and post-colonial tourism, see Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Trevor Sofield, “Post-Colonial Heritage, Post-Colonial Tourism: Culture, Politics and Development at Angkor” *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 4 (2009).

<sup>43</sup> This will be explored further in Chapter 5, “Post-Colonial Crossings.”

<sup>44</sup> See Gerard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity*, trans. Geoffrey de Laforcade (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Alec Hargreaves, *Immigration, ‘Race,’ and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic: Migrant Rights and the Limits of Universalism in France, 1918-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

emigration, post-colonial or not.<sup>45</sup> Building off the idea that the end of empire affected people in imperial spaces as well as the colonies, this dissertation will place the migrations of people from France to India in conversation with those who moved from India to France, who often crossed paths and shared ideas as they sought new communities and ways of living at the dawn of a new era.

### *Memory and Identity*

Recently, there has been a flurry of news stories and sociological work around the notion that there is a “little India in France,” mostly centered around the 10<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris, home to the most dense concentration in Paris of South Asian restaurants and shops of former Pondichérians, but also a much larger *Sri Lankan* Tamil community that has received asylum aid from the French government since the start of the Sri Lankan civil war in the 1970s.<sup>46</sup> In fact, the growing visibility of the Tamil population in Paris (the Tamils, who originate from the South of India, are the largest South Asian ethnic group in France) is largely due to the migration of the Sri Lankan Tamils displaced by civil war, leaving the Pondichérians, or the French nationals of Indian origin, in the minority. The presence of the Sri Lankan Tamil immigrant community in France has, in some ways, brought the Pondichérian population in France closer together.<sup>47</sup> *L'Association les Comptoirs des Indes*, an Association located in Paris dedicated to “conserving the history of *l'Inde française*” and bringing together former

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<sup>45</sup> Nancy L. Green, “The Politics of Exit: Reversing the Immigration Paradigm” *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (2005); Nancy L. Green and François Weil, eds., *Citizenship and Those Who Leave: The Politics of Emigration and Expatriation* (Champagne-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> On the Sri Lankan migration to France, see the special issue of *Hommes & Migrations*, Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud, ed., “Diasporas sri lankaises: entre guerre et paix,” May-June 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Sophie Dassaranayadou, “Tamouls indiens: de Pondichéry à la France” *Hommes & migrations* 1268 (2007), 69-70.

residents of the colonies, is one example of a space in metropolitan France where the memory of French India is allowed to flourish, and for the *trait-d'union*, or link, between France and India to be remembered and reproduced.<sup>48</sup> Acknowledging the space of the hyphen, of the in-between, has been important to the preservation of the communities and identities formed in geographic spaces that no longer exist.

Just weeks after I arrived in Paris to begin my research on questions of post-colonial identity in France, the *Ministère de l'Immigration, de l'intégration, de l'identité nationale et du développement solidaire*, a commission led by former Socialist party leader Eric Besson, launched a government-funded website on the question of national identity. Although the website has been disabled since 2010, the banner on top of the site read “Grand débat sur l'identité nationale” (The Great Debate on National Identity) and was flanked by the motto of the Republic on the right (“Liberté, Fraternité, Égalité”) and the official mark of the French Republic on the left.<sup>49</sup> The question under discussion is “Qu'est-ce qu'être français aujourd'hui?” (What does it mean to be French today?)<sup>50</sup> The site featured testimonies from a variety of people, everyone from public officials to anonymous citizens, voicing their opinion on the meaning of “French identity.” There were statements from the Ministry of Immigration, as well as videos of public intellectuals, and a section for reader comments. There was also a series of debates organized throughout France to bring the question to a public forum. The launch of this campaign on the question of identity was largely a response to the increasing tensions

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<sup>48</sup> There are many associations in France dedicated to the preservation of various colonial cultures. My thinking throughout this work on questions of post-colonial identity in France has been greatly influenced by the Anthropologist Andrea L. Smith and her book *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.debatidentitenationale.fr/> The site was launched on October 2, 2009 by the Ministry of Immigration and Integration. Also see “Un outil collaboratif pour débattre de l'identité nationale” *Le Monde*, 2 October 2009.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.debatidentitenationale.fr/>

between Maghrebi communities in France and the “French French,” a tension that has been marked by numerous riots throughout the *banlieues* of major cities, police violence against North African youth, and debates about the compatibility (or, as many see it, the *incompatibility*) of the practice of Islam and French *laïcité* (commonly translated as secularism), most recently marked by the passing of a law in 2010 that outlaws the wearing of burqas (full face veils) in France.<sup>51</sup>

The political urgency of inclusion in mainstream French society is clear for the millions of second and third generation immigrants, many of whom originate from the former colonies. Returning to the epigraph at the beginning of this introduction, “On est un peu bâtard, on est étranger partout” (We are sort of like bastards, strangers everywhere), we hear the voice of a French-Indian, who holds French citizenship as a former French colonial subject, but feels out of place in France, to highlight an important gap in the scholarship on post-colonial migrations. The relationships created through hundreds of years of colonization between imperial nation and colonized subject defined and propelled prominent migrations in the post-colonial period. For example, it seems somewhat obvious to discuss the post-colonial migrations of South Asians to the United Kingdom after 1947, as well as the migrations of Algerians into France after 1962. The large waves of immigration that followed the end of empire in the case of both France and England was often accompanied by debates about national identity and citizenship, about the right to access the welfare state and post-colonial obligations to former

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<sup>51</sup> The “burqa ban” passed the French Senate in 2010 by an overwhelming majority. “Burqa : la France prend-elle un risque ? (The Burqa: Is France taking a risk?)- LeMonde.fr,” 5 May 2010, [http://www.lemonde.fr/a-la-une/article/2010/05/05/burqa-la-france-prend-elle-un-risque\\_1347074\\_3208.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/a-la-une/article/2010/05/05/burqa-la-france-prend-elle-un-risque_1347074_3208.html). See also Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Laurent Dubois, “La République Métisse: Citizenship, Colonialism, and the Borders of French History,” *Cultural Studies* 14 (2010).

subjects. However, the smaller groups of post-colonial migrants have been overlooked, even though, as will become evident in the following pages, the margins of the Empire had a significant amount of influence on the system as a whole. By looking at the history of French India from the vantage point of the states involved in the colonization and decolonization of this space and people, as well as the movements of people--French, Indian, and French-Indian--between these spaces, this dissertation will challenge current thinking on decolonization, migration, and post-colonial identity.

## Chapter One

### Internal Borders and Colonial Categories: Race, Space, and Belonging in French India

« Comme Français, nos droits ont plus d'une fois été écrits en caractères de sang dans les plaines du Carnatic et c'est sur les ossements de nos pères et de nos frères, morts pour le soutien de la Gloire et l'Honneur du nom française, que sont élevés les remparts de Pondichéry. » *Cahier des doléances des citoyens de Pondichéry à l'Assemblée Nationale, Mars 1790*<sup>1</sup>

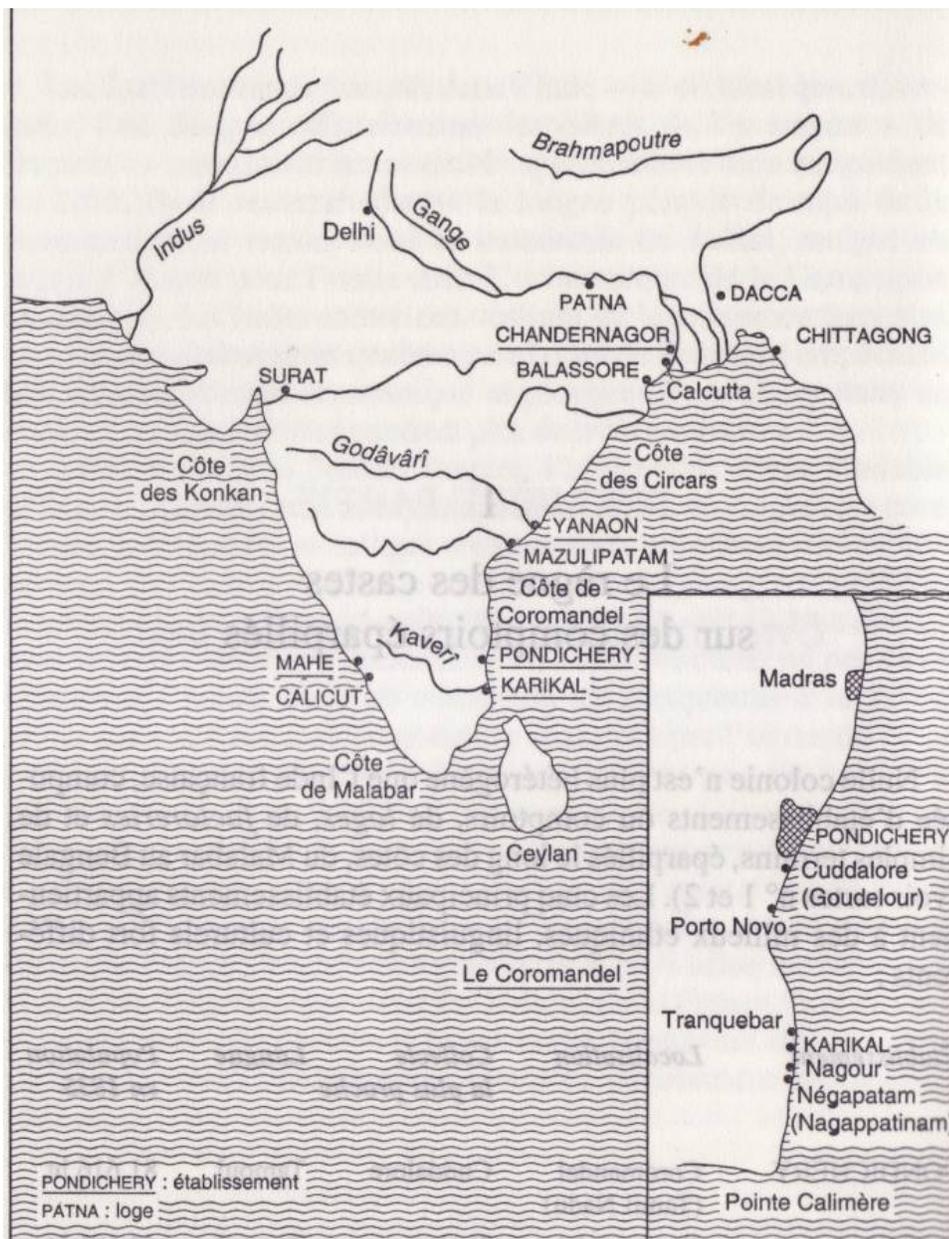
The five territories of French India (often referred to as *comptoirs*, or trading posts, due to their locations on the water) consisted of Pondichéry, Karikal, Mahé, Yanam, and Chandernagore (See Figure 2). The territories date back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when Portuguese, French, English, and Dutch interests were exploring the southern coasts of India. Before the French East India Company arrived in what would become Pondichéry (more commonly known today as Pondicherry, or in the Tamilized version, Puducherry), Portuguese merchants and sailors were living in the area amongst the local populations. Despite the presence of numerous Europeans in the area, François Martin, who would become the first Governor General of Pondicherry, is credited with founding Pondicherry for the French and giving the city its name in 1674.<sup>2</sup> Over the next hundred years, the four other *comptoirs* were acquired through deals made with local princes, emperors, and rajas. Chandernagore, a small village that today is a suburb of Calcutta,

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<sup>1</sup> "Like the French, our rights have more than once been written in characters of blood on the plains of the Carnatic, and it is on the remains of our fathers and of our brothers, all dead out of support of the Glory and Honor of the French name, upon which the ramparts of Pondicherry are raised." Quoted in Michel Gaudart, *Généalogie des familles de l'Inde Française, XVIe – XXe siècle* (Société de l'Histoire de l'Inde Française, 1976): 10.

<sup>2</sup> William F.S. Miles, *Imperial Burdens: Countercolonialism in Former French India* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995): 2.

was acquired in 1688. Mahé, which lies on the eastern coast of southern India, was won from the Prince of Badagara in 1725. Karikal, which is south of Pondicherry, was taken in 1739, and the final *comptoir*, Yanam, was recognized in 1750 when the nizam of Hyderabad granted the French landholding rights for the territory.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 2** A map of the French-Indian territories and the surrounding areas in the 19th and 20th centuries. The French-Indian territories are underlined. (Printed in Jacques Weber, *Pondichéry et les Comptoirs de l'Inde après Duplex: La démocratie au pays des castes* (Paris, 1996): 20.

<sup>3</sup> Miles, 2-3.

There are two names that remain synonymous with the history of the French territories in India: François Martin (1634-1706) and the Marquis Joseph François Dupleix (1697-1764). The traditional narrative remembers and honors Martin for establishing Pondicherry for the French in 1674, when he was granted permission by Sher Khan Lody, governor of the Carnatic, to establish a trading post there. Martin became the first governor of Pondicherry, quickly consolidating French trade interests in India to be centered in the new French possession.<sup>4</sup> Although Martin lost control of Pondicherry to the Dutch for 6 years, between 1693-1699, by 1702 he had begun the process of building fortifications around the territory, in the interest of attracting merchants and weavers to settle there.<sup>5</sup> While it was Martin that transformed Pondicherry from a trading post into a colony, with an administration and concrete borders, it was the Marquis Dupleix who, on becoming the governor in 1742, began the struggle for French control of South Asia.<sup>6</sup>

The 18<sup>th</sup>-century was an important era of struggle between French and British imperialism, not only in South Asia but in North America, as well.<sup>7</sup> Just as Dupleix arrived in Pondicherry in 1742, the Austrian War of Succession, a battle fought primarily in Europe, had reached the sub-continent, creating tensions between the French in

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<sup>4</sup> Gauri Parasher, "State Building in a Transcultural Context: The Case of the French in India during the Early Eighteenth Century," *Transcultural Research: Heidelberg Studies on Asia and Europe in a Global Context* 3 (2012); See also G.B. Malleson, *History of the French in India: from the Founding of Pondicherry in 1674 to the capture of the place in 1761* (London: W.H. Allen & Co, 1893); S.P. Sen, *The French in India, 1763-1816* (New Delhi: M. Manoharlal, 1971); Jacques Weber, *Les établissements français en Inde au XIXe siècle (1816-1914)* (Paris: Librairie de l'Inde, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Parasher, 245.

<sup>6</sup> There are quite a few works on Dupleix, many written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Pondichérians. Some of the more well known works include Alfred Martineau, *Dupleix et l'Inde Française, 1722-1754* (Paris: Champion, 1920); L. Luceney, *Dupleix, conquérant des Indes fabuleuses* (Paris: Zimmerman, 1946); Léon Moreel, *Dupleix, marquis de fortune et conquérant des Indes, 1697-1763* (Rosendaël: Editions le Port de Dunkerque, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> On the relationship between France and England, see Robert and Isabelle Toombs, *That Sweet Enemy: The French and British from the Sun King to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 2007).

Pondicherry and the British in near-by Madras. In fact, Madras fell to the French in 1746, causing Dupleix to try frantically to retain the territory by forming alliances with local Indian leaders.<sup>8</sup> He was successful for a time, which has led many people, in the past as well as the present, to believe that France had the ability and the opportunity to conquer much larger segments of South Asia, while simultaneously proving their superiority to British forces.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately for the French, and especially for Dupleix who was removed from his post and recalled to Paris as a fallen hero, Madras was returned to the British in the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle of 1749. For the next few decades, France and England continued to fight for control of territory in South Asia – at one point, during the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), France lost all five territories to the British – they also lost most of their territories in Canada. The French-Indian colonies changed hands several more times, during the French Revolution, and in again when Napoleon decided to make advances towards India in 1802. Pondicherry was returned to France in 1815, under the Second Treaty of Paris, and the other four territories followed suit in 1816 (Chandernagore) and 1817 (Karikal, Mahé, Yanam.)<sup>10</sup>

Demarcating the French-Indian territories on a map can be accomplished with ease –however, defining the French-Indian people has never been a simple or straightforward task. There have been a smattering of dissertations, editorials, and academic works devoted to the task, but none have offered a clear picture of the communit(ies) in question, primarily because none of these works looks at both the people who stayed in French India after the end of the French colonial presence *and* those

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<sup>8</sup> Miles, 3.

<sup>9</sup> For more on what the loss of India meant to the French, see the essays collected in Kate Marsh and Nicola Firth, eds., *France’s Lost Empires: Fragmentation, Nostalgia, and la fracture coloniale* (Boulder: Lexington Books, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Miles, 5.

who migrated to France.<sup>11</sup> Another part of the difficulty in setting parameters around a specific French-Indian community is that the boundaries of these communities were often imposed by a higher power, whether the French colonial authorities or the British Raj – therefore, they rarely originated from the populations.<sup>12</sup> Of course, communities did exist within the geo-political borders of French India, but not all the people within these borders considered themselves French-Indian, or could have at a time when the idea of being “Indian” had not yet been widely theorized or formulated. The term French-Indian is itself a contemporary designation, based on an identification with two separate nation-states. Therefore, throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-centuries, when the people who lived in and around the geo-political borders of French India spoke and wrote of themselves, they used identifying markers such as religion (Hindu, Catholic, Muslim), caste, and race (European, *métis* (mixed race), or *indigène* (indigenous or native)). These categories were not specific to French India, but spanned the sub-continent, with regional variations, and were used by both French and British officials in descriptions of local populations. However, by the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, it was clear that that the local populations in British and French territories had become distant. This, argues Adrian Carton, was because “concepts of hybridity” and “race-mixing” were not seen as threatening in the French-

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to William Miles’ *Countercolonialism*, see Adrian Carton, *Mixed Race and Modernity in Colonial India: Changing Concepts of Hybridity Across Empires* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Animesh Rai, *The Legacy of French Rule in India (1674-1954): An Investigation of a Process of Creolization* (Pondicherry: French Institute of Pondicherry, 2008); Lourdes Tirouvanziam Louis, “Les ‘Créoles’ ou descendants d’Européens à Pondichéry,” (PhD diss., Pondicherry University, 1994); Paul Michalon, “Des Indes françaises aux Français Indiens ou Comment peut-on être Franco-Pondicherian?” (Master’s thesis, Université Aix-Marseille I, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> The construction of colonial categories meant to define certain communities was certainly not limited to French India, but was a tool widely used by imperial powers throughout the world. See Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Indian territories and were much more common, a practice that allowed for a new class in the colonial society: that of the créole or the métis.<sup>13</sup>

The messiness of defining a French-Indian community is consistent with the blurry boundaries of colonial categorization, a tension between exclusion and inclusion that Ann Laura Stoler has described in her work on French Indochina and the Dutch Indies.<sup>14</sup> After the French had lost the majority of India to the English in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, they were faced with the question of how to establish a significant and important French space in South Asia without extensive military and economic conquest, which was forbidden by the Second Treaty of Paris, the act that restored Pondicherry to the French for good. French officials never thought there would be a large French settler/European society in India, but it was still important to make Pondicherry as European as possible. In the remainder of this chapter, I will look at how internal, social boundaries were constructed in French India to transform this geographic space into a European space and simultaneously construct a European community *without* a significant population of white Europeans. Unlike other areas of the Empire, where, as Ann Laura Stoler has argued, *métissage* was seen “as a threat to white prestige, an embodiment of European degeneration and decay,” French India, especially Pondicherry, relied on the *métis* population to augment the small number of Europeans in the construction of a European space and social milieu.<sup>15</sup> In her work on sex, gender, and family in British India, Durba Ghosh has shown the importance of interracial sexual

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<sup>13</sup> Carton, *Mixed Race and Modernity*, 62.

<sup>14</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia” in Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Stoler, “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers.”

relationships, and particularly the formation of interracial families, arguing that they were “a crucial and constitutive part of early colonial state formation and governance in British India” and that these relationships laid “the foundations for the colonial social order.”<sup>16</sup> Because of the geo-political relationship between the British Raj and the French colonies in India, interracial relationships were very much encouraged in French India, and were not challenged until the Empire was on the verge of collapse, after the departure of the British in 1947.

### ***Race and Race-Mixing in Colonial India***

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, “French-Indian” had become a designator, commonly used to denote a geographic area as a population distinct from British India. Taken as two distinct terms, “French” and “Indian,” half of this identity, Indian, was ultimately determined in the colonial context by notions of race, while the other half could be acquired by factors of cultural, political, and social identity, which included language (ability to communicate in French), citizenship status, family history, religion, name, dress, and schooling. Thus, French-Indians might be *métis* (mixed race), but they may also be Tamils who had converted to Catholicism, they could also be low-caste Hindus who renounced their civil status and obtained French citizenship (an option available beginning in 1881), or they could be Muslims who lived in French villages on one of the many French-British Indian borders.<sup>17</sup> There were caste Hindus who were descendents of the men and women who sided with the French during the Seven Year’s War (1756-

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<sup>16</sup> Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 2.

<sup>17</sup> The question of renunciation and acquiring French citizenship will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2. For more, see Jacques Weber, *Pondichéry et les Comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix: La démocratie au pays des castes* (Paris: Denoël, 1996).

1763), and who participated, albeit remotely, in the French Revolution by petitioning Paris for rights and writing entries into *cahiers des doléances*.<sup>18</sup> There were certainly cultural, political, and social elements to the “Indian” identity marker as well, however, understandings of racial difference and hierarchy overrode other affiliations.<sup>19</sup> The combination of a political identity comprised of a racial marker with a national marker was in many ways unique to French India at this time. Unlike British India, which did not designate anyone as a “British-Indian,” but did mark mixed-heritage subjects as Eurasians, the people of French India were given the opportunity at several points in time to become French citizens, adopting a *national* identity for the first time.

Laurent Dubois has written about the importance of the slave rebellions in Saint-Domingue (Haiti) during the period of the French Revolution for the development of Republican citizenship, arguing that slave insurgents claiming racial equality and citizenship rights “universalized” the language of rights.<sup>20</sup> While Pondicherry did not experience a similar rebellion, the Revolution did spark a movement by the mixed-race people of Pondicherry, who believed they should be granted equal rights with those considered fully French.<sup>21</sup> The battle over the meaning of ‘universal rights’ was just beginning, and at the center of the debate was the question of the mixed-race population. In fact, the *métis* was of concern to French imperialists and intellectuals as early as the

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<sup>18</sup> The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter comes from a Pondicherry *cahier de doléance*. The *cahiers des doléances* were lists of grievances composed by the various strata of society, addressed to the King of France. While the *cahiers* and their relationship to the French Revolution is the subject of much discussion for metropolitan France, it is important to note that the colonies of the *ancien régime* also composed these lists. For more on citizenship issues in French India during the French Revolution, see Adrian Carton, “Shades of Fraternity: ‘Créolization and the Making of Citizenship in French India, 1790-92,” *French Historical Studies* 31 (2008).

<sup>19</sup> Adrian Carton, *Mixed Race and Modernity*.

<sup>20</sup> Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Laurent Dubois, “La republique metisse: Citizenship, Colonialism, and the Borders of French History” *Cultural Studies* 14 (2010): 22.

<sup>21</sup> Adrian Carton, “Shades of Fraternity.”

18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> Despite the supposed “language of equality” French experts continued to keep a close watch on the *métis* populations throughout the Empire. Doctor N. Huillet, a French physician who wrote a text in 1867 titled *Hygiène des blancs, des mixtes et des indiens à Pondichéry* commented on the great heterogeneity he found in Pondicherry’s 121, 186 souls (*âmes*).<sup>23</sup> He observed four “distinct elements” (*éléments bien distinct*) within the population of Pondicherry: Europeans, the descendents of Europeans *or* créoles, the “mixtes” or *topas*, and the Hindus (and, he adds to this category, the Muslims who were “naturalisés après la conquête.”)<sup>24</sup> Huillet counted 954 people belonging to the “population blanche,” 1239 in the “population mixte,” and 118, 993 in the “population Indienne.”<sup>25</sup> Earlier, the French administration made their first attempt at a systematic count of the resident of the *comptoirs* in India in 1842, although, according to the *Gazetteer of India*, registration was not compulsory and therefore failed to provide a total count of those domiciled in French India.<sup>26</sup> The initial categorization of the population was divided into Europeans, Mixed, Indian, and Muslims.<sup>27</sup> While Huillet was happy to place Muslims and Hindus into the same category, under the title of Hindus (as his interest was biological, not social), the imperial government desired understood the social divisions to between European, mixed-race, Hindu, and Muslim.

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<sup>22</sup> Claude Blanckaert, “Of Monstrous Métis? Hybridity, Fear of Miscegenation, and Patriotism from Buffon to Paul Broca” in Tyler Stovall and Sue Peabody, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> N. Huillet. *Hygiène des blancs, des mixtes et des indiens à Pondichéry* (Pondichéry: Imprimeur du Gouvernement, 1867): 12.

<sup>24</sup> Huillet, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Huillet, 16-17.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Cyril Antony, ed., *Gazetteer, Union Territory of Pondicherry* (Pondicherry: The Government Press, 1982): 301.

<sup>27</sup> *Gazetteer*, 301. In 1849 the form changed the categories of Indians and Muslims to Hindus and Muslims, classifying both as ‘natives.’

Despite the lack of a concrete and homogenous understanding of the category of French-Indian, the colonial systems that interacted in French India, of the French and the British, did construct certain internal boundaries that dictated, to varying degrees of success, how people were positioned in relation to each other, and came to understand themselves in relation to the greater colonial, and eventually post-colonial, society. While interracial relationships were tolerated and in some ways encouraged in the early years of French rule in India, the resulting population born of these unions was separated from the population-at-large, through both racial and spatial segregation. The mixed-race population in French India in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which self-identified as “*créole*,” became part of the white class, as they converted to Catholicism, adopted European clothes, and participated in the public life of the non-indigenous population.

There has been numerous debates about the use and meaning of the term *créole* – most commonly over the past three decades, it has been used to describe the coming together of two or more cultures, or as a linguistic term, referring to the merger of two or more languages.<sup>28</sup> In French India, and in many of the other colonies, *créole* referred to people of European origin who were born in the colonies, a definition that has fallen out of general use.<sup>29</sup> Most commonly employed today to describe cultures in the Caribbean, the West Indies, and Louisiana, the post-colonial framework of *créolization* does not transfer well to French India, partly because it has been used in French India primarily to

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Celia M. Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> This unique usage in French India, to refer to *métis* and people of French parents born in the colonies is noted in many people who lived in French India. See, for example, Michel Gaudart de Soulages and Phillippe Randa, *Les dernières années de l'Inde française* (Paris: Dualpha, 2005): 210-212. For more on historical uses of *créole* and *métis* throughout the French Empire, see Saliha Belmessous, “Assimilation and Racialism in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Policy,” *American Historical Review* 110 (2005); Jennifer M. Spear, “Colonial Intimacies: Legislating Sex in Louisiana,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 60 (2003).

describe race-mixing (*métissage*), not culture-mixing, since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup>

Lourdes Tirouvanziam Louis, herself a self-identified Pondichérien *créole*, who was born in Vietnam to a French-Indian family, wrote a doctoral thesis on the *créoles* of Pondicherry. She writes that by the first years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the term *créole* was used to describe *both* Europeans born in the colonies *and* those with mixed blood, or *métis*.<sup>31</sup> The word *topas* was also used in several areas of colonial India during the same period to signify a person with Portuguese heritage, a designation that separated the French and British *colons* from the often lower-class descendants of Portuguese colonists, and mixed Indian-Portuguese heritage population. During the late 17<sup>th</sup>-century, there were very few European women in India, and the French soldiers in South India often married and/or had children with *topasine* women, who were preferable to “*les femmes du pays*,” (local women) largely because they were often already Catholic and thus seen as more appropriate marriage partners than the local Hindu and Muslim women.<sup>32</sup>

In this way, we can see that religious compatibility was a primary factor in choosing a partner at this point, although it is difficult to ignore the direct association of religious identity and heritage or racial background in this particular time and place. From the very first days of European presence in India, there was a hierarchy in place, relative to the power of imperial and economic institutions that operated in this geo-political space. While it is easy, in hindsight, to call this a racial hierarchy, 18<sup>th</sup>-century conceptions of race were not based in the same biological discourse that became popular

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<sup>30</sup> Animesh Rai, *The Legacy of French Rule in India*. Although race-mixing and culture-mixing do go hand in hand, Rai argues that in French India, the two dominant cultures, French and Tamil, never morphed into a hybrid, or *créole* culture, like those of the West Indies or in Louisiana.

<sup>31</sup> Tirouvanziam Louis, 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Tirouvanziam Louis, 7.

in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, religion played an important role in the earliest unions between European men and local women in India. Beginning with the Portuguese settlers in India in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century, the Catholic Church encouraged interracial unions as a way to convert non-Catholics and create a larger Catholic presence in the colonies.<sup>34</sup> This led to the births of many mixed-race children, who, during this time, were more likely to have a higher class standing than the indigenous populations, because of the one European parent and the likelihood they would own property or other capital.<sup>35</sup> The elevated class status of mixed-race persons, made it likely that European men would consider a métis women a good match. In this way, religious, economic, and racial identities became intimately connected.

The Portuguese presence in South Asia in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century meant that when French and British sailors and merchants began to arrive in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, there was already a population of mixed-race men and women living throughout the Indian port cities. By this time, the métis population was increasing, and many French men of high class standing were marrying métis women.<sup>36</sup> Dupleix himself married a créole woman, Jeanne Dupleix (née Albert) (1706-1756), upon arriving in Pondicherry. Madame Dupleix had been raised in Pondicherry, the daughter of a Frenchman, Jacques-Theodor Albert and a créole mother, Rose de Castro, who was believed to be of Portuguese and

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<sup>33</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Carton, *Mixed Race and Modernity*, 13. Most of the local women who married Portuguese and eventually other European men came from marginal social groups and married to improve their social standing. This will be explored in more detail for French India in Chapter 2, “Colonial Borders and National Identities.”

<sup>35</sup> Adrian Carton notes that in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in India, the phrase “les filles portugaises” could refer to mixed-race women *or* Christian free women of color, depending on the source. Carton, *Mixed Race and Modernity*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Very little is said in my sources about the marriage patterns of métis or créole men. Adrian Carton has suggested that many of them married within the métis community, while a small number traveled to other French colonies and found partners there. Adrian Carton, *Mixed-Race and Modernity*, 74-75.

Indian parentage.<sup>37</sup> While the Marquis and Jeanne did not have children of their own, Dupleix is to this day remembered as the father of Pondicherry – while he was not the “founder” of the colony, that honor goes to François Martin, he was the man who gave the “sleepy” town life, and Madame Dupleix was seen as a key figure in the success her husband had as Governor, and in the building of Pondicherry as a rival to British power in India.

Madame Dupleix spoke Tamil, as well as French and English, a common trait amongst the créole population. She was one of many créole Catholics in Pondicherry. Créole individuals were not considered caste Hindus, because of firmly held beliefs that one must be born to two Hindu parents to be of pure caste - thus, the majority of the *créoles* in French India were Catholics.<sup>38</sup> While her familiarity with the local landscape and population as well as European customs and languages made her a useful, and necessary, person for the European settlers, her reputation amongst the local people was largely negative. The tensions between Madame Dupleix, and other créoles in the area, and the local, mostly Tamil communities, is evident in the diaries kept by Ananda Ranga Pillai (1709-1761), the Tamil man who served as Governor Dupleix’s dubash.<sup>39</sup> Dubash is a word of Hindi origin that translates to interpreter, or “man of two languages” -- most European men in India had a dubash from the local community who would act as a guide and middleman, translating and facilitating alliances between himself and the indigenous leaders and/or merchants. In this way, Madame Dupleix and Ananda Ranga Pillai served

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<sup>37</sup> Isidore Guët, *Origines de l’Inde française, Jân Begum (Mme. Dupleix, 1706-1756)* (Paris: Baudoin, 1892).

<sup>38</sup> Tirouvanziam Louis, 28.

<sup>39</sup> Ananda Ranga Pillai, *The Private Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai: A Record of Matters Political, Historical, Social, and Personal, from 1736 to 1761*. trans. Sir J. Frederick Price (Madras: Government Press, 1904).

a similar function for Governor Dupleix, of translator and interpreter. In his diary, Pillai wrote extensively of his dislike of Madame Dupleix, especially concerning her involvement with politics, which he believed would be better left to the Governor.<sup>40</sup> His writings also suggest that he resented her for what he saw as persecution of Hindus through destruction of their religious practices.<sup>41</sup> While Pillai had respect for the power and authority of the Governor, who came from France and had no knowledge of local customs, he saw Madame Dupleix as a traitor to the lives of the local people, by deriding Hindu and Muslim customs and suggesting the superiority of European ways.

Despite her inability, or lack of desire, to form friendships with non-European and non-créole people in Pondicherry, Madame Dupleix has become something of a local hero in Pondicherry, at least amongst the Francophile community. The life of Madame Dupleix has captured the attention and imagination of many Francophone authors who have written about her life in 18<sup>th</sup> century French India.<sup>42</sup> Sometimes called Johanna Bégum or Jeanne Albert, Madame Dupleix has been mythologized in Francophile Pondicherry, portrayed as a strong woman who was actively involved in the political affairs of her husband and of French India. The two major French works that have attempted to provide a biography of Madame Dupleix have made her power over the dubash and her influence on Governor Dupleix a centerpiece of her life story. These works have also noted the importance of her *métis* heritage: the 1934 work by Yvonne Robert Gaebelé was titled *Créole et Grande Dame: Johanna Bégum, Marquise Dupleix*

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<sup>40</sup> Pillai, 54-57.

<sup>41</sup> Pillai often recorded his conversations with Madame Dupleix, and would note in his text that she spoke to him in Tamil, a language her husband did not understand.

<sup>42</sup> Isidore Guët, *Origines de l'Inde française, Jân Begum (Mme. Dupleix, 1706-1756)* (Paris: Baudoin, 1892); Yvonne Robert Gaebelé, *Créole et Grande Dame, Joanna Bégum, marquise Dupleix, 1706-1756* (Pondichéry: Bibliothèque Coloniale, 1934); Rose Vincent, *Les temps d'un royaume: Jeanne Dupleix* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982).

(1706-1756), a title which clearly suggests her créole heritage was her primary identity.<sup>43</sup> Gaebelé's book suggests that Dupleix depended on his wife's mixed background to help him negotiate with local princes, as well as local people, including the dubash Pillai. It was more logical, these books suggest, for the Governor to trust his wife than his dubash – while he may have been loyal to the Governor, his true interests would lay with his Tamil-Hindu community, not with the values and goals of the Europeans. The divisions between Madame Dupleix and Ananda Ranga Pillai, two people separated by gender, race, and religion, are indicative of the boundaries formed as French colonialism came to Pondicherry. Despite the overlaps in their lives – they were born in the same location, spoke the same languages, and knew many of the same people – the arrival of Dupleix and the colonial system reordered local communities in such a way that instead of working together, they could only compete to be the most useful to those with the most power – who were, in this case, the French officials, military officers, and settlers.

The arrival of Dupleix led to a reordering of space in Pondicherry, as well. Following the example of the neighboring British enclave, Madras, Dupleix divided Pondicherry into a *ville blanche* (white town) and a *ville noire* (black town). Throughout the 1740s, Pondicherry town was divided into 4 quarters: the white town was comprised of the *quartier Saint-Laurent* and the *quartier Saint-Louis*, which were respectively south and north of the Fort Louis. The black town, which was separated from the white town by a sewage canal (the *petit canal*) was made up of the *quartier de l'Hôpital* and the *quartier Saint-Joseph*.<sup>44</sup> (See Figure 3) As Carl H. Nightingale has written, Madras, located about 100km north of Pondicherry, was the first city in the world to be split into a Black Town

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<sup>43</sup> Gaebelé, *Créole et Grande Dame*.

<sup>44</sup> Jean Deloche, "Pondicherry from the origins to 1824" in *Pondicherry hier et aujourd'hui* (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2007): 4.

and a White Town.<sup>45</sup> In the case of Madras, Nightingale argues that the colonial administrators were primarily interested in separating the much smaller European population from the much larger South Asian populations.<sup>46</sup> While it seems likely that officials in Pondicherry borrowed from the city plans of Madras to separate Pondicherry into a *ville blanche* and *ville noire*, key differences in the construction of the two towns reflect the differences in the British and French approaches to managing populations of mixed European and non-European communities.



Figure 3 Illustration of the sewage canal that separates the *ville blanche* from the *ville noire* in Pondicherry, 18th century. From Douglas Gressieux, *Les Comptoirs de l'Inde* (Alan Sutton, 2004): 6.

<sup>45</sup> Carl H. Nightingale, "Before Race Mattered: Geographies of the Color Line in Early Colonial Madras and New York" *American Historical Review* 113 (2008): 48.

<sup>46</sup> Nightingale, 52.

The local people of Madras were effectively segregated from the white population by walls and laws forbidding non-Europeans from purchasing land in the White Town. However, in Pondicherry, the definition of “white” or “European” immediately included the mixed-race population -- out of a total European population of 787 Europeans, 461 of them were *métis*.<sup>47</sup> Pondicherry did not construct physical barriers between the quarters in the way that the British did – while there was a canal that separated the *ville blanche* from the *ville noire*, once could look across and see the other side, an experience made impossible in Madras by the building of walls that kept the Europeans and the Indians from seeing each other. However, it was clear from the start that the *ville blanche* held an economic and social value that the *ville noire* did not. All the government buildings and educational institutions were built in the *ville blanche*. Doctor Hulliet’s 1867 study of Pondicherry suggests that the separation of the *ville blanche* from the *ville noire* gave an “immense advantage” to this city over others in British India, a fact that riddled the British with envy and accounted for the beauty and healthiness (*beauté et salubrité*) of Pondicherry’s *ville blanche*.<sup>48</sup> However, Hulliet also notes the danger of the water in the canal that separated the two parts of town, writing that the canal was filled with “a blackish water, the exhalations fetid” that “by its stagnation gives rise to a fever-inducing miasma.”<sup>49</sup> While Hulliet attributed the dangers of air-borne disease (miasma) to the water in the canal, he also made it clear that the residents of the *ville blanche* remained relatively safe from the deadly poisons by nature of separation from the *ville noire*. By incorporating the mixed-race population into the European milieu and increasing the

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<sup>47</sup> Jean Deloche, *Le papier terrier de la ville blanche de Pondichéry 1777* (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2002).

<sup>48</sup> Hulliet, 10.

<sup>49</sup> “Une eau noirâtre, aux exhalaisons fétides, donnant naissance à des miasmes fébrigènes par sa stagnation.” Hulliet, 10.

numbers of people in the *ville blanche*, the two parts of town remained separate, despite the French discourse of universal rights that would come to dominate global images of French India in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.

***The Paris of the East: Colonial Tourism in French India***

The resources put into developing the Pondichérian *ville blanche* throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries resulted in widespread image of Pondicherry as an anomaly in the pantheon of Indian cities; Pondicherry was constructed as *more European* than Madras, Calcutta, or Bombay, cities built by the British that failed to effectively recreate the feeling of a European city. Travelers, tourists, and general on-lookers from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day have referred to Pondicherry as “a little bit of France in India.”<sup>50</sup> European visitors to Pondicherry, whether French or British, have almost always noted both the segregation in the city and the prominence of the *créole* and/or *métis* communities, paying particular attention to the differences between British and French India as well as the beauty of the *créole* women. Pierre Loti, the famed author, traveler, and *Académie Française* member, wrote in his 1903 work on India, *L’Inde (sans les Anglais)*, that while he felt himself to be a foreigner in British India, he was at home in Pondicherry, which possessed an “old country charm that nothing can replace, and that our great Far Eastern colonies, too new, having no past, do not yet possess.”<sup>51</sup> Julian James Cotton, a British military officer from neighboring Madras visited Pondicherry in

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<sup>50</sup> Grafting an image of Paris onto the colonial cities the colonial administration deemed the most culturally important to the maintenance of the Empire was commonplace: in Indochina, Saigon was often called “Paris on a small scale,” and Hanoi the “Paris of Tonkin.” See Ann Raffin, “Imperial Nationhood and Its Impact on Colonial Cities: Issue of Conflict and Peace in Pondicherry and Vietnam,” in Diane E. Davis and Nora Libertun de Durén, eds., *Cities and Sovereignty: Identity Politics in Urban Spaces* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011): 35.

<sup>51</sup> « Vieux charme de patrie que rien ne remplace, et que nos grands colonies d’Extrême Orient, trop nouvelles, n’ayant point de passé, ne possèdent pas encore. » Pierre Loti, *L’Inde (sans les Anglais)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1903): 214.

1905 and remarked that it was a “little piece of France in India” adding “even on the hottest day, when the very chairs crackle with heat, life here seems inviting and restful.”<sup>52</sup> Unlike British India, which the author described as the “Land of Regrets,” filled with houses imbued with an “unmistakable Indian look,” in Pondicherry, “the European spirit of architecture is far better preserved.”<sup>53</sup> It is the presence of European style buildings and city planning that made both of these men feel markedly more comfortable than they did in the neighboring areas of British India.

Much like the architecture that combined European and Indian styles and gave visitors the visual confirmation that they were in a French colony, the physical features of the *créole* women in Pondichéry, the blending of Indian and European “racial” features, made the men feel at ease.<sup>54</sup> Cotton moves from speaking of the houses of Pondicherry to the *créole* women, writing that “the Paris of the East,”

Contains a race of its own, which has never been appreciated in print...To see the *topazine* at her best, you should go to early mass at *Notre Dame des Anges*. The back of the church is filled with a crowd of kneeling natives, but the Eurasians have seats in front. The sunlight falling through the richly-stained windows made the altar glow again, and the whole service is solemn and impressive; only the harshness of the Indian singing grates on the ear. The ladies are many of them pretty. They younger ones effect the becoming fashion of low-necked dresses in the daytime, and the little girls have bare arms. It is the *créole* type with all its peculiar languid grace.<sup>55</sup>

Cotton notes that while the Indians have infiltrated this European space of the Catholic Church with their singing which “grates on the ear,” the subtle beauty of the *créole*

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<sup>52</sup> Julian James Cotton, “Pondicherry,” *Macmillian’s Magazine* 87 (1905): 125.

<sup>53</sup> Cotton, 125.

<sup>54</sup> Throughout my research, I have not encountered a single reference made by my European travelers to Pondicherry about *créole* men, who, of course, certainly did exist.

<sup>55</sup> Cotton, 129.

women balance out the “native” noise. Indian women, with their foreign customs, language, and clothes, were too unknowable to pique the interest of these travelers. The créole women, on the other hand, were exotic enough to lend an air of excitement to watching and pursuing them, yet familiar enough to care about.

Pierre Loti, much like Cotton, also moves seamlessly from a discussion of architecture to that of women. Describing the atmosphere of the *ville blanche* he wrote,

Oh! The melancholy of arriving here, in this remote and charming old town, where between cracked walls a French past lays dormant! The side streets a bit like home, deep in our most tranquil provinces; from the straight small streets, to the low houses, the old houses, white lime on red soil; the garden walls, from which fall garlands of white flowers (*liserons*); behind the bars of the barred windows we can see some pale faces of créole, or métis, women, very beautiful, with Indian mystery in their eyes.<sup>56</sup>

Both Loti and Cotton portray Pondicherry as a gentle refuge from the chaos of India; the beauty of the light-skinned créole woman brings a welcome relief from the pollution of sights and sounds that demarcate the Indian background. A. Maufroid, another French traveler writing in 1911, noticed the many “demi-négresses” and “demi-noires” in Pondicherry and commented on how they insisted on wearing clothes that were copied from “the current Parisian styles”<sup>57</sup> These women were a “curious group,” he continued, stemming from old unions between Indians and French.<sup>58</sup> Maufroid notes that the *créole* girls speak French, attend school, and enjoy acting as French as possible, although he himself seems to be amused by their attempts to act French.

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<sup>56</sup> “Oh ! la mélancolie d’arriver là, dans cette vieille ville lointaine et charmante, où sommeille, entre des murailles lézardées, tout un passé français ! Des petites rues un peu comme chez nous, au fond de nos plus tranquilles provinces ; des petites rues bien droites, aux maisonnettes basses, aux maisonnettes centenaires, blanches de chaux sur un sol rouge ; des murs de jardins, d’où retombent des guirlandes de liserons ou de réaux tropicales ; des fenêtres grillées derrière les barreaux desquelles on aperçoit quelques figures pâles de femmes créoles, ou bien métisses, trop jolies, avec du mystère indien dans les yeux . » Loti, 213.

<sup>57</sup> A. Maufroid, *Sous le soleil de l’Inde* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1911): 108.

<sup>58</sup> Maufroid, 109-10.

These passages make it clear that créole women were not only a part of the colonial landscape, tempting the European male with glimpses of exotic sexuality, but were also sought out as symbols of the success of colonialism. Indigenous Indian women were most often characterized as ruined by local practices such as child marriage and *sati*, or widow immolation, and were thought to be kept hidden by their fathers, husbands, and brothers. Looking to Doctor Huillet's "medical" text on race-mixing in Pondicherry, he hypothesized that the créole community was the best suited to life in the colony: the environment was too harsh for the "Français de France" and the native Indians were not clever enough to attain a higher quality of life. Attempting to prove this point, Huillet conducted a count of the sexes within the three racial populations of 'white,' 'mixed,' and 'Indian.' Through this study he showed that men outnumbered women in both the White and Indian communities, while women outnumbered men in the "mixte" population. He attributed this to a few factors, including the difficulty European women had adapting to the environment in Pondicherry, and in the case of the Indians, the "ignorance" of the community in seeking out medical help for women.<sup>59</sup>

Of course, the tourists rarely visited the *ville noire* – while everyone had to pass through this area to reach the *ville blanche*, the description of Pondicherry as "the Paris of the East" referred exclusively to the *ville blanche*, the town on the sea that remained calm and clean despite the hurdles presented by India. Just as Paris today is surrounded by suburbs filled with the economically disadvantaged, populations comprised primarily of immigrants and non-white French nationals, Pondicherry was surrounded on all sides by the *ville noire*, a collection of villages of Tamil men, women, and children who were

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<sup>59</sup> Huillet, 20. For the years 1856-66, the birth records in Pondicherry show there were 169 white boys to 92 white girls born, 113 "mixed" boys to 173 "mixed" girls born, and 2169 Indian boys to 2076 Indian girls born.

segregated by class, race, and space, from participating in the social and political life of the European space constructed within the borders of the *ville blanche*. Incorporating the créole population into the *ville blanche* was critical to establishing the *ville blanche* as both European and colonial, without the threat that a non-mixed population carried by virtue of having no blood relationship to the imperial homeland.

### *Citizens and Subjects*

The epigraph I began this chapter with was written in 1790, during the French Revolution, by a group calling themselves citizens (*citoyens*) in Pondicherry. This group included both white and métis men who considered themselves part of the essential fabric of Pondicherry, and were excited by the revolutionary language that was making its way to the colonies. Eager to assert their rights to French citizenship under the new regime, they quickly moved to define who could and who could not be a French citizen. It was initially decided, in 1790, that ‘tous européens et descendants d’européens’ (all Europeans and descendants of Europeans) would be eligible for French citizenship.<sup>60</sup> This immediately excluded the many people who had previously been considered white, who were of Portuguese heritage. It also excluded the majority of the population, who were, of course, the Tamils. Until 1881, when the prospect of citizenship opened up to non-Europeans in French India, only white and métis men were allowed to call themselves citizens. Despite the initial exclusion of the local population by racial criteria, the fact that eventually some non-Europeans were allowed to become citizens became an important point of departure from the trajectory of rights in neighboring British India,

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<sup>60</sup> This did not, at any time, include women or men under the age of 25. Adrian Carton, *Mixed Race and Modernity*, 88.

where no one, Eurasian or not, was considered a citizen of the British Empire; rather, all those domiciled in a British colony or dominion was considered a subject of the Crown.<sup>61</sup> Non-European individuals born in India were classified as “non-European natural born British subjects.”<sup>62</sup> Those non-European Indians born in the Princely States were classified as British Protected Persons (B.P.P.s), and while they were considered aliens on British soil, they also had claims to protection under the crown.<sup>63</sup> Both groups could become European British subjects “upon application,” a process spelled out in the Indian Naturalization Act of 1852; however, the Act also stated that neither non-European natural born British subjects *or* B.P.P.s could ever become “fully naturalized members of the Empire,” leading to what Daniel Gorman has written, a function of empire wherein whites were allowed “to rule as a caste unto themselves.”<sup>64</sup>

By the 1940s, the geo-political borders between French and British India had been effective in separating the populations of the two areas. Despite the historically shared characteristics of race, language, customs, and religion, the subjects of British India and the subjects and citizens of French India were divided. As I will show in Chapter 2, geo-political borders in the colonies served a dual purpose: to control the movements of colonial subjects and to demarcate the land and resources that belonged to a particular imperial power. The French and English borders in India did not mark the boundaries of a nation *or* a state separate from the imperial power, but served to attach certain areas of land and populations to the empire-at-large. The formation of the colonial state and the

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<sup>61</sup> Daniel Gorman, “Wider and Wider Still?: Racial Politics, Intra-Imperial Immigrations and the Absence of an Imperial Citizenship in the British Empire” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 3(2002): par. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Gorman, “Wider and Wider,”: par. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Gorman, “Wider and Wider”: par. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Gorman, “Wider and Wider”: par. 17.

desire to grant different rights and privileges to certain groups necessitated a system that would recognize distinct identities. Thus, as Durba Ghosh has argued in the case of British India, colonial institutions identified “who was a British subject and who was putatively an “Indian” before a formal conception of India existed.”<sup>65</sup>

While French India did not develop a *créole* culture akin to those in the Caribbean or the islands of the Indian Ocean (such as Réunion and Mauritius), groups of people within French-India did develop a distinct French-Indian consciousness that was questioned, both internally and externally, once the surrounding areas transformed from British India to India in 1947.<sup>66</sup> However, because the *créole* community had been granted certain privileges within colonial society, there was a gulf between the *créole* French-Indian community and the much larger population that seen by colonial administrators and *créoles* alike as less French than the rest.

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<sup>65</sup> Ghosh, *Sex and the Family*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> On the question of *créolization* in Pondicherry, see Animesh Rai, *The Legacy of French Rule in India*.

## Chapter 2

### Colonial Borders and National Identities: French and British Borders in India prior to Independence

“The nationalities are hopelessly mixed up, and many persons do not know, and cannot prove, whether they are French or British subjects.”  
- Reginald Schomberg, HM Consul General in the French Establishments, 1937<sup>1</sup>

During the summer of 1939, the British authorities in India began construction on a barbed-wire fence that would enforce the boundaries between British and French India. The fence, which was built in two out of five French-Indian territories, Pondicherry and Karikal, cost approximately Rs. 3.21 lakhs (321,000 rupees), a toll incurred by the British Government in India.<sup>2</sup> As the fence was erected, Reginald Schomberg, the British Consul in Pondicherry, reported, “although only a dozen odd miles have been put up...good results have already been noted.”<sup>3</sup> The fence had a double barrier, and the posts were sealed in concrete to “prevent the earth being dug away.”<sup>4</sup> Schomberg estimated that it would take a “smuggler” 40 minutes to cut away both fences, so the fence was patrolled every 40 minutes to ensure no one passed through unnoticed.<sup>5</sup> Before the fence was built, customs agents were forced to “pursue smugglers over rice fields and swamps,” a chase that rarely favoured the customs agent. Schomberg ends his report praising the construction of the barbed wire fence but offering a note of caution, “No fence, however,

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<sup>1</sup> British Library, India Office Records (IOR): L/PS/12/4454 3 Dec 1936-16 Oct 1941, Letter dated 19 April 1937 from HM Consul General in French Est. to Sec to the Gov of India in External Affairs, Simla.

<sup>2</sup> IOR: Coll 42/30 French India: reports on general situation, /L/PS/12/4456 21 Jun 1938-7 Jan 1945, 14 Feb 1939, Extract from Official Report between British India and Pondicherry with Barbed Wire (851-2).

<sup>3</sup> IOR: Coll 42/30 French India: reports on general situation, /L/PS/12/4456 21 Jun 1938-7 Jan 1945, August 1939.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

will by itself stop smuggling, just as no prison without a guard will confine its inmates.”<sup>6</sup> Officially, the fence was built to stop the smuggling of goods between British and French India, as the British were concerned they were losing out on millions of rupees of revenue on import and export tariffs. However, Schomberg’s use of a prison as an analogy for the customs barriers captures the sentiment of local responses to the fence. A prison, of course, is not built to confine material goods, but to control bodies that are considered dangerous to those outside the prison walls. In response to the building of the fence, the dual language French-Tamil newspaper *Dessobagari* ran an editorial questioning the purpose of the fence, asking “Why the plan of barbed-wire fencing around French territory? Will they enclose the British enclaves or will they surround only the French territory?”<sup>7</sup> In this context, it is unclear whether French or British India was the interior of the prison, but what is clear is that the two areas, divided by borders originally drawn by imperial powers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by imperial powers concerned only with the politics of expansion, had become important markers of identity, dictating the movements and livelihoods of the local populations.

Pondicherry, the largest of the French possessions in India, was the headquarters of the French possessions. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, a small yet vocal community of French-Indians emerged, concentrated around the French run *Collège Colonial*, dozens of dual French-Tamil language newspapers, and political clubs devoted to discussing and debating the laws and ideologies, such as equality, of the French Republic. With British interests focused in the other areas of South Asia, and French interests concentrated in Indochina and North and West Africa, the French possessions in India seemed to be of

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<sup>6</sup> IOR: Coll 42/30 French India: reports on general situation, /L/PS/12/4456 21 Jun 1938-7 Jan 1945, July 1939.

<sup>7</sup> *Dessobagari*, 11 February 1939.

little concern to the rest of the Empire: in the words of one British administrator, the continued existence of French India “constitute[d] an administrative inconvenience.”<sup>8</sup>

England had made gestures towards rectifying this “inconvenience” throughout the 19th-century. According to records at the British India Office and the archives of the *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*, the British and French governments had engaged in discussions about reducing the French territories in 1857 and again in 1883-5.<sup>9</sup> While an agreement was not reached at any point in these negotiations, in 1857 the two governments had discussed the French relinquishing all territory except for Pondicherry and Karikal, and in 1883-5, the “extinction of all French rights in the *loges* in return for territorial compensation in the Pondicherry region.”<sup>10</sup> Pondicherry was not a continuous block of territory; the city was made up of Pondicherry town, surrounded by 10 or so French-Indian communes that were technically situated *within* British India (See Figure 4). The other four *comptoirs*, Karikal, Mahé, Yanam, and Chandernagore, were spread throughout the sub-continent, and were home to varied groups of peoples who spoke different languages and practiced an array of customs. Consulate memos make it clear that England knew France was unlikely to relinquish Pondicherry, as it was an important port for their much larger colonial holdings in Southeast Asia (Indochine), as well as a significant symbol of their importance on the global imperial stage. However, the English government in India made continued efforts to trade more territory in Pondicherry for a cessation of the other territories and *loges*.

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<sup>8</sup> IOR: L/PS/12/4429/ D. 238/ Indian Desiderata for Peace Settlement, 4 December 1918.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

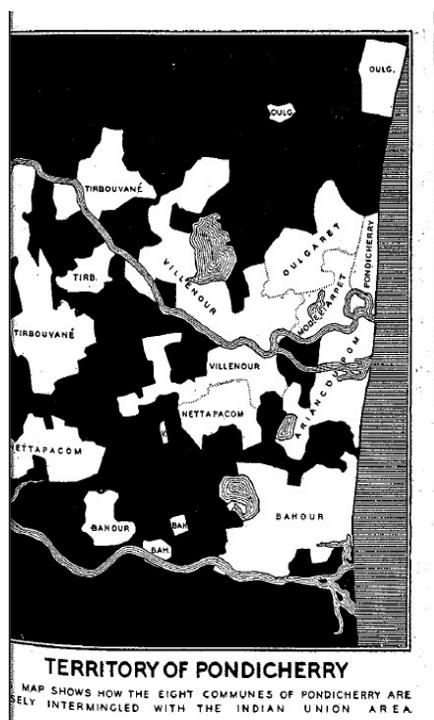


Figure 4 Map of Pondicherry after 1947. The white areas are French India and the black areas are British/India. Taken from N.V. Rajkumar, *The Problem of French India* (Department of Foreign Relations, Indian National Congress, 1954).

If French India represented a mere inconvenience to the British Raj, why were they set on regaining control of these territories? By 1918, the India Office was trading memos with the British Consul in Pondicherry, discussing the “intolerable” situation that had arisen, as Chandernagore in particular had become a “hotbed of revolutionary conspiracy directed against the British government... thanks to the weakness of the French administration.”<sup>11</sup> Chandernagore was the smallest of the French *comptoirs* that lay just outside of the city of Calcutta, an area that was, by the end of the 19th-century, a breeding ground for Bengali revolutionaries.<sup>12</sup> In 1906, the British government had become concerned with the formation of Bengali terrorist groups that were engaging in

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1973).

violent attacks against the Raj, and blamed the French administrators in India for allowing the formation of these groups.<sup>13</sup> Sri Aurobindo Ghose, a Bengali man who was, at one time, one of the most wanted Indian nationalists, used Chandernagore as his exit point to flee the British authorities. Aurobindo sought refuge in Pondicherry in 1910, and his safety there encouraged many other freedom fighters to travel to Pondicherry. In addition to the revolutionaries themselves, seditious literature against the British colonial government as well as money and arms meant to support the overthrow of the British were shipped to Pondicherry, Chandernagore, and to a lesser extent the other *comptoirs*, for distribution throughout British India, often originating from factories and printing presses in France. While the French colonial police in Pondicherry did agree to the surveillance of those subjects considered dangerous by the British, they also insisted on exercising complete sovereignty over their colonies, much to the dismay of the British authorities who found it increasingly difficult to quiet the deafening calls for Indian independence.

Clearly, French India proved to be a larger problem than the British ever imagined it would be in 1815, as the connections between France and anti-British Indians created space and resources for the anti-British freedom movement to expand. Pondicherry's reputation as "an abode of nationalists, an asylum of the revolutionaries hunted out of British India, a hot bed of terrorist activities and above all a spring-board of national sentiments" steadily grew with the freedom movement, including a number of Tamils from the surrounding areas of British rule.<sup>14</sup> While the British did not have any luck negotiating with France for the return of their scattered territories, the need to control

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Heehs, "Foreign Influences on Bengali Revolutionary Terrorism, 1902-1908" *Modern Asian Studies* 28 (1994).

<sup>14</sup> A. Ramasamy, *History of Pondicherry* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987): 154.

these ‘French pockets’ in India became increasingly important as anti-British, anti-colonial sentiment gained momentum in India and abroad. Anti-British agitators in India saw French India as territory that was safe from British persecution, a territory in which they could seek refuge from British charges of sedition, theft, murder, libel, and a litany of other crimes levied against anti-colonial revolutionaries. Indian revolutionaries not only sought refuge in French India, but also, prior to the Second World War, fled London for the relative safety of Paris. During this period, French India *and* France were spaces that were at once colonial and anti-colonial, offering refuge from the British Empire and British India for those willing to respect the power and ideology of the French Republic, itself an imperial nation-state.<sup>15</sup>

This chapter examines the tensions between forces of colonialism and anti-colonialism by looking at how colonialists and those who lived under colonial rule defined the specific *national* characteristics of various colonialisms, and how this colonial nationalism was reinforced through the construction of borders. France and England both had massive empires that were threatened by anti-colonial movements and could have benefitted from a united front against them, yet, as I will show, France often undermined British attempts to control their colonies in South Asia. This does not suggest that France was particularly supportive of anti-colonialism; it is well known that the French police, at home and in the colonies, maintained near constant surveillance over colonial subjects, both French and non-French, especially following the start of the First

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<sup>15</sup> On the complex relationship between the image of French India as a site of refuge and anti-colonial activity, see Penny Edwards, “A Strategic Sanctuary: Reading *l’Inde Française* through the Colonial Archive” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 12 (2010).

World War.<sup>16</sup> However, it does suggest that France, as an imperial nation-state, was playing both sides of a singular game: on one side, France promoted the virtues of *Frenchness*, of the rights of man and citizen and the glory of the French Republic, a specific national identity that was based heavily on a centuries old rivalry with England; on the other side, France needed to cast suspicions on all colonized subjects in order to maintain control of the Empire. Because of the geographic proximity of French and English interests in India, these oft-contradictory aims came head to a head in conflicts over control of and within the French *comptoirs*. Colonial subjects, most of whom were uninterested in being either French or British, were drawn onto an imperial chess board and were often expected to choose a side, even though neither the rules nor the stakes of the game were clear to the pieces.

Of course colonial nationalism was not a finite game of chess involving inanimate game pieces -- the people being played with did have an important amount of influence over the game itself. A key element of this chapter will be to show how the colonized utilized European rhetorics of nationalism and the perceived differences between British and French colonialism to further their own anti-colonial efforts. Discussions of French India often highlight the eagerness of Indians in this region to embrace French universalism: both M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru publicly stated their sympathy for the goals of the French Republic and specifically the liberty, fraternity, and equality embodied by the French Revolution. While it is undeniable that there was a substantial amount of rhetoric in India glorifying the ideology of French universalism, the situation

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<sup>16</sup> The major efforts of imperial surveillance occurred in the North African and Middle Eastern colonies, although were certainly not exclusively limited to these areas. See Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control Between the Wars* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

was much more complicated for the people of French India (and for the people just outside of French India) than that of preferring France over England as a colonial power. While the current historiography of French India has made significant contributions to filling in the “gaps in more conventional history,”<sup>17</sup> as Ian H. Magedera wrote in the introduction to a recent special issue of the journal *Interventions*, this work moves beyond issues of national, and transnational, allegiances to explore alternative, non-nation based, ways of envisioning community and belonging in the colonies and beyond.

Borders and boundaries were important markers and tools of control in the colonies, just as they remain important tools for the functionality of post-colonial nation-states. Readjusting, erasing, and drawing new borders was often the first step towards “decolonization”: colonial governments created colonial borders to reflect the attachment to the imperial ruler and the relationships between that ruling country and other imperial powers. Geographic borders separated British India from French India, just as internal borders throughout Pondicherry separated the Europeans from the indigenous population, the Europeans and the métis residing in the *ville blanche* and the local populations in the *ville noir*.<sup>18</sup> The borders between French and British India were uneven, dividing communities and villages along lines drawn by colonial administrators unfamiliar with the inhabitants and their land. Colonial powers, both French and British, used borders and boundaries, both geographic and social, to control goods, people, and land, in the period leading up to decolonization. I will also look at how various non-European populations

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<sup>17</sup> Ian H. Magedera, “Arrested Development: The Shape of ‘French India’ after the Treaties of Paris of 1763 and 1814,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 12 (2010): 332.

<sup>18</sup> I place decolonization in quotes to signify the post-colonial construction of the process of decolonization; when the borders I am referring to were drawn, it was not necessarily a conscious step towards decolonization, but instead an element of the colonial practice of divide and conquer, or population management.

in the region split by French and British interests responded to these attempts at colonial control, paying specific attention to the malleability of colonial subject formation. While the imperial nation-state needed to create borders to exercise power over the land and the population, anti-colonial agents appropriated the same borders for their own uses directed against not only imperial boundaries but national ones as well. Indian anti-colonialists took advantage of longstanding tensions between England and France to evade colonial controls, carving spaces of refuge for themselves and their ideas in both French India and in France.<sup>19</sup> The ease with which “French” and “British” Indians switched their identities and crossed borders, identifying with whichever colonial power afforded them the most benefits, led colonial authorities to tighten borders, erect fences, levy taxes against ‘foreign’ subjects, and begin, in earnest, to require colonial subjects to carry passports (British) and/or *cartes d’identités* (French), all measures that influenced the paths of post-colonial migrations, and have remained in place in the contemporary world. Examining this period of transition, from colonial to post-colonial, reveals the many ways in which contemporary systems of global border security and national identity are rooted in colonial systems of control.

### ***French India/British India: Colonial Affiliations***

When Ernst Renan asked the question in 1882 ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’ his answer included, amongst discussions of race, language, and religion, the importance of

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<sup>19</sup> Revolutionary activity was not confined to France, as Indian revolutionaries used contacts in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the United States, Russia and other countries. However, I will show how important the French Indian connection was to the circulation of Indian revolutionaries during the struggle for independence.

‘historical forgetting.’<sup>20</sup> European nations had been brought together through tyranny and violence, and as Renan stated, “France’s frontiers in 1789 had nothing either natural or necessary about them.”<sup>21</sup> The creation of a feeling of patriotism or national belonging would require the forgetting of violence and conquest against minority groups and the remembering only of ‘common’ elements that brought the nation together, including national defeats as well as victories, unifying instead of dividing. While Renan never explicitly discussed the *overseas* empire, he does recognize the imperial foundation of the nation-state, particularly on the heels of the loss of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany at the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. Understanding that by the late 19th-century the empire was an integral part of constructing modern European nation-states has been an important development in the writing of colonial history. As historian Gary Wilder recently wrote “France was never not an imperial nation-state,” a comment that can just as easily be applied to England.<sup>22</sup> While I do not intend to suggest that every person resident in Europe was an avowed imperialist, it is important to recognize the importance colonial expansion played in forming European identities.<sup>23</sup> As the group of scholars working on the history of French India has argued, the position of France in India as a “subordinate colonizer” was important to constructing colonial identities, in the colonies

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<sup>20</sup> Ernst Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’ (Original 1882) in Geoff Eley Ronald Grigor Suny (eds.), *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 41-55.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005): 3.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch, Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel, eds., *Culture coloniale en France: De la Révolution française à nos jours* (Paris: Broché, 2008).

and in the metropole -- French colonial officials were keen to show their superiority over the British as colonizers, even if they did not have the territory to prove it.<sup>24</sup>

French colonial policy, especially in the century following the end of the Napoleonic years (1817) and the start of the First World War (1914), used the ideology of the French Revolution to argue for the universal benefits of assimilating to French culture and ‘civilization.’<sup>25</sup> Political clubs and associations devoted to *l’Inde française* and the connections between India and France provided a space for members of the intellectual and political elite to forge a relationship with the colonizing nation. Yet, the majority of people who lived in Pondicherry were not members of the political or intellectual elite.<sup>26</sup> While educated Pondicherians had the opportunity to attend the French schools, the *Collège Colonial* and the *lycée*, and participate in the civic life of the colony through becoming a member of the *Société de l’Histoire de l’Inde Française* and by reading and contributing to dual Tamil/French language publications such as *Le Progrès de l’Inde française* (1881), *Pontikseriyen* (1893), *Hindu nesan* (1893), *L’Hindou* (1895), *Djothy* (1929), *Dupleix* (1933), *Le Petit Pondichérien/Putuvei vaci* (1911), *Dessobagari* (1937), and the *Republique française* (1949), most Pondicherians lived in small village communities and were generally unaware of the politics particular to the colonial administration.<sup>27</sup> Whether in French India or British India, the people in these villages

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<sup>24</sup> In her recent work, the historian Kate Marsh uses French writings on India in the 18th and 19th centuries to show how important the loss of India was to creating a particular French colonial identity. See Kate Marsh, *India in the French Imagination Peripheral Voices, 1714-1815* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> The classic work on French assimilation theory is Raymond F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

<sup>26</sup> On French political clubs of the 19th century in India, see, Henri-Louis Castonnet des Fosses, *La Révolution et les clubs dans l’Inde française* (Nantes: Forest et Grimaud, 1885).

<sup>27</sup> These titles represent only a small sample of the over 100 French-Indian periodicals held at the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (BnF). Each of the five *comptoirs* produced a variety of daily

spoke Tamil and celebrated the same holidays, attended the same temples and festivals, and, perhaps one of the most important markers of Hindu identity, practiced the same caste customs that separated these communities in ways that were largely uncontested by the French or the British, both of whom initially believed that it was important not to interfere with local customs.

Issues of caste have dominated discussions of India for centuries and remain central to the current social and political climate of the region. In his important work, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Nicholas Dirks shows how the need to understand the “customs of the natives” drove colonial officials to try to understand caste and how it operated in Indian society.<sup>28</sup> One of the ways in which European interests sought to concretize their understanding was to promote the production of knowledge about the things they did not understand; in the case of caste, this fell on a French missionary, the Abbé Jean-Antoine Dubois. Dubois originally travelled to Pondicherry in the service of the *Mission Etrangères* in 1792, fleeing the French Revolution and the threat of anti-religious persecution. Unlike many of his fellow missionaries, Dubois learned Tamil and Sanskrit and dressed in local clothing. It was his interactions with the indigenous populations and his attempts to convert them that led him to write a book that became the center of imperial knowledge about caste. The book, *Mœurs, institutions et cérémonies des peuples de l’Inde*, was purchased by the East India

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newspapers and monthly journals, some in regional indigenous languages (largely Tamil and Bengali), some in dual or tri-language format, and some exclusively in French.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Company and published in English as the *Description of the Character, Manners, and Customs of the People of India, and of Their Institutions, Religious and Civil* in 1816.<sup>29</sup>

Dubois, as a missionary, travelled well outside French-Indian territory to engage in his work of conversion. In addition to Pondicherry, Dubois worked in Mysore and surrounding areas in the south – although he was a product of French education and society, his work in India, whether amongst French Indians or British Indians, led him to the same conclusion: that it would be impossible to convert any Indian, save for the untouchable or ‘pariah’ caste that rested at the bottom of the hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> According to Dubois, it would be impossible for the Catholics to have any degree of success in India if they could only appeal to the ‘pariahs’ who Dubois saw, in keeping with the morals of Indian society at the time, as dimwitted and incapable of progress or self-care.<sup>31</sup> Dubois observed that Brahmins, the highest caste, had too much power in society that they risked losing if they were to convert to Catholicism; breaking their caste would mean interacting with the ‘pariahs’, a measure almost all caste Indians were unwilling to take. Dubois’ observations about this problem became a common point of discussion throughout French India as colonial administrators in Paris as well as in Pondicherry discussed the

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<sup>29</sup>Jean-Antoine Dubois, *Mœurs, institutions et cérémonies des peuples de l’Inde* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1825). The historian Sylvia Murr has argued that Dubois’ text was based on a text written several decades earlier by another French missionary, Père Coeurdoux. See Sylvia Murr, “Nicolas Desvaulx (1745-1823) véritable auteur de oeuvres, institutions et ceremonies des peuples de l’Inde, de l’abbé Dubois,” *Purusartha* 3 (1977).

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that in this time, and really prior to the 1910s, the distinction between British and French Indians is anachronistic as these terms were not used to distinguish individuals. However, the geographic borders were in place, so that it makes sense to use these terms to refer to the people who associated with one area or the other.

<sup>31</sup> Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 24-25.

implementation of an assimilationist policy in the colonies that would encourage colonial subjects to become French, in language, culture, and eventually, citizenship.<sup>32</sup>

Debates about assimilation in the colonies were important to the policies enacted by the Third Republic. Many French politicians saw universal suffrage in French India as a chance to show how the strength of Republicanism could wipe out inequalities in “degenerate societies” such as those represented by caste hierarchies in India.<sup>33</sup> Universal suffrage in French India had been avoided up to this point as upper caste Indians protested that it would violate caste customs. It was not long before people who were considered ‘pariahs’ recognized the opportunity French assimilation presented to improve their lives. Jacques Weber has suggested that the ‘pariah’ communities were the “most Francophile” of all the French Indians, even though they were not the ones running and participating in French political clubs and speaking French, but because they worked as domestic servants in the houses of Europeans, and felt that they were treated much better by Europeans than by fellow Indians who practiced caste.<sup>34</sup>

The chance to overcome the disadvantages of caste oppression was the first reason that any person in French India chose to renounce their civil status and submit to the French civil code, an option that was available to inhabitants of French India beginning in 1881.<sup>35</sup> This legislation opened the door for those wishing to escape caste hierarchies, as they could renounce their adherence to local laws and customs and instead affiliate with the colonial power, the micro-representative of a nation over a thousand

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<sup>32</sup> Jacques Weber, “Chanemougam, ‘King of French India’: Social and Political Foundations of an Absolute Power under the Third Republic,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 26 (1991).

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Weber, *Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix: la démocratie au pays des castes* (Paris: Denoël, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Animesh Rai, *The Legacy of French Rule in India (1674-1954): An Investigation of a Process of Creolization* (Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2008): 77.

<sup>35</sup> Similar legislation had been introduced to Algerian Jews in 1870, and for Annamites in Indochine in 1881.

miles away. Those who chose to affiliate with France were made to choose a French name, often as an addition to their Tamil name, and were put on a special list of voters, known as *renonçants*.<sup>36</sup> M.D. Moracchini, a one-time French colonial administrator in Karikal and Chandernagore, suggested in 1883 that only pariahs and Catholics would ever choose to renounce their civil status and become French *renonçants*, a statement that echoed the earlier predictions of Dubois.<sup>37</sup> It was commonly believed that for Indians of high caste, the idea of being treated as equals with *parias* was unthinkable and was to be avoided at all costs.<sup>38</sup> This prediction proved largely true, and French administrators eventually allowed both *renonçants* and *non-renonçants* to vote, preserving local caste customs as well as universal suffrage. Despite these efforts, by the turn of the century, the *parias* were still excluded from schools, temples, and courtrooms, out of a fear that they would sully the “noble castes.”<sup>39</sup> Eventually, in 1908, the French administration dealt with this divide by creating separate schools for low-caste French Indians, preserving the social hierarchies assimilation was meant to erase.<sup>40</sup>

Even as caste oppression continued in French India well into the 20th century, the *idea* that those in French held territory were more able to free themselves from the constraints of caste had effectively spread throughout British India. When M.K. Gandhi came to Pondicherry on 17 February 1934, at the behest of the Harijana Seva Sangh of

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Weber, “Chanemougam,” 295.

<sup>37</sup> M.D. Moracchini, *Les Indigènes de l’Inde française et le suffrage universel* (Paris: Blot, 1889).

<sup>38</sup> Weber, “Chanemougam,” 297.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

Pondicherry,<sup>41</sup> he spoke of Pondicherians as being better able to understand the oppression that caste brought, better than those in the rest of India:

The removal of this curse [untouchability] is the primary means that has got to be done to realize the brotherhood of man in the place of suppression and subjection in the name of religion by caste Hindus. You, who have come under the direct French influence, should have no difficulty in understanding what that means. Equality and brotherhood were brought into France several hundred years before people began to realize that there was any such thing as brotherhood of man. The bravest of them fought and bled for that realization. The aspiration for which so many heroic souls fought and bled is an aspiration that is universal treasure...I have therefore every hope that you in Pondicherry, have no untouchability in your midst. And if you have it I hope that you will remove that blot from your mind.<sup>42</sup>

This speech proved to be somewhat confusing to the French-Indian freedom fighters who organized the event, as they were hoping that Gandhi would advocate for their independence in addition to speaking of the plight of harijans. V. Subbiah, one of the leading agitators for independence in French India as well as a member of the Pondicherry chapter of the Harijana Seva Sangh looked on in dismay as the Governor of Pondicherry, Georges Bourret, watched the speech and took pleasure in Gandhi's praise of French history and culture.<sup>43</sup> By endorsing the French ideas of brotherhood and equality, and suggesting that they had been realized in French India, Gandhi seemed to imply that the struggle for freedom from colonial rule was limited to the British Raj, while French India had been the beneficiary of a positive relationship with their

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<sup>41</sup> Weber, *Pondichéry*, 332. The Harijana Seva Sangh was an organization started by Gandhi, initially as the 'All India anti-Untouchability League' in 1930. Gandhi used the word Harijan, meaning 'people of god,' instead of the more commonly used 'pariah,' which is a pejorative word meaning outcaste or outsider.

<sup>42</sup> MK Gandhi, quoted in V. Subbiah, *Saga of Freedom in French India* (Madras: New Century Book House, 1990): 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> Subbiah, 33.

colonizer. The lines between French and British India which had once seemed arbitrary and useless were becoming increasingly important in the lead up to independence.

### *Colonial Borders and Foreign Subjects*

The restoration of Pondicherry to France from England in 1816 came with the stipulation that import and export duties were to be leveled on all goods coming in and out of British territory, making the French territories surrounded by British territory an economic boon. However, it was soon realized that placing a tax on all goods was untenable for the French Indians, and in 1817, there was an exception made for the import and export of rice, on the condition that the French would not export rice by sea to foreign (i.e. non-French) countries or territories. By 1882, the British agreed to abolish customs duties on all articles of merchandise *except* salt, alcohol, salted fish, and opium, although they re-imposed some of these tariffs in 1894.<sup>44</sup> Because of the tight restrictions placed on these isolated French pockets, there were a significant amount of smuggling that took place between British and French India, primarily, according to British records, of “cotton and silk, brass vessels, salted fish, groundnuts, seeds of sorts, jewellery, and kerosene oil.”<sup>45</sup> In an area of less than 115 square miles, six customs stations, or *chaukis*, were established in 1844 to monitor the transfer of goods between the two areas.<sup>46</sup> A 1915 British report on the topic of smuggling on the “Pondicherry Frontier” acknowledges that despite the many customs checkpoints, on land and on the trains, the fact that British and French villages “intermingled” meant it was impossible for

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<sup>44</sup> IOR: L/PS/20/G84 Notebook/ General Information of the Pondicherry Frontier, 1915, 6-8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>46</sup> The six *chaukis* were established at Kandamangalam, Madalapet, Mortandic havadi, Kottakuppam, Tukananbakkam, and Valvudar. IOR: L/PS/20/G84 Notebook/ General Information of the Pondicherry Frontier, 1915, 8.

stationary customs guards to stop the smuggling; the solution presented in this report was to “convert the more or less stationary out-gate staffs into a moving (patrolling) preventive force.”<sup>47</sup> Pondicherry, which in 1912 extended 16 miles north to south and about the same distance east to west, and had a population of about 184,200 thousand people, had a mobile border guard, over six customs stations, and in addition, a customs guard that stopped all trains, for 40 minutes during the day and 50 minutes at night, forced them to exit the train, enter a shed (with a separate inspection area for women) and “register” any items they were taking into Pondicherry or were planned to be taken out.<sup>48</sup>

The report on the Pondicherry Frontier in 1915 never explicitly mentions concerns with the smuggling of seditious materials, revolutionary contraband, or criminal peoples, but many other documents reveal that this was a very serious concern amongst British officials. Seven years prior to the production of this report, in 1908, a parliamentary notice appeared, alerting the Under Secretary of the State of India that “seditious literature habitually reaches India from France,” and “prohibited newspapers and pamphlets are sent to French-Indian settlements, from which they are secretly distributed in British-India.”<sup>49</sup> While this may have been news in London, the authorities in India were well aware of the revolutionary activities gaining strength in Pondicherry. Earlier in 1908, the Tamil poet and anti-colonial agitator C. Subramanya Bharathi had “fled to Pondicherry,” bringing with him his nationalist newspaper *India*, which was printed in Pondicherry and smuggled into British India. The papers, which were sent by train, were often seized by one of the agents at chaukis on their way to Madras, and were

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<sup>47</sup> IOR: L/PS/20/G84 Notebook/ General Information of the Pondicherry Frontier, 1915, 10.

<sup>48</sup> IOR: L/PS/20/G84 Notebook/ General Information of the Pondicherry Frontier, 1915, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Parliamentary Notice, 1 December 1908. IOR: L/PJ/6/907, File 4443.

subsequently destroyed by the Madras police.<sup>50</sup> Various British intelligence documents show that between 1906 and 1914, over two-dozen Indian revolutionaries who were under surveillance by the British travelled to Pondicherry, often making trips between Pondicherry and Paris.<sup>51</sup> As previously mentioned, the famed nationalist Aurobindo Ghose escaped into Pondicherry through Chandernagore in 1910. Despite the presence of what seems to be an unnecessary amount of customs borders, the revolutionary movement could not be contained.

Sri Aurobindo Ghose is arguably the most famed individual to have ever lived in Pondicherry; yet, he was not a French Indian. He was born in Calcutta on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1872. Raised by an Anglophile father, he studied in England, where he lived from the age of 7 until he finished his schooling and returned to India in 1893 at the age of 21.<sup>52</sup> He excelled at his studies in England, mastering French, Greek, and Latin and earned a scholarship to Cambridge. Aurobindo's father planned for him to finish at Cambridge and then take the ICS (Indian Civil Service) exam, and to return to India and join the colonial administration in the highest position allowed for Indians. However, as the ICS exam became imminent, and despite his father's insistence on the superiority of Western culture, Aurobindo became aware that he would never be respected in England, simply because he was an Indian. His biographer Peter Heehs suggests that this realization led him to recognize that his focus on Western philosophy and languages had blinded him to his own culture, a culture that everyone around him in the West associated

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<sup>50</sup> Ramasamy, *History of Pondicherry*, 155.

<sup>51</sup> James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907-1917* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1917). See also Prabha Chopra and P.N. Chopra, eds., *Secret British Intelligence Report: Indian Freedom Fighters Abroad* (New Delhi: Criterion Publications, 1988).

<sup>52</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes: and Other Writings of Historical Interest* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2006).

with him, but that he himself knew nothing about.<sup>53</sup> Heehs argues that this realization was a turning point for Aurobindo, and “his own belief that Asian and particularly Indian culture was superior to anything in Europe grew in tandem with his conviction that India had to throw off the British yoke.”<sup>54</sup> Aurobindo purposefully failed the ICS exam, and returned to India determined to join the struggle for Indian independence.<sup>55</sup>

According to the Viceroy of India in 1910, Lord Minto, Aurobindo Ghose was “the most dangerous man [the British government] have to deal with at present.”<sup>56</sup> In 1908, the Police Commissioner of Bengal accused Aurobindo of instigating a bombing that killed two European women. Although he was eventually acquitted, Aurobindo spent a year in jail awaiting trial at the Alipore prison.<sup>57</sup> Aurobindo was dangerous to the government of India because his nationalist agenda was popular with “the student class,” the group of young, educated Indians that could potentially overthrow the British government.<sup>58</sup> Aurobindo sought refuge in Pondicherry in 1910 amidst rumors that he would be arrested, or deported to a prison colony, for writing and publishing the essay “To My Countrymen” in the journal *Karmayogin* on 25<sup>th</sup> December 1909. While the publisher of *Karmayogin*, Monmohan Ghose, was arrested and sentenced to 6 months in prison for his role in publishing the allegedly seditious essay, British officials were unable to arrest Aurobindo as he had left for Pondicherry as soon as he heard there was a

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<sup>53</sup> Significantly, Aurobindo did not speak any Indian languages until he returned to India in 1893, despite his spending the first five years of his life in India. His father had always insisted on the superiority of English. The most recent (and very controversial) biography of Aurobindo was written by the head archivist of the Aurobindo Ashram Archives. See Peter Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>54</sup> Heehs, *The Lives of Aurobindo*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Heehs, *The Lives of Aurobindo*, 29-35.

<sup>56</sup> Viceroy Lord Minto to Secretary of State Lord Morely, 14 April, 1910.

<sup>57</sup> Sri Aurobindo, *Tales of Prison Life*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1974. Originally published as *Karakahini* in the Bengali journal *Suprabhat* in 1909-1910.

<sup>58</sup> Viceroy Lord Minto to Secretary of State Lord Morely, 14 April, 1910.

warrant for his arrest. A telegram dated Calcutta, August 1910 from the Commissioner of Police in Calcutta to the Secretary of the Government of India noted that Aurobindo was out of their reach in Pondicherry but was “being watched by the Madras Police. Should he attempt to escape by way of Colombo he will be arrested under the Fugitive Offenders Act.”<sup>59</sup> Knowing that they could not arrest him in French India, the British authorities cancelled the warrant by the end of November 1910. Hoping to stem the tide of wanted revolutionaries from “absconding” to French India, C.R. Cleveland of the Home Department, issued a statement claiming that Aurobindo was free to “return to British India without fear of molestation from Government whenever he likes.”<sup>60</sup>

Aurobindo never did return to British India – he spent the rest of his life, until his death in 1950, in Pondicherry, mostly withdrawn from political life. He arrived in April of 1910, and spent several months out of the public eye, in deep spiritual contemplation and study. In November of that year he wrote a letter to the editor of *The Hindu* addressing the question of his whereabouts and his intentions. He wrote,

I shall be obliged if you will allow me to inform every one interested in my whereabouts through your journal that I am and will remain in Pondicherry. I left British India over a month before proceedings were taken against me and, as I had purposely retired here in order to pursue my Yogic sadhana undisturbed by political action or pursuit and had already severed connection with my political work, I did not feel called upon to surrender on the warrant for sedition, as might have been incumbent on me if I had remained in the political field. I have since lived here as a religious recluse, visited only by a few friends, French and Indian, but my whereabouts have been an open secret, long known to the agents of the Government and widely rumoured in Madras as well as perfectly well-known to everyone in Pondicherry. I find myself now compelled, somewhat against my will, to give my presence here a wider publicity. It has suited certain people for an

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<sup>59</sup> Extracts from Government of India, Home Department, Political-A, Proceedings, December 1910, Nos. 14-42, “Prosecution, under section 124-A., Indian Penal Code, of the Editor and Printer of the Karmayogin newspaper.” Documents reproduced at <http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/research/>

<sup>60</sup> C.R. Cleveland, 21-11-1910; Available at <http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/research/>

ulterior object to construct a theory that I am not in Pondicherry, but in British India, and I wish to state emphatically that I have not been in British India since March last and shall not set foot on British territory even for a single moment in the future until I can return publicly.<sup>61</sup>

The lines between British and French India were clear to Aurobindo; in British India, he would be arrested and placed in prison, while in French India he would be left alone to study yoga and live the life of a “religious recluse.” In fact, Aurobindo eventually became Pondicherry’s most famous resident, not for his politics, but for his philosophy of ‘integral yoga’ which spawned a movement and an ashram that today still draws thousands of visitors to Pondicherry every year. Although Aurobindo himself was not French Indian, his spiritual companion and the co-founder of the ashram Aurobindo would become known for, was a Parisian born French woman named Mira Alfassa, who would later be known simply as *la mère*, or the Mother.

Mira came to Pondicherry for the first time in 1914 in the company of her husband, a French colonial administrator named Paul Richard. Paul and Mira quickly entwined themselves with the life of Aurobindo and his yoga. Mira’s brother Matéo was also a colonial administrator, serving at the time as the Lieutenant Governor of French held Middle Congo and Congo.<sup>62</sup> Paul Richard, in his memoir, recalls how he and Mira helped Aurobindo by using their connections with Matéo to “lose” the order of extradition sent by the British authorities to the French.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the usefulness of their political connections, Paul and Mira spent a significant amount of time discussing philosophy and yoga with Aurobindo, eventually creating a journal that was printed in

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<sup>61</sup> Sri Aurobindo, Letter to the Editor of *The Hindu*, November 7, 1910. Reprinted in Sri Aurobindo, *Autobiographical Notes*, 264.

<sup>62</sup> Matéo Alfassa would later serve as the Governor-General of French Congo and French Equatorial Africa.

<sup>63</sup> Michel Paul Richard, *Without Passport: The Life and Work of Paul Richard* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987): 60.

French and English, titled *Arya: A Philosophical Review*.<sup>64</sup> The increasing intensity of the First World War caused the French government to order Paul and Mira to leave India and return to France.<sup>65</sup> Unhappy with their return, Paul requested a transfer to Japan for the remainder of the war. Eventually, in 1920, Mira returned to Pondicherry without Paul to join Aurobindo once again.<sup>66</sup> Aurobindo and Alfassa quickly became spiritual companions, spending their days together in meditation and discussion. By 1926, Aurobindo announced his “retirement” and christened Alfassa “the Mother.”<sup>67</sup> Under the leadership of the Mother, the Ashram grew, attracting devoted followers from Northern India as well as Europe. While Aurobindo was a major figure in the Indian independence movement and thus attracted significant attention, the Mother’s philosophical works were published throughout Europe and North America, in French and English. Bengalis, the ethnic brethren of Aurobindo, as well as French nationals familiar with the work of the Mother, were well represented at the Ashram.<sup>68</sup>

Aurobindo used his European education and connections to secure a place for him in Pondicherry. Nolini Gupta, one of Aurobindo’s devotees, noted that Aurobindo

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<sup>64</sup> The French edition was called the *Revue de la Grande Synthèse*. The journal was published between the years of 1914-1921. The majority of the articles were written by Aurobindo, and were eventually compiled into several volumes that are considered the foundation of Aurobindo’s philosophy, including: *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, and *The Ideal of Humanity*.

<sup>65</sup> Richard, *Without Passport*, 72. They returned to France from India in 1915, and soon thereafter sailed to Japan for the duration of the war.

<sup>66</sup> Although the Mother and her followers never discuss the relationship between Paul and Mira, Paul wrote about their growing estrangement leading up to her permanent move to India, including his fathering a child with another woman. See Richard, *Without Passport*.

<sup>67</sup> Shyam Kumari notes that while there was some grumbling amongst Aurobindo’s followers about the amount of power held by the Mother, Aurobindo continued to reassure them that she was truly the “Divine Mother.” Shyam Kumari, *How they Came to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: Twenty-Nine True Stories of Sadhaks and Devotees* (Bombay: The Mother Publishing House, 1990): 33.

<sup>68</sup> The Frenchman Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire is a good example of the type of Europeans who came to live in the Ashram. Saint-Hilaire became interested in Theosophy and travelled to Japan and Africa before landing in Pondicherry and joining the Ashram in 1926. See Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire, *Itinéraire d’un enfant du siècle: Correspondance de Pavitra avec son père (1918-1954)* (Paris: Buset/Chastel, 2001).

charmed the French police in Pondicherry with his knowledge of French, Latin and Greek. In fact, Gupta suggested, “the French Government had not been against us...they had helped us as far as they could.”<sup>69</sup> Gupta believed that while the French sided with the Indian freedom struggle, they had to take into account their diplomatic relationship with England, and thus collaborated with some amount of surveillance over Aurobindo and his devotees. Writing in 1969, Gupta looked back on the French as the superior civilization to the British. Considering the ‘asylum’ that was unofficially granted to anti-colonial Indians escaping British persecution, Gupta wrote,

We were looked upon as their guests and as political refugees; it was a matter of honour for them to give us their protection. And where it is a question of honour, the French as a race are willing to risk anything: they still fight duels in France on a point of honour. But at the same time, they had their friendship, the *entente cordiale*, with Britain to maintain, and it is this that got them into a dilemma.<sup>70</sup>

This type of glorification of France and of French people was typical of this time and place, particularly by *non*-French Indians: because the identity of the ‘refugee’ was dependent on their position as British exiles in French India, there was a political benefit to ‘siding’ with the French, which in this context, often included ignoring the functions and consequences of French colonialism and focusing on the *idea* of France, which was portrayed in popular discourse as a Republic that espoused fairness, equality, democracy, and freedom, all which are also antithetical to colonial rule.

The seemingly obvious contradiction of an imperial-nation operating as a refuge from colonial oppression can be attributed in part to a particular construction of France as a space of freedom in Indian nationalist discourses. I do not wish to suggest that there is

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<sup>69</sup> Nolini Kanta Gupta. *Reminiscences* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1969): 44-45.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

or ever has been one homogenized idea of France in India, but it is clear that amongst Western educated Indians in the late-19th and into the 20th-century, France was viewed as distinctly suited towards freedom struggles, based most often on the history and, perhaps more importantly, the mythology surrounding the French Revolution. This idea was reinforced with experience, at least in the early 20th-century, as Paris became the headquarters for anti-colonial Indian revolutionaries who found themselves forced to flee London. In 1907, a Bombay born Parsi woman known commonly as Madam (Bhikaji) Cama wrote a letter to the *Indian Sociologist*, an anti-colonial newsletter published out of London by Shyamji Krishna Varma, suggesting that English attempts to shut down presses and limit freedom of speech in India and England meant the revolutionary movement should consider a move to Paris “beyond the reach of the tyrannical English, where we can publish all necessary circulars, etc. in different Indian vernaculars.”<sup>71</sup> The *Indian Sociologist* was a newsletter that was closely watched by British authorities. Shymaji Krishna Varma, much like Aurobindo, has been accused of penning seditious material. Varma was singled out for writing, in the *Indian Sociologist*, that he was “not a British subject.”<sup>72</sup> The English government thus declared he was “an undesirable alien endeavouring to debauch the loyal subjects” of India, and banned the *Indian Sociologist* in India beginning in 1907.<sup>73</sup> That same year, Varma left London for Paris and joined the already growing movement of Indians in Paris as British authorities attempted to

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<sup>71</sup> Bhikaji Cama, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Indian Sociologist: An Organ of Freedom, and of Political, Social, and Religious Reform*, November 1907.

<sup>72</sup> Editorial quoted in Bhikaji Rustom, *Madam Cama: Mother of Indian Revolution* (Calcutta: Manisha, 1975): 14.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

eliminate Indian nationalists on English soil.<sup>74</sup> Before the publication ever moved to France, *The Indian Sociologist* had already published the *Marseillaise*, the French national anthem, in six different Indian languages.<sup>75</sup>

The move of the *Indian Sociologist* to Paris highlighted what many revolutionaries thought to be true about France: that it was a place where they could write what they needed to write, and meet freely with Russian revolutionaries and French socialists, both groups sympathetic to the calls for the violent overthrow of the British espoused by this group of Indians. The Paris Indian Society began in 1905 as a continental branch of the London based Home Rule Society, led by Sirdarsinghiji Rewabhai Rana (S.R. Rana), along with Madam Cama and eventually Shyamji Krishnavarma.<sup>76</sup> The Sûreté Générale in Paris kept a file on this group, in compliance with a request from the British Embassy, although they would not agree to extradite Rana or Krishnavarma, or any of the other British Indian subjects, to London or India.<sup>77</sup> These records do, however, make it clear that French officials were aware that there were Indians (*hindous revolutionaries*) living in Paris, extorting money from wealthy Indians, learning how to assemble bombs, gathering weapons, printing seditious newsletters, and shipping all of these items to Pondicherry.<sup>78</sup> According to one source, there were at least twenty-six Indians who were working for freedom against British rule living in Paris in between 1905 – 1914.<sup>79</sup> A report prepared by the Sûreté Générale in 1909 at the request

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<sup>74</sup> While Varma did move the editorial office of the *Indian Sociologist* to Paris, it continued to be printed in England.

<sup>75</sup> T.R. Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad, 1905-1921* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Ltd., 1979): 38.

<sup>76</sup> Sareen, 38.

<sup>77</sup> Archives Nationales, Paris (AN): F7/12900/Revolotionaires Hindous/ Dossier pour M. le Directeur de la Sûreté Générale.

<sup>78</sup> AN: F7/12900/Revolotionaires Hindous/ Dossier pour M. le Directeur de la Sûreté Générale.

<sup>79</sup> Prabha Chopra & P.N. Chopra, eds., *Secret British Intelligence Report*.

of the British Embassy in Paris reported that while they carried out “discreet surveillances” of Rana and Krishna Varma, their investigations did not yield any results.<sup>80</sup>

Krishna Varma and his compatriots knew they were being watched, and wrote about it regularly in the *Indian Sociologist*. They blamed the British authorities for spreading rumors that the Indians in Paris were planning a “terrorist attack,” replying, “the existence of an Indian conspiracy in Paris is a myth.” Further, Krishnavarma makes it clear that he is *not* a British subject, as he was “born in India an Indian... the natives of which, even according to the Imperial Gazetteer of India are “foreigners in the eye of the law of British India.”<sup>81</sup> This line of argument worked with a French public fascinated with Indian culture as well as with the perceived atrocities of British imperialism. A 1908 interview with Krishnavarma, published in the leftist Parisian newspaper *l'Éclair* begins by stating “It is well known in France what the true situation of India is...”<sup>82</sup> This simple statement, that people in France are aware of “true situation” in India, underlines the support the Indian revolutionaries felt in Paris. Yet, nowhere in the *Indian Sociologist* nor in the writings of Madame Cama or S.R. Rana is there an acknowledgement of the French treatment of their own colonial subjects, let alone the plight of their *Indian* brethren in French India. The revolutionary Indians in Paris had support from French leftist parties as well as the popular press, which helped them avoid political persecution for their anti-colonial views.<sup>83</sup> While there were a few Pondicherians involved in the operation of the revolutionary network established in Paris, the movement remained

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<sup>80</sup> AN: F7/12900/Revolutionnaires Hindous/ Dossier pour M. le Directeur de la Sûreté Générale.

<sup>81</sup> Shyamji Krishnavarma, “A Rejoinder to a Malignant Attack,” *The Indian Sociologist*, February 1909.

<sup>82</sup> G. Berthy, “L’Inde aux Hindous” *L’Éclair*, 28 December 1908.

<sup>83</sup> For more on the interest of the French press in the treatment of Indian by the British, see Kate Marsh, *Fictions of Decolonization: Representations of Indian Decolonization, 1919 – 1962* (Oxford: Peter Berg, 2007).

largely an operation of British Indians, and the revolutionaries remained uncritical of France.

Similarly in French India, Aurobindo and his fellow political refugees from British India were largely secluded from the French-Indian community-at-large. Both the residence Aurobindo initially occupied, as well as the Ashram, are located in the *ville blanche*, or the European part of Pondicherry. Unlike the majority of French Indians who lived in the surrounding villages and in the *ville noir*, or Indian part of the city that is separated from the *ville blanche* by a large sewage canal, Aurobindo and his devotees did not face daily border crossings for work or constant inquiries about their nationality. Even though, as Penny Edwards has noted, the French colonial authorities were spying on the refugees, they allowed them to project an image of Pondicherry as refuge from British India, a colony within a colony.<sup>84</sup> However, this protection did not extend to French Indians who spoke against the French.

While Pondicherry, Chandernagore and the other *comptoirs* appeared to many in British India and abroad to be a place of safety and asylum for Indian revolutionaries, this safety net did not extend to those French Indians who defied the colonial project of the French. Varadarajulu Subbiah (sometimes spelled Soubaya by the French) was born in 1911 in the village of Kottaikuppam, a French territory about 1.5 miles from Pondicherry town.<sup>85</sup> Kottaikuppam was also one of the six original *chaukis* established in 1844 in order to enforce the Land Customs Act, right on one of the borders between the two colonial zones.<sup>86</sup> Subbiah would become one of the most important leaders of the freedom movement in French India – consequently, for the entire time that he was

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<sup>84</sup> Edwards, “A strategic sanctuary.”

<sup>85</sup> Subbiah, x.

<sup>86</sup> IOR: L/PS//G84 Notebook/ General Information of the Pondicherry Frontier (1915), 76.

fighting for the independence of the *comptoirs*, his nationality was questioned by both British and French authorities. As the British Consulate wrote in a report on the political situation in Pondicherry in 1944, “the nationality of Subbiah is often in question, and changes with the political whims of the government, whether he is useful to them or not.”<sup>87</sup> Whether he was actually French or British Indian, Subbiah was fighting the forces of colonialism, represented by the presence of both European powers.

Subbiah was born to parents of “British Indian parentage,” but on French land, making him eligible for French citizenship. Subbiah attended the *Petit Seminaire* and later the *College Calve*, both French schools in Pondicherry, although later the French authorities would accuse him of not being able to speak French.<sup>88</sup> According to his own remembrances, he developed his political consciousness at the college when he organized a strike amongst the students in 1928.<sup>89</sup> After the strike he was “branded as an arch-agitator” and expelled from the school, encouraging the attention of the French police, as well as the local government.<sup>90</sup> Following his foray into student activism, Subbiah went to Madras and became involved with the Self-Respect Movement and eventually the freedom movement in British India. Returning to Pondicherry in 1930, he founded the French India Youth League, while continuing to build connections with anti-colonial agitators in Madras. Subbiah soon allied himself with the Communist Party in Pondicherry, a group that had a growing presence and influence in French India, and

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<sup>87</sup> IOR: Coll 42/30 French India: reports on general situation/L/PS/12/4456 21 Jun 1938-7 Jan 1945, March 1944.

<sup>88</sup> When Subbiah ran for election on French India, the French remarked that he had “no knowledge of French,” which was a requirement to be elected to the *Conseil de la Republique*. IOR: Coll 42/30(1) French India: reports on the general situation / L/PS/12/4457 1 Feb 1946-7 Aug 1947: January 1947. Jacques Weber has written that by the 1920s, when Subbiah was a student at the College Calve, very few *indigenes* were taught French, as English was thought to be a more useful language to learn in India. Weber, *Pondichéry*, 352-353.

<sup>89</sup> Subbiah, 21.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

began to agitate for labor reform in the three major mills in Pondicherry, which led to a series of labor strikes in the 1930s, drawing the attention of French and British imperial forces alike.<sup>91</sup> He was arrested multiple times, in British and in French India, and was jailed for several years in various prisons. In 1946 he was elected to the French Senate as a representative for French India and after independence he served as a member of the Legislative Assembly of Pondicherry.<sup>92</sup>

Subbiah's memoir illuminates the many contradictions he faced as he battled both French and British colonial institutions. The first chapter is devoted to highlighting the importance of Pondicherry for India's independence movement, as "Pondicherry served as a centre for political refugees and also for establishing communication with the Indian revolutionaries who stayed and operated, at that time, from Britain, Germany, and France."<sup>93</sup> He notes that Pondicherry became the refuge for Sri Subramanya Bharathi, "who roused the patriotic and revolutionary sentiments of the people through his writings against British imperialist rule in India", while Sri Aurobindo was "smuggled into Pondicherry through Chandernagore in April 1910," followed a few months later by V.V.S. Iyer, who was wanted in England for his revolutionary activity, and managed to escape arrest by travelling to Pondicherry via France.<sup>94</sup> Yet, despite the importance of Pondicherry for the Indian independence movement, Subbiah himself spent many years hiding from the French authorities in an "underground shelter" in Madras because of his involvement with movements that challenged French rule.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>92</sup> Weber, *Pondichéry*, 360-362.

<sup>93</sup> Subbiah, 11.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 195.

Subbiah represented the Communist Party, and travelled between French and British India to make connections between workers who lived under both jurisdictions. Because of his association with anti-colonial agitators in Madras as well as Pondicherry, the British police followed his movements; because he was agitating the workers of Pondicherry, the French police had him under surveillance, as well. Still, the French officials in Pondicherry issued him a passport in 1937, allowing him to sail, via Colombo and Djibouti, to Marseilles and onward to Paris, carrying letters of introduction from Jawaharlal Nehru.<sup>96</sup> Subbiah spent much of his trip with Louise Morin, a French journalist who he had met in Pondicherry in 1933, who was also close friends with the nationalist leaders Nehru and Subash Chandra Bose. He described her apartment as a space that “Indian friends used to frequent” as it had an “Indian atmosphere with portraits of Indian national leaders” and was decorated with “exhibits of Indian arts and handicrafts.”<sup>97</sup> Subbiah spoke openly about the support he encountered in France, though it was mostly associated with his comrades from the Communist Party and others who sympathized with the anti-British independence movement. He does not mention any specific support shown towards his efforts to subvert French colonial rule.

Neither the French nor the British wanted to claim responsibility for Subbiah: in 1944, he was expelled from Pondicherry as an “undesirable alien,” despite the fact that he was born in Pondicherry, attended French schools, and was involved in local French-Indian politics.<sup>98</sup> The French authorities expelled him because he “was not a French

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<sup>96</sup> There was quite a bit of confusion between the French and the British authorities in India as to who was responsible for Subbiah. Later, the French officials in Paris would state that issuing him a French passport had been a mistake. *Ibid.*, 122-128.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>98</sup> IOR: Coll 42/30 French India: reports on general situation/L/PS/12/4456 21 Jun 1938-7 Jan 1945, May-August 1944.

Indian subject,” and although “his father was a British Indian” and “he was born in Pondicherry” he “omitted to declare for French-Indian nationality on attaining 21 years of age.”<sup>99</sup> The fact that he was granted a French passport in 1937 and that he had all along been allowed to vote as a French Indian was, in 1944 “declared now to have been allowed under a misconception of the true legal position.”<sup>100</sup> French records make it clear that questioning Subbiah’s nationality was simply a trick used to encourage his followers to question his legitimacy, although eventually, this backfired, as a 1947 report from the French-Indian government stated that his being hunted out of French India had made him a martyr, “une victime de l’imperialisme française,” (a victim of French imperialism) which undermined French efforts to portray their colonial rule in a positive light in comparison to the British.<sup>101</sup>

The arguments between British and French authorities on the nationality of Subbiah continued into the 1940s.<sup>102</sup> While Subbiah was a major figure who had support locally and abroad, there were many other people who straddled the borders between French and British India. The division between the political refugees from British India and the French Indians who were forced to hide in British territory to escape prosecution from the French further defined the differences between French and British India. Specifying the particular characteristics of national identity is important to the construction of nationalism: in order for a French national to distinguish themselves from a British national, they looked to certain key cultural traits and geographic boundaries. Of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> CAOM: Inde/H/23/ Cabinet du commissaire de la république/ “Évolution de la situation politique dans l’Inde Française,” 27.

<sup>102</sup> IOR: Coll 42/30(1) French India: reports on the general situation /L/PS/12/4457, *1 Feb 1946-7 Aug 1947*: February 1947.

course, in the twenty-first century, we would now look also to an individual's passport for proof of national belonging, an act that will, coupled with certain widely held beliefs about race, ethnicity, religion, and language, pinpoint a person as an immigrant to or a 'native' of the state that issued the passport. For the residents as well as the administrators of French India, and the surrounding areas of British control, the lines that separated one nationality from the other were rarely clear, although the question of who was a French Indian and who was a "foreigner" became increasingly important.

### **Passports and Fences: Tracking Subjects and Citizens**

The modern system of passport control, which has roots in the 19th-century, began to be enforced in earnest at the start of the First World War.<sup>103</sup> By November of 1915, all British subjects leaving the UK were required to carry a passport. A year later, in 1916, the Secretary of State for India "suggested that the Government of India provide a passport for all European British subjects, Indian British subjects and subjects of native states setting out for British dominions and colonies," a suggestion that was codified with the Indian Passport Act of 1920.<sup>104</sup> Throughout the decades preceding the implementation of a passport system for British subjects in India, the government of India had opposed passport regulations for Indian laborers, thousands of whom regularly travelled to work in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Malaya, Australia, and the British colonies in Africa.<sup>105</sup> As

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<sup>103</sup> John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: surveillance, citizenship and the state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Torpey starts his study with the question of the passport in the French Revolution, making the invention of the passport a question of national identity and movement between sovereign nation-states.

<sup>104</sup> Radhika Singha, "A 'proper passport' for the colony: border crossing in British India, 1882-1920," *Yale Agrarian Studies Colloquium Papers* (2006): 2.  
<http://www.yale.edu/agrarianstudies/colloqpapers/16passportill.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> On Indian labor migration to Canada and the use of passports, see Radhika Viyas Mongia, "Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport" *Public Culture* 11 (2003).

Radhika Singha has shown, colonial authorities had to weigh their desires to control the movement of ‘undesirable’ individuals against the need to keep the borders within India, and within the empire, porous, to accommodate the needs for labor on plantations and in mines, most of which required many poor workers to cross borders regularly.<sup>106</sup> For this reason, the Indian Passport Act of 1920 deals *only* with immigration into India, not emigration from India. The main purpose of the law was to stop foreign revolutionaries, and specifically “Bolsheviks,” from spreading anti-colonial material and ideas in India.<sup>107</sup> While the government discussed how they could prohibit “foreign revolutionaries” from entering India, the real problem was that the anti-colonial revolutionaries were largely *Indian*, and therefore could not be barred from living on Indian land under the existing laws. As I have shown, when threatened with prosecution for promoting seditious ideas and materials, Indians were able to seek refuge on French-Indian land, and in various European countries, again limiting the powers of the British to control the anti-colonial movement.

The discontinuous borders that marked the areas of French rule in India were initially created in the 18th-century to prevent any challenge to British power. This tactic of indirect rule, of dividing neighbors into distinct and separate communities based on colonial affiliations, was used throughout British territories to discourage the formation of resistance to colonial domination. In 1938, one year prior to the building of the fences in Pondicherry and Karikal that would separate British and French India, Jewish subcontractors were hired to erect a barbed-wire fence on the Palestine-Transjordan border in British mandate Palestine. Known as the “Tegart wire,” after

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<sup>106</sup> Singha, “A Proper Passport.”

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Charles Tegart, a British officer who built his career in India before working in Palestine, the fence arbitrarily cut across Arab farmland and was violently contested by the local populations who recognized it was built to prevent the growth of Pan-Arabism.<sup>108</sup> Tegart had been instrumental in discussions about the need to track internal enemies of the empire in French India, particularly in Chandernagore, throughout the 1920s.<sup>109</sup> Like in Pondicherry, the fence in Palestine was accompanied by additional customs checkpoints and long debates about requiring people who crossed the fence to carry identity cards.<sup>110</sup> That the two fences, in India and in Palestine, served the same purpose of control, Reginald Schomberg wrote in 1939 “ ‘Tegart’s Line’ in Palestine is a pale simulacrum of the barbed wire entanglement around both these French dependencies.”<sup>111</sup>

The French government in India attempted to stop the building of the fences in Pondicherry and Karikal by proposing a poll tax on non-French subjects and citizens who lived in the *comptoirs*. On November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1936, the Government of the French Settlements in India published a decree that called for the taxing of “foreigners” in French India.<sup>112</sup> The law, which was at the time still subject to the approval of Paris, would require non-French residents, those who were not « les officiers, fonctionnaires, employés et agents civils et militaires des services généraux et locaux, des municipalités et établissements publics, ainsi que leur famille » or « les citoyens, sujets et protégés français » to pay Rs. 20 a person a year to live in French India, or even to travel to and

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<sup>108</sup> Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, 249.

<sup>109</sup> IOR/L/PJ/12/6, File 2315/18 *Dec 1924-Jan 1936*/ Relations between French and British local authorities in Chandernagore and Pondicherry: revolutionary activities.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, 249.

<sup>111</sup> IOR: Coll 42/30 French India: reports on general situation, /L/PS/12/4456 *21 Jun 1938-7 Jan 1945*, August 1939.

<sup>112</sup> “Admission des Français et des étrangers dans les établissements français de l’Inde,” *Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 22 November 1936.

from the French-Indian territories.<sup>113</sup> The passing of the poll tax would not only tax the many non-French Indians who worked in Pondicherry but would also require all people who crossed the borders between French and British India to carry some form of identification, which could, according to the proposed law, be in the form of a « livret de solde, titre de voyage, carte d'identité » or foreign issued passport. After almost two years of discussion, the tax, as well as the regulations stipulating proof of identity, were announced on the streets of Pondicherry in early November, 1938 “by the beat of a drum” accompanied by a call that all “British subjects must register at the police station by 25<sup>TH</sup> November 1938.”<sup>114</sup> This caused some amount of chaos and confusion amongst the people of Pondicherry, as many of the 300,000 residents had never had occasion to declare their nationality one way or the other. As the British Consulate reported after the public announcement in November 1938, “amongst the labouring class it will be difficult to prove nationality as many do not themselves know if they are French or British subjects.”<sup>115</sup>

The British Consulate immediately protested the law, arguing that “to enforce [the poll tax] will be extraordinarily difficult, and must lead to endless disputes and irregularities. The nationalities are hopelessly mixed up, and many persons do not know, and cannot prove, whether they are French or British subjects.”<sup>116</sup> British authorities saw the law as “discriminatory” towards “British subjects,” and acknowledged that it was a

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<sup>113</sup> « Admission des Français et des étrangers. »

<sup>114</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/4454 Coll 42/28 French India: admission of French subjects and foreigners; discrimination against British subjects; Poll Tax/ Letter from Reginald Schomberg to the Under Secretary of Government of India, External Affairs, 21 November 1938.

<sup>115</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/4454 Coll 42/28 French India: admission of French subjects and foreigners; discrimination against British subjects; Poll Tax/ Letter from Reginald Schomberg to the Under Secretary of Government of India, External Affairs, 14 November 1938.

<sup>116</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/4454 Coll 42/28 French India: admission of French subjects and foreigners; discrimination against British subjects; Poll Tax/ Letter from Reginald Schomberg to the Under Secretary of the Government of India, External Affairs, 19 April 1937.

retaliatory measure in response to the increase in British customs patrols. The British consul Schomberg estimated that 99 per cent of “foreigners” in Pondicherry were British Indians, and that British Indians made up 30 per cent of the resident population.<sup>117</sup> As British opposition to the law moved up the chain of command, the focus of the protest towards the French law narrowed to argue that the law would primarily negatively affect the “labouring classes,” the group of people that the Government of India believed needed the greatest freedom of mobility. Without the free movement of indigenous labor, the colonial economy would cease to be profitable. A letter dated the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1938 from the Government of Madras to the Secretary General of External Affairs for the Government of India notes,

the Government of Madras are of the opinion that even this seemingly light tax will be a great hardship to the labouring classes. They would stress again the importance of recognising that the French territories in India are artificial political divisions imposed on a homogenous population and that the movement of British Indians into French India bears no resemblance [sic] to the immigrations of foreigners into France. A tax or system of registration which might well be applied in the latter case is wholly out of place in the circumstances pertaining to French India, and must be regarded as an unfriendly discriminatory act.<sup>118</sup>

The Government of Madras later added that “the idea of “foreigners” is inapplicable in the case of Pondicherry and other small French areas situated in the Madras Presidency.”<sup>119</sup> While the British government in India was intent on increasing the number of *chaukis* and collecting customs taxes from travelers from French India, they

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<sup>117</sup> IOR: Coll 42/30 French India: reports on general situation/L/PS/12/4456, 21 Jun 1938-7 Jan 1945: January 1939.

<sup>118</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/4454 Coll 42/28 French India: admission of French subjects and foreigners; discrimination against British subjects; Poll Tax/ Letter from Boag, Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras to the Government of India External Affairs, 21 Dec 1938.

<sup>119</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/4454 Coll 42/28 French India: admission of French subjects and foreigners; discrimination against British subjects; Poll Tax/ Letter from Boag, Chief Secretary to the Government of Madras to the Government of India External Affairs, 19 January 1939.

were appalled at the idea that an Indian would be asked to identify as either French or British. However, for many people in French India who had cultivated French identities for generations, distinguishing between French and British Indian meant the difference between being a subject of the British Empire or a citizen of the French Republic.

In response to the protests of the British government, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that French India was primarily for French citizens, including French Indians, and British Indians were to be considered aliens on French soil. They would, however, be willing to negotiate if the British would consider removing the “British customs cordon to the outer limits of Pondicherry.”<sup>120</sup> The British government responded that this would not be possible, “since such a removal would involve renunciation by them of the right to subject all the inhabitants of the intervening British Indian territory to the taxation imposed by the British Indian customs tariff, and would result in considerable loss of revenue and capital.”<sup>121</sup> Discussions between France and England about the poll tax carried on into August 1939, when an agreement was finally reached that required British *and* French Indians to be able to produce a passport or an identity card on demand in either of the territories. Procuring these cards/passports would initially cost Rs. 2 per person, and would take the place of the proposed poll tax.<sup>122</sup> While the issue of one group being subjected to more taxes than the other was resolved by this agreement, the issue of who constituted a “foreigner” in British or French India only escalated with the imposition of a passport system that forced individuals to identify with

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<sup>120</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/4454 Coll 42/28 French India: admission of French subjects and foreigners; discrimination against British subjects; Poll Tax/ Letter from the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères to the British Embassy in Paris, 1938.

<sup>121</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/4454 Coll 42/28 French India: admission of French subjects and foreigners; discrimination against British subjects; Poll Tax/ Memo responding to letter from the MAE, 1938.

<sup>122</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/4454 Coll 42/28 French India: admission of French subjects and foreigners; discrimination against British subjects; Poll Tax; Memo from C.A.G. Savidge, Secretary to the Government of India, External Affairs, 19 August 1939.

one colonial power or the other, an issue that became increasingly important as the move towards an independent India intensified.

The building of the fences between areas of French and British India in 1939 can be viewed as the physical results of a proxy war between French and British interests. While both France and England acknowledged the lack of cultural distinction between the *Indians* in the two areas, they insisted on marking their national territories, a project that began with claiming land and by this period, needed to claim people, as well. The French-Indian population in Pondicherry responded to the building of the fence with outrage. The newspaper *Dessobagari* ran a series of editorials decrying British customs officials for creating and enforcing customs fences, and for making it so difficult for both people and goods to cross these borders. While French subjects were allowed to carry goods from one French area to another, the British customs agents often doubted their “birth certificates,” the papers that are meant to guarantee their rights as French Indians. The author writes that the British customs agents “ask how they could believe that the holder of the certificate is the same genuine person” and ask if their name is the “one on their head or on their shirt.”<sup>123</sup> Without the benefits of French subjecthood, which in this context amounted to being able to carry goods such as silk, alcohol, and fruit across borders without paying taxes, the author concludes “what difference is there between the British Indians who live like slaves under a foreign Government and us who live under a honourable Republic?”<sup>124</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, there was a legal distinction between a French and a British Indian that was enforced through the issuance of identity cards and passports,

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<sup>123</sup> *Dessobagari*, 11 February 1939.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

although these forms of identity were often flexible and could be changed, by both the individual and by the government. While the definitions of who belonged to which group was often unclear, particularly amongst the lower classes who often lived in one territory and worked in another, the need to choose a nationality became imperative as it became clear that while British India would achieve independence, the future of French India was unclear. The creation of more borders and fences and the growing enforcement of these borders, initially meant to control the movement of goods between French and British territory in India, had turned neighbors into strangers as India neared independence. While figures like Shyamji Krishnavarma, Aurobindo Ghose, and V. Subbiah attempted to unite all *Indians* in the struggle against colonial oppression, revolutionaries depended on the territorial borders of European powers to provide them a refuge. The designation of British Indians as “foreigners” in French India as well as the reverse set the stage for the crisis of belonging that would direct the relationships formed over the next two decades in this region.

### Chapter 3

#### Untangling the Colonial Knot: Nation, Family, and Identity in French India, (1947-1954)

« La population de l'Inde française, étant composée de libres citoyens et citoyennes, reste maîtresse de son avenir. »<sup>1</sup>

“There is only a tiny minority of electors who actually vote; the greater part of them prefer to keep away from elections either from indifference, fear or ignorance.”<sup>2</sup>

On the afternoon of 21 February 1953, Sri Raphael Ramanayya Dadala, once an officer of the French India gendarmerie, led a group of people to the border village of Suramangalam, between French India and India, to participate in a rally denouncing French imperialism. According to French-Indian police reports, Dadala and his men (who numbered somewhere around 15) rode their bullock cart along the border shouting slogans such as “A bas l'impérialisme français!”, “A bas le gouvernement français!”, and “les chiens de français doivent quitter l'Inde française sous peu!”<sup>3</sup> (Down with the French imperialism! Down with the French government! The French dogs must leave French India without delay!) They called for French-Indian nationals to come and listen to their program that, according to the gendarmerie, consisted entirely of anti-French propaganda. During the course of the afternoon, two notable events took place: first, the French-Indian police arrested a man named Thulasignam, who was wanted by the

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<sup>1</sup> Centre Archives d'Outre-Mer (CAOM), Aix-en-Provence, France : Inde/H/23/Rapports des fonctionnaires, “Étude sur les possessions Français dans l'Inde,” (1947): 13.

<sup>2</sup> Indian nationalist pamphlet, *French Pockets in India*, Madras: Free India Publications, n.d. (1953?): 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Archives, La Courneuve, France (MAE): Asie Oceanie/1944-1955/Inde française/ Maintien de l'ordre incidents policiers/72 : Report from Chef Appavou, Commandant la Brigade de Gendarmerie Auxiliaire Indienne to the Capitaine Commandant la Section de Gendarmerie Auxiliaire Indienne, 21 February 1953.

French-Indian government for the murder of a Municipal Counselor the previous June.<sup>4</sup> After he was apprehended the gendarmes put him into a police car and sent him to Pondicherry. People began to scatter and run through the streets and a riot soon followed. During the course of this melee, a French-Indian police officer named Ganése, a 39-year-old father of three, was shot.<sup>5</sup> He died on the way to the hospital in Pondicherry.

Two days later, on 23 February 1953, the national newspaper *The Hindu* ran an article with the headline “Clash on French India Border.”<sup>6</sup> According to the report, the French Police had entered Indian territory to “kidnap” a refugee from French India, one Thulasignam, who was Secretary of the Merger Volunteer’s Dal.<sup>7</sup> “Some pro-merger workers” went “to the rescue of Thulasignam,” the report continued, which “resulted in the death of a French constable.” The article gives no details of the dead officer, but continues on to discuss the injustice in “kidnapping” Thulasignam. The author concludes by stating that the people present at the time of the violent border incident held a meeting following the events and “stressed the need for the merger of the French settlements in the Indian Union.”<sup>8</sup> The death of the French police officer was blamed on the French – one could deduce from this report that the French were responsible for the death of this French-Indian police officer simply because they were in India, in a location where they did not belong – more incidents such as these could be expected if the French continued to govern their colonies in India. Many French-Indian refugees, the article continues, had

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<sup>4</sup> Details of Thulasignam’s crimes were detailed in police report. The French spell his name Tolassingame. See MAE: Asie Oceanie/1944-1955/Inde française/ Maintien de l’ordre incidents policiers/72: Report of Capitan Lagisquet, Commandant of the G.A.I., 24 February 1953.

<sup>5</sup> MAE: Asie Oceanie/1944-1955/Inde française/ Maintien de l’ordre incidents policiers/72 : Report from R.K. Tandon, Consul General of India in Pondicherry to the Commissioner of the Republic for the French Establishments in India, 26 February 1953.

<sup>6</sup> “Clash on French India Border,” *The Hindu*, 23 February 1953.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

filed complaints with the Government of India in response to the incident, hoping to cause the release of Thulasignam and push the merger of French India into India.

The “Suramangalam incident” reignited an intense debate between the Government of India and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the nature of the borders between the two territories, the rights of the people that lived within and outside of these borders, and the future of the relationship between India and France, issues that ranged from local concerns to international relations. The Government of India continued to insist French forces on Indian land had kidnapped Thulasignam, thus violating the political asylum that had been granted him by the Government of India.<sup>9</sup> Yet, French police reports contain testimonies from many witnesses who stated that Thulasignam had been arrested on French soil.<sup>10</sup> This lawful arrest, according to French sources, was followed by the murder of the gendarme Ganése on French land.<sup>11</sup>

Arguments about the location of events and activities deemed to be illegal by one government or the other were plentiful in this time period in French India and the surrounding areas. The impossibility of strictly adhering to the chaotic and often unmarked borders that separated French India and India caused a great deal of tension between the two state powers, and subsequently, between the people that lived within the borders of the state. While the French officials insisted the arrest of Thulasignam was entirely legal, they also admitted that it was impossible for the police, both Indian and French-Indian, to avoid crossing the borders that divided the village of Suramangalam.

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<sup>9</sup> MAE: Asie Oceanie/1944-1955/Inde française/ Maintien de l'ordre incidents policiers/72 : Report from R.K. Tandon, Consul General of India in Pondicherry to P. Kresser, Commissioner of the Republic for the French Establishments in India, 26 February 1953.

<sup>10</sup> MAE: Asie Oceanie/1944-1955/Inde française/ Maintien de l'ordre incidents policiers/72 : Report of Capitan Lagisquet, Commandant of the G.A.I., 24 February 1953.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Following this particular incident, the Commissioner of the Republic for French India, P. Kresser wrote a letter to the Government of India that read,

When you know the layout, and we know that the borders in the village of Suramangalem are constituted by the main street, and theoretically by an imaginary line situated exactly in the middle of the road, one is forced to admit that there could be, that day like any other, numerous border crossings on the part of your police as well as ours.<sup>12</sup>

More important than whether Thulasignam was captured in French or Indian territory, Kresser continued, was the fact that the Indian Government had granted asylum to “*des criminels et des repris de justice*” (criminals and fugitives from justice) in the first place.<sup>13</sup> According to Kresser, there had been 92 border incidents, including gunfire and beatings, instigated by Dadala and his gang as well as the Indian police in the past year. He called for the Indian police to help with the extradition of those responsible for the murder of Ganése, for the sake of the already fragile friendship between France and India.<sup>14</sup>

Invoking the notion of friendship had become a common trope for the maintenance of the diplomatic relationship between France and India. As we saw in the previous chapter, during the Indian struggle for independence from the British Empire, the French-Indian colonies became an important space of refuge for Indian freedom fighters. The “friendship” formed between the Indian Congress Party and the French

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<sup>12</sup> “Quand on connaît la disposition des lieux, et qu’on sait que les frontières dans le village de Suramangalem est constituée par la rue principale et théoriquement par une ligne imaginaire située au milieu exact de la chaussée, on est bien obligé d’admettre qu’il y a pu y avoir ce jour-là comme les autres de nombreux passages de frontière de la part de votre police comme de la nôtre.” MAE: Asie Oceanie/1944-1955/Inde française/ Maintien de l’ordre incidents policiers/72 : Letter from P. Kresser to R.K. Tandon, 6 March 1953. The title of Commissioner of the Republic for French India replaced the title of Governor of French India in 1947.

<sup>13</sup> MAE: Asie Oceanie/1944-1955/Inde française/ Maintien de l’ordre incidents policiers/72 : Response from the Commissaire de la République Kasser to R.K. Tandon, the Consul General of India in Pondicherry, 6 March 1953.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

colonial institutions (Ministry of the Colonies, local government in Pondicherry) during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not forgotten by the French state in Paris (particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), who hoped to use this friendship to continue their positive presence in India. However, by the time Thulasignam had been arrested in 1953, it had been almost seven years since India had been free from British rule, and the national Indian government was running out of patience for the continued colonial presence of the French in India. In the previous chapter I argued that the borders erected by British and French imperial forces had gradually turned neighbors into strangers – in this chapter, I will show how the period following the independence of India transformed the same people into enemies. While the national governments discussed publicly the need for the friendship between nations, the forces of state power, including the maintenance of borders and enforcement of national (ethnic and race based) identities, tore apart villages, communities, and other groupings on the local level. For example, Dadala, Thulasingam, and Ganése were all “French-Indians” – perhaps more importantly in the anti-imperial context of post-1947 India, they were all non-European (non-white) French-Indians.<sup>15</sup> Dadala and Ganése had both been, at one time, officers in the gendarmerie. Thulasingam and Dadala had both ostensibly chosen to abandon the French-Indian political community to fight for the integration of French India into India.<sup>16</sup> Ganése, on the other hand, died in the line of duty, obeying the commands of his French superiors. Although we do not know if Ganése had been eager to sacrifice his life

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<sup>15</sup> The French-Indian gendarmes were almost all ethnic Indians, i.e. not European. According to Indian government figures, there were 672 police officers of various ranks in all 5 *comptoirs* in 1948. Of this number, 20 were identified as European. Dr. N.V. Rajkumar, *The Problem of French India* (Delhi: All India Congress Committee, 1952): 19.

<sup>16</sup> I say “political community” here to differentiate between these individuals’ desire to merge with India and their self-identification as French-Indians. Dadala identified as French-Indian, even after French India ceased to exist in a legal-geographic reality. He continued to speak French and admire French culture, despite his long struggle against the French colonial state.

for French India, the circumstances of his death transformed him into a true French patriot. The actions of these three men exemplify, at the very least, the potential for violence that lies in the power of the discourse of belonging to the singular community of the nation, and the complications of state borders that, in this case, divided people and families considered to be members of the same (Indian) nation.

The constructed nature of the often-intimate relationship between *nation and state* came into sharp focus throughout the period of decolonization, leading to a number of questions about the relationship between *place and nationality*. Common understandings of what makes a “nation” suggest that nations are socio-cultural groups that have common identity markers, such as common language, religion, history, and cultural practices. Alternately, a “state” is a legal entity that has fixed borders and a system of government that provides laws and governance within these borders. While nations often have a strong tie to certain geographic areas, including, primarily, the ownerships of land for agricultural and cultural (religious structures, schools) uses, it is possible, and not entirely uncommon, for a nation to be *stateless*, while the state must always be on some level geographically static. One of the primary goals of this chapter, as well as the two remaining chapters, is to show how the period of decolonization forced numerous populations to rethink and reconstruct their personal and collective identities, as the end of formal empire ignited a movement to erase colonial borders, cultures, and institutions created on both international and local levels during the colonial era.

Very few people in French India made any claim to support French Imperialism, yet, not everyone was eager to immediately merge French India into India. As the decolonization of British India became inevitable, various factions of the populations in

French India began to ask questions, such as, did residence within the juridical borders of French India transform individuals, families, and various groups *into* French-Indians? Was colonization under the British an essential factor of a common *Indian* identity? If yes, could French-Indians understand what it meant to be an Indian? Who, if anyone, could answer such questions? Initially, the decision was placed before the people who lived in French India, “The population of French India, composed of free citizens, remain masters of their future,” proclaimed a report written by Tézenas du Montcel, the French Inspector-General of the Colonies, in 1947.<sup>17</sup> Following the departure of the British soon thereafter, the national governments in Paris and Delhi came to an agreement on 8 June 1948 calling for the “future status of the French settlements” to be determined by “a free and fair referendum.”<sup>18</sup> However, save for Chandernagore, the small French enclave in the suburbs of Calcutta, which voted to join India in 1949, the referendum was never held in the remaining *comptoirs* – the people of French India were never allowed to vote, due to the perceived atmosphere of political bias and violence throughout French India. The final movement of transferring the French colonies to India, a process that began in 1954 but was not completed until 1962, was an act of diplomacy, not plebiscite, intended to “retain Nehru regime’s friendship” with the French state.<sup>19</sup>

Friendship and family became the key terms utilized in discourse about the situation of French India, on both the national level in both France and India and locally in French India. The language and imagery of families and friendship were used to encourage a peaceful and amicable debate between the French and the Indian states -

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<sup>17</sup> CAOM: Inde/H/23/Rapports des fonctionnaires, “Étude sur les possessions Français dans l’Inde,” (1947): 13.

<sup>18</sup> “Déclaration du Gouvernement du 8 juin 1948,” reprinted in Neogy, Appendix II (283-284).

<sup>19</sup> “France is Ending Empire in India by Yielding Two Last Enclaves,” *New York Times*, 4 August 1954, 3.

diplomats, politicians, and government agents regularly invoked these words to describe the situation in French India. The French colonial government used the language of family, specifically fraternity, to promote the unity of the French Union. Ideally, fraternity, or brotherhood, would gather all the peoples of the French Republic, in the colonies and in France herself, into a family united by common ideas of democracy, freedom, and liberty, united by the personification of France, Marianne. Similarly, Indian nationalism relied on the imagery of Mother India (Bharat Mata) to encourage the many different linguistic, ethnic, and religious communities of India to envision themselves as members of the same nation. Both nation-states engaged in similar gendered language and imagery of needy nationalist mothers and brave citizen brothers, which effected different groups and individuals in different ways. The two governments presented the referendum as a legitimate choice to be made by the people of French India, yet the people were never allowed to vote. Using the language of family, the state as parent never allowed the children to vote, despite the continued insistence that the future lay in their hands.

Outwardly, India claimed that the vote would never take place as it was impossible to create an environment free of political violence in French India. As France continued to insist on the necessity of the referendum, the violence in and around French India continued undisturbed. Despite the amicable discourse of family and friendship, the spirit of friendship was constantly undermined by the dark underworld of the “goonda,” a word of Hindi origin used to describe men who made themselves available for hire to

various, often political, interest groups.<sup>20</sup> The discourse of the “goonda” and of “goondalism” was a form of violence employed by the state in order to discipline the citizens and subjects of the state. Violence is often associated with the process of colonization, the forced take-over of land and the subjugation of populations under an imperial power. Violence, however, is not only the primary means of imperialists and colonizers but also of state-makers. The referendum on the status of French rule in India was a threat to the hegemony of both the French and the Indian states. If the people of French India voted to remain French, the Indian state would be confronted with a population considered to racially and ethnically Indian who chose to be French, upsetting definitions of what it meant to be an Indian. If the people voted to merge with India, the French Empire/Union would be weakened and possibly destroyed. While the Indian state was an anti-colonial state, born out of struggles for independence, both France and India employed violence - symbolic and physical - on the populations of French India to maintain the power of the state and perpetuate the ideology that the nation and the state depended on one another for power and functionality.

In the final pages of his landmark study *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee concludes “The modern state, embedded as it is within the universal narrative of capital, cannot recognize within its jurisdiction any form of community except the single, determinate, demographically enumerable form of the nation. It must therefore subjugate, if necessary by the use of state violence, all such aspirations of community

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<sup>20</sup> The construction of the *goonda* as the opposite of the citizen will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. In the meantime, it is important to note that the term refers to the men involved in semi-organized crime.

identity.”<sup>21</sup> This chapter will flesh out Chatterjee’s argument with greater nuance and complexity by examining the many ways that both the French and Indian states subjugated non-nation based groups and identity formations and in doing so will shed light on these groups and their struggles to survive the era of decolonization. Chatterjee, it should be noted, was speaking almost exclusively of the experience in British India and the post-colonial relationship between British and Indian culture, politics, and society. Examining French India, which had occupied an intermediary position between the British Raj and the Indian nationalists until the time of independence, allows us to complicate the normative story of Indian independence and decolonization, a narrative that has often overlooked the many “minority” populations that were expected to assimilate to the cultural norms of the modern Indian nation-state.

Before we can analyze the effects of decolonization on the people, institutions, and geography of French India, we need to identify the numerous groups that comprised, and often challenged, what was commonly thought of as the French-Indian community. How, and when, did these various groups form and what factors contributed to the stabilization of their group definitions for people who were subscribing to those group definitions, if they were indeed stable at all? Conversely, what factors were destabilizing their subscriptions to particular group definitions? What issues did they face as the prospect of decolonization loomed before them? How did constructions of French and Indian nationalisms, as separate ideologies, affect the discourse and imagery of these groups? Through an analysis of four (sometimes overlapping) groups: the Communist Party of French India, the Francophone Indian community in French India, the Sri

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<sup>21</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993): 238.

Aurobindo Ashram, and the shadowy ‘population’ labeled as goondas, I will argue that the language and imagery of family, kinship, and friendship was used by the French and the Indian states in an effort (whether intentional or not) to convince and coerce those in French India that they belonged to their respective nations; Indian nationalists worked to remind the people of French India that greater India was their real family – that they were all brothers and sisters living under the guidance of Mother India. However the boundaries of these families were fuzzy, moving, and often ill defined. By examining the period in-between the emergence of independent India in 1947 and the transfer of power of the *comptoirs* from France to India in 1954, we will see that while both India and France espoused a message of universalism and equality in belonging to the nation-state, the period of decolonization strengthened the ties between race and nation, as nationalist interests attempted to untie the “knot” of cultures, families, and groups that formed over several centuries of colonialism.

**Unraveling the Colonial Family: Independent India and the Question of the French**  
 “The Indian Constituent Assembly has proclaimed in their “Charter of Freedom” that Independent and Sovereign India will never tolerate foreign sovereignty on their territory.”<sup>22</sup>

On 15 March 1946, the newly appointed British Prime Minister Clement Attlee addressed the House of Commons about the coming independence and decolonization of India. A month previously, Attlee had announced that in the coming year, India would be granted full independence from the British Empire. On this day in March, Attlee spoke of the importance of the right of India to determine her future, while also congratulating his

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<sup>22</sup> « L’Assemblée Constituante Indienne a proclamé dans sa “Charter of Freedom” que l’Inde Indépendante et Souveraine ne tolérerait jamais une souveraineté étrangère sur son territoire. » CAOM: Inde/H/23/Rapports des fonctionnaires, Tézenas du Montcel, “Étude sur les possessions Français dans l’Inde,” (1947) : 4.

fellow country-men for their work in India, as it was, after all, the British who gave to India a “sense of nationality which she so very largely lacked over the previous centuries.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Attlee believed that the growth of Indian nationalism was the commonality between the distinct religious and ethnic communities, mainly the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Sikhs, who were posed to go to war as soon as the British were gone. Attlee spoke of the need to encourage Indian leaders to unite all the people of India, and to remain a member of the British Commonwealth. He noted that India was currently in a “state of great tension” and that it would be a “great mistake to stake out the claims of rival communities.”<sup>24</sup> Attlee suggested that Indians remember the “principles of democracy and justice” that they had learned from British rule to help guide them in overcoming the great many “minority problems” that faced independent India.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Attlee created a commission to travel to India to set the stage for the imminent departure of the British.

Attlee used the discourse of anti-British agitation to attempt to draw together the many religious and ethnic communities of India, a history that was noticeably lacking in French India. The French government in India watched with great interest as the Attlee commission travelled to India in April 1946. While the decolonization of British India was at this point inevitable, the French were entrenched in discussions about how to keep their colonies. Just two months after his arrival in Pondicherry, the new interim Governor François Baron reacted to the movement by the British towards the decolonization of India by declaring his intention to see French India flourish within an independent India

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<sup>23</sup> Clement Attlee, 15 March 1946. *Parliamentary Debates*. House of Commons-Official report. First session of the Thirty-Eighth Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Dir. of publ. Hansard. 1946, No 420; fifth series. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office.

<sup>24</sup> Attlee, 15 March 1946.

<sup>25</sup> Attlee, 15 March 1946.

and a new French Republic that, through the creation of the French Union, would officially end the period of colonialism. Baron addressed the people of French India on 6 April 1946, saying,

France proclaims that colonialism is dead, that all men and women of French land – be they from Paris, from Quimper, from Tananarive or from Pondicherry – are free and equal in rights. That all men and all women have the right and even the duty to freely elect, irrespective of caste, race, or color, representatives who must faithfully express the ideas and the wishes of their constituents... There is no longer empire, there are no longer colonies. Henceforth there is only a great nation of 100 million perfectly equal and consenting souls, or, more precisely, a free association of original communities within the French Union, united willingly because they desire to be free, equal, and brotherly.<sup>26</sup>

Baron stressed the voluntary nature of inclusion in the French Union, an idea that had yet to be granted to the people of the colonies who, in theory, would be presented with the opportunity to vote, through a referendum, on their participation in the French Union. Baron spoke of the end of colonialism, and the beginning of an era of free will and fraternity, a notion meant to light a fire of optimism amongst the people of the “former” French Empire. The language of voluntary inclusion in the nation mirrored British rhetoric at the time that stressed the importance of self-determination for the people of India, while allowing the people in French India to remain distanced from the violent tensions surrounding issues of partitioning India. By basing the future of French India on a referendum to take place under universal suffrage, French colonial authorities hoped to

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<sup>26</sup> CAOM: « Évolution de la situation politique dans l’Inde française », 3. « La France proclame que le colonialisme est mort, que tous les hommes en toutes les femmes des terres françaises – qu’ils ou qu’elles soient de Paris, de Quimper, de Tananarive ou de Pondichéry – sont également libres et égaux en droit. Que tous les hommes et toutes les femmes ont le droit et même le devoir d’élire librement, sans distinction de caste, de race ou de couleur, des représentants qui, aux, doivent exprimer fidèlement les idées et les volontés de leur électeurs... Il n’y a plus d’empire il n’y a plus de colonies. Il n’y a désormais qu’une grande nation de 100 millions d’âmes toute parfaitement égales et consentantes, ou, plus exactement, une libre association de communautés originales au sein de l’Union française, unies de leur plein gré parce qu’elles veulent être libres, égales et fraternelles. »

avoid the development of any anti-colonial movements by the people in their Indian colonies.

Avoiding anti-French agitation in India was incredibly important to French officials, as the departure of the British from India marked a crucial point during which the French were forced to reckon with the possible decolonization of the French Empire. Much of this was uncharted territory for the French in terms of approaches to decolonization as well as negotiations with an independent nation that had overthrown their European rulers; in the lead-up to the departure of the British, French officials noted in a report that the strong position of independent India against foreign rule on Indian land was “le principal obstacle” facing the French colonies in India.<sup>27</sup> Before we turn to the local level, in the remainder of this section, we will examine some of the issues that faced both France and India at the international level as they embarked on discussions on the future of French India, revealing the important contrasts between the public discourse of the two nations, which emphasized the need to continue the cultural connections between France and India, and their actions, as France quietly fought to retain control of their territories and India used what power they had to push them out. Underlying the diplomatic negotiations was violence, on both sides, that each state was perpetuating while simultaneously attributing it to external forces.

While the question of French India presented a new set of problems to France and India, neither state was a stranger to border disputes and questions of race, ethnicity, and nationality. France had spent the better part of the past century battling with the German state over the eastern borderland regions of Alsace and Lorraine. As Laird Boswell,

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<sup>27</sup> CAOM: “Étude sur les possessions Françaises dans l’Inde,” (1947) : 11.

amongst others, has argued, these border regions between France and Germany held an important place in the construction of French national identity following the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870.<sup>28</sup> Between 1870 and 1918, when the provinces were under the rule of the German state, French nationalist discourse cast Alsace and Lorraine as integral parts of the French *nation* that had been lost to the German *state*.<sup>29</sup> While the borders had shifted to make these areas part of Germany, constructions of the French nation included the two provinces, depicted on maps and in school-books during the period of German control as “lost provinces.”<sup>30</sup> While France ultimately gained control of Alsace and Lorraine at the conclusion of the Second World War, India was heavily entrenched in its own border disputes, particularly around the issue of the princely states of Jammu & Kashmir in the northwestern region, Junagarh, and Hyderabad in central India. At the time of independence and partition, Jammu & Kashmir was caught in-between the two states of India and Pakistan. During the upheavals and mass migrations fomented by partition in 1947, Muslims who left India for Pakistan were referred to as refugees in Pakistan.<sup>31</sup>

The re-integration of Alsace and Lorraine into the French nation resulted in “ethnic purges” meant to weed out “bad” Alsatians and *Lorrainers* who posed a threat to France, either because of their allegiance to Germany (especially as the majority of people in Alsace were speakers of German and were also Protestant), or because they advocated for independence for the regions. Jammu & Kashmir posed a similar ethnic

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<sup>28</sup> Laird Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials in the “Mythic Provinces”: Recasting French Identities in Alsace and Lorraine, 1918-1920” *French Historical Studies* 23 (2000).

<sup>29</sup> On Alsace and Lorraine, see also Stephen L. Harp, *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850-1940* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Boswell, “From Liberation to Purge Trials,” 131.

<sup>31</sup> Ashutosh Varshney, “India, Pakistan, and Kashmir: Antinomies of Nationalism” *Asian Survey* 31 (1991): 1001.

problem for the newly independent India: while the majority of inhabitants of Kashmir were Muslims, India advocated a secular nationalism that did not, ideologically, preclude Muslims from being Indians. Thus, the argument of Sheik Abdullah along with a group of prominent Indian Muslims that ceding Jammu & Kashmir to Pakistan would jeopardize the safety of the substantial Muslim population who continued to live in India. Despite the cultural differences, in terms of religion, language, and ethnicity, between the populations in Alsace-Lorraine and France, and between Jammu & Kashmir and both India and Pakistan, neither region was ever truly given the choice to become independent. The choice for the people of these regions was simply to assimilate to the nation-state they found themselves living within, or migrate, if they had the means and ability to do so, to the nation-state they felt they belonged. It is in this way that the re-drawing of borders re-defined cultural, political, and ethnic identities.

Post-war France envisioned the transformation of the French Empire into a network of Francophone localities that would not only maintain the many capitalist economic relationships that were developed during the colonial era but would also continue to promote French language and culture throughout the world. Article 27 of the Constitution of the Fourth Republic stated “no cession, or exchange, or annexation of territory is valid without the consent of populations concerned.” The French Union was walking a fine line between denouncing the colonial practices of the British and promoting the unity of their own colonies. While they worked to distance themselves from the practices of the British, they also kept a close eye on how the Portuguese were approaching their Indian colonies, primarily the state of Goa. On 23 July 1946, the Portuguese released a statement to the Indian press declaring that Portuguese India was

integral to the Portuguese *mère-patrie* and they had absolutely no intention of leaving the fate of the territory in the hands of “millions d’hindous dont elle se sépare par des différences irréductibles”<sup>32</sup> (millions of Hindus separated by irreducible differences.) The authoritarian approach of the Portuguese towards the question of Portuguese India led to many protests, riots, and calls for solidarity with the Indian nationalists. M.K. Gandhi encouraged those in Portuguese India to engage in passive resistance, and Nehru declared that the Portuguese would not be allowed to remain in India. The French noted that the Portuguese approach was to be avoided at all costs – they would have to exercise diplomacy and stress the agency of the inhabitants of French India at all times in order to avoid being forced out of India. They also recognized that the Portuguese approach aided the French cause, as the Anglo-Indian press often compared the “liberal” attitude of the French to the authoritative-imperialist motives of the Portuguese.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately for officials in Paris, the French administrators in Pondicherry were not always on the same page. In March of 1947, Governor Baron made the following statement, “The British decision to give to India her independence does not have any effect on the French possessions in India. The two questions are absolutely without connection. The French Possessions in India are an integral part of the French Union.”<sup>34</sup> Baron had made this statement without the permission of the Foreign and Overseas Ministries in Paris.<sup>35</sup> The unauthorized statement greatly angered the Minister of Colonies, which issued a statement that denounced Governor Baron’s attitude towards

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<sup>32</sup> CAOM: « Évolution de la situation politique dans l’Inde française » (1947), p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>34</sup> « La décision Britannique de donner à l’Inde son indépendance ne peut avoir aucun effet sur les possessions françaises des Indes. Les deux questions sont absolument sans rapport. Les possessions françaises aux Indes font partie intégrante de l’Union française.» CAOM: “Étude sur les possessions Français dans l’Inde,” (1947) : 19.

<sup>35</sup> Clement Attlee to the British Parliament, 20 February 1947. *Parliamentary Debates*, cols. 1395-1398.

French India as “incompatible” with the views held in Paris.<sup>36</sup> This incident is representative of the confusion surrounding the question of French India in the months leading to the departure of the British. Following this misstatement, the Paris authorities rushed to put together a set of reports outlining the situation in French India, including the difficulties France might encounter in their attempts to retain the colonies, the reasons why the colonies needed to remain French, and the temper of the local population. They sent Tézenas du Montcel, the Inspector-General of the Colonies, to travel to all five of the *comptoirs* and compile a report on his findings. Issued on 24 June 1947, the « Étude sur les possessions Françaises dans l’Inde » (Study of the French Possessions in India) reveals that authorities considered attempting to hold colonies in the world’s first post-war, post-colonial nation-state to be their biggest challenge. Yet, they also recognized that they had an important advantage in India, one that they had spent centuries cultivating. The mainstream nationalist freedom movement in India had cast the British as the true enemies of freedom and liberty, an idea that the French had supported by sheltering Indian freedom fighters in French India. The 1947 report suggests that the friendship formed between France and India during the period of British rule should not be taken for granted.

The du Montcel report makes four primary suggestions to the colonial administration to overcome the great challenge of maintaining the Indian *comptoirs*. The first suggestion was to appeal to the French-Indian community by reminding them that as French-Indians they held a special position within India. In independent India, they would simply be incorporated into the whole, “in the mass of 400 millions Indians, our

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<sup>36</sup> CAOM: “Étude sur les possessions Français dans l’Inde,” (1947) : 19.

350,000 French-Indians would lose all their originality, all their importance – [they would become] a drop of water in an ocean.”<sup>37</sup> This line of thinking implies that it would be a loss to the French-Indian community to integrate with their neighbors, that they possessed an advantage by continuing to associate with a nation over a thousand miles away, on another continent. While the position of minority communities in India, such as language minorities or scheduled castes, was generally viewed as marginal and exclusionary, French authorities knew that association with a European superpower would prove exceptional. However, the people must also be given a *choice*, as “if one locks up a man, he will not rest until the doors are pressed open. Instead, open the doors wide and say to him: “Think and choose.”<sup>38</sup> The importance that du Montcel, as well advocates of the French Union, placed on “choice” implied that the people of French India, and by association, the French Union, were autonomous, free-standing, freely choosing *individuals*, the central figure in the liberal capitalist state, in both its colonial and post-colonial versions. Providing the formerly colonized population the “freedom” to vote and to participate in democracy would emancipate them from the bonds of colonialism, without disrupting the capitalist order of the nation-state.

The preservation of French-Indian culture and history was the most publicly visible concern of the French colonial administration. Du Montcel stressed the importance of the French Union and the French family, reiterating to the French-Indians that their status as French residents *or* citizens made them members of France, a

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<sup>37</sup> « Fondus dans la masse de 400 millions d’indiens nos 350.000 franco-indiens perdent tout originalité, toute importance – une goutte d’eau dans un océan. » CAOM: Inde/H/23/Rapports des fonctionnaires, « Évolution de la situation politique dans l’Inde française » (1947), 2.

<sup>38</sup> “Si l’on enferme un homme, en effet, il n’aura de cesse que les portes soient enfoncées. Au contraire, laissez-lui les portes grandes ouvertes en lui disant : « Réfléchissez et choisissez ». CAOM: Inde/H/23/Rapports des fonctionnaires, « Évolution de la situation politique dans l’Inde française » (1947), 2.

designation that gave them a unique status amongst their *Indian* neighbors and made them members of a much larger and diverse community that shared a common history. He also suggested highlighting the many links between France and India as two “*grandes cultures*” and making it clear to the inhabitants of French India that these connections would be lost if the *comptoirs* were swallowed by India, their unique history would be “annihilated.”<sup>39</sup> The duty of both the French and Indian governments, du Montcel believed, was to preserve the “original personality, and political and cultural traditions” created by the synthesis of the two “*grandes civilisations*.”<sup>40</sup> The argument for the preservation of cultural links between France and India underlined the social and cultural capital attached to French India and the French-Indian community, based on the *differences* between former British India and French India. The argument of du Montcel and the French Ministry of Colonies was that while French India was not wholly French, it was not wholly Indian, either.

### ***The Communist Party of French India: A Global Concern***

No group challenged the borders created by state interests more than the Communist Party. Beginning in the 1930s, well before Indian independence, V. Subbiah, the future Secretary of the Communist Party of French India, organized laborers across the French India/India borders, as he simultaneously spoke of the “fraternal links” between workers in India and workers in France. As a local chapter of an international organization, the Communist Party of French India adopted many of their ideas and tactics from abroad, in an attempt to appeal to all workers in the area, most of whom

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4.

crossed borders daily to reach their jobs. The 1920s and 1930s were an especially trying time for the working class populations of Pondicherry, Chandernagore, and the areas surrounding the two French enclaves. Many people who lived outside the juridical borders of French India were employed in the textile factories and jute mills in French territory, and were subjected to “abnormally low wages” and 12-hour working days “under inhuman conditions.”<sup>41</sup> Subbiah and other party leaders had organized multiple strikes and protests in Pondicherry and Chandernagore throughout the 1930s, one of which led to the killing of 12 laborers by police in 1936.<sup>42</sup> While the strikes were eventually put down, and new compromises were made between the factory owners and workers, the Communist Party had gained influence with a large segment of the French-Indian population through labor organizing. Subsequently, Subbiah, as a potent representative of the international movement of the Communist Party, was often *persona non grata* in both India and French India, and spent most of the 1940s and some of the early 1950s in hiding from both state governments.<sup>43</sup> Despite international reports, particularly in France, that Communists in India were only interested in decolonization in British India, and not in French India, the Communist Party of French India was active in the movement towards decolonization, especially amongst the working class in French India and the surrounding areas.<sup>44</sup>

Subbiah made several trips to Europe, including extensive visits to France, in his capacity of representative of the Communist Party of French India. Upon his return from

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<sup>41</sup> Neogy, *Decolonization of French India: Liberation Movement and Indo-French Relations, 1947-1954* (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 1997): 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Subbiah, *Saga of Freedom of French India* (Madras: New Century Book House, 1990): 262-3.

<sup>44</sup> Kate Marsh, “Representing Indian Decolonization in the Parisian Press, 1923-54,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 5 (2002): 82.

one such trip to Paris in 1947, Subbiah denounced the “cultural connections” proposed by Baron, citing his efforts to retain power in India through cultural institutions as “a mask for perpetuating French imperialism in India.”<sup>45</sup> While Subbiah challenged the discourse of fraternity between nation-states, he continued to use the term “fraternity” in reference to the global connections between the working class in France and the working class in French India. His memoir notes “the fraternal link forged between the struggling toiling people of France and of Pondicherry through reports of the events in France roused tremendously the consciousness of the textile workers here.”<sup>46</sup> The “support” of the “powerful working class organization of France” was helping the people in French India to direct their actions “against the European capitalist exploitation and simultaneously against the French Imperialism here.”<sup>47</sup> While Subbiah and the Communist Party did not endorse Nehru’s government, and actively worked against the organization of the French-Indian Congress Party to organize anti-French rallies and protests, they did advocate for the merger of French India into India, on the basis of anti-imperial ideology.<sup>48</sup>

While there were many political parties in Pondicherry, such as the French India Socialist Party (FISP), Congress Party, and Social and Democratic Union, that advocated the merger of French India into India, the Communist Party of French India was the only group to actively denounce the proposal for a referendum on the future of French India.<sup>49</sup> Subbiah, in his memoir, described the proposals for a referendum as a “mockery of political reform” that “stood unmasked even at the early stage of its implementation as

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<sup>45</sup> Neogy, 46.

<sup>46</sup> Subbiah, *Saga of Freedom of French India*, 67.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-8.

<sup>48</sup> Neogy, 50-51.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

nothing short of a treacherous game of imperialism to perpetuate its colonial rule here.”<sup>50</sup> Subbiah and his comrades’ argued that the presentation of a “choice” to be made by free individuals was an illusion, perpetuated by both colonialism and global capitalism. The Communists of French India certainly believed in the importance of collectivity, family, and friendship, but expressed this through declarations of solidarity with the working people of France, Italy, England, Russia, and other countries with strong Communist Parties, as well as with their fellow colonial subjects in Indo-China and Africa, relationships born through the common experiences of class struggle and colonial oppression. The refusal of the Communist Party of French India to work with the other political parties advocating merger isolated their efforts, and made them vulnerable to attacks by both the national French and Indian governments who often accused them of instigating physical violence against peaceful protestors and citizens who believed in the power of self-determination and the democratic equality of the liberal nation-state.

The Communist Party of French India posed a threat to both the French and Indian governments, as well the maintenance of economic global relations. The international press applauded Nehru’s decision to negotiate with the French government rather than allowing the Communists to “capitalize on honest patriotic feelings, as they have so often done.”<sup>51</sup> Despite the fact that the Communist Party of French India openly and consistently advocated for the merger of French India into India, their political ideology was viewed as incompatible with that of the democratic state, their “patriotic feelings” were interpreted as insincere. Just as Subbiah was stateless throughout much of his life because of his political affiliation with the Communist Party, Indian and French

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<sup>50</sup> Subbiah, 273.

<sup>51</sup> “Reds in French India,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1954: 12.

nationalists portrayed members of the Communist Party of French India as extra-state actors, possible liabilities to the state and the nation. A *New York Times* article on Communists in French India concludes by suggesting that “France can afford the loss of the virtually worthless colonies far better than the loss of friendly relations with India and can better afford a generous gesture than giving an additional weapon to her Communist foes.”<sup>52</sup>

### ***French-Indians***

Membership in the Communist Party was a political act, and those who chose to join the Party and speak on behalf of the Party are remembered and critiqued as political actors. Although it is not universally true that involvement with the Communist Party was voluntary, in this place and time people were free to choose if they wanted to subscribe to this particular political ideology. Membership in the French-Indian community at-large was, in contrast, less voluntary as most members of this group were subject to inclusion on the basis of their family and/or their place of birth and residence. As discussed in previous chapters, some French-Indians had been French citizens since the French Revolution, others since 1881, when they were given the opportunity to renounce their civil status and claim French citizenship, and others since they fought for France in the world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the families that had chosen French citizenship in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had converted to Catholicism and thus were seen as practicing French, not Indian, culture. Still other French-Indians had never declared French citizenship, particularly upper-caste Hindus, as explained in Chapter 2, but were active members of a milieu that attended French schools, studied French history and politics, and considered

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<sup>52</sup> “Reds in French India,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1954: 12.

themselves substantially different than their neighbors in British/independent India.

While political clubs, dual language newspapers, French-Indian historical societies, and French cultural associations served as meeting places and media for the construction of a French-Indian identity, there were always members, such as French-Indian Communists, who existed on the margins of this identity, many unable to communicate in French and unwilling to submit to an imperial identity.

The figure of the ‘French-Indian’ was never stable, yet there *were* several overlapping groups that self-identified as French-Indian and viewed the potential decolonization of French India as a threat to their identities and livelihoods. The development of Indian and French nationalisms, ideologies formed throughout a period of imperial conquest and anti-colonial struggle, pulled at these colonial subjects and citizens as they negotiated the political terrain of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leading many of them in different directions. Raphael Ramanayya Dadala, the man who led the fatal protest in the beginning of this chapter, was born to Dalit parents in a village called Farompet outside of Yanam.<sup>53</sup> He grew up impoverished, and although his family lived in French-Indian territory, they did not speak French or practice French cultural traditions. His “conversion” from Dalit farm boy to French teacher and police officer occurred through the patronage of a Catholic missionary from France, Father Artic, who had him admitted to a French Catholic school, leading to his baptism in 1919.<sup>54</sup> Later, another priest, Father Gangloff of Alsace, helped Dadala travel to Pondicherry to continue his studies, encouraging him to fully immerse himself in the French-Indian culture and atmosphere of Pondicherry.

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<sup>53</sup> Sri Raphael Ramanayya Dadala, *My Struggle for the Freedom of French India: An Autobiography*: 1.

<sup>54</sup> Dadala, 1-2.

Dadala opens his autobiography by stating “I am a Scheduled castes Catholic.”<sup>55</sup> Following this statement is a list of identities he had practiced throughout his life, including farm boy, French teacher, “police officer in the Government of the French settlements in India,” “leader of the French-Indian liberation struggle,” and finally “Superintendent of Excise and District Prohibition Officer in the Government of Andhra Pradesh.”<sup>56</sup> While his autobiography is ostensibly devoted to re-telling his role in the struggle against France for freedom, he devotes the entire preface and much of the small booklet itself to the importance of fighting for the rights of the Scheduled Castes, an identity he finds much more powerful and unifying than either that of French citizen or Indian nationalist. While Dadala chose to fight for freedom colonial rule, eschewing his position in the French police force and his favor with the French colonial authorities, he holds the Indian government accountable for “genocide against the scheduled castes community” claiming “caste Hindus” planned to “exterminate [the Scheduled Castes] as a race.”<sup>57</sup> During the era of anti-French demonstrations in French India, Dadala and his “gang” was seen as the primary threat against the safety of French-Indian people, as they walked the streets shouting “Down with the French” and “Jai Hind!”<sup>58</sup> However, as he looked back in the writing of his autobiography, Dadala has changed his rallying cry to “Jai the All India Scheduled Castes and Tribes Liberation Organisation” while also suggesting that it may have been better for the Scheduled Castes to remain under French colonial rule than submit themselves to the prejudices of the Indian government.

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<sup>55</sup> Dadala, Preface. Scheduled caste is a phrase developed by the Indian Government as legal terminology to describe historically oppressed groups, largely those previously known as “untouchables,” “outcastes,” or “pariahs.”

<sup>56</sup> Dadala, Preface, i.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, ii.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Jai Hind’ is a slogan closely associated with Indian nationalism. It translates roughly to ‘Hail India’ or ‘Victory to India.’

Dadala is an example of an individual whose French-Indian identity was a passing phase in his own lifetime. We now turn to Arthur Anasse, a man who lists his credentials as “Ancien Président des “Patriotes de l’Inde française”, Chevalier de l’Ordre National du Mérite” and “Croix de la Fédération Nationale des Combattants Volontaires et de la Résistance.” He served in the French military and was stationed in Indochina during the Second World War. Anasse published a book in 1975, highlighting what he saw as the glorious history of French India.<sup>59</sup> Anasse carefully described the differences between Hindu families in French India, which he viewed as very traditional and rooted in old and “medieval” traditions, and the “very small” Muslim and Catholic populations, who had “adopted” more ways of Western living.<sup>60</sup> His own Catholic grandfathers, on both the maternal and paternal sides, had worked with the “indignés” in the 1870s to lobby the French government in Paris for rights equal to those of French citizens. While men like Dadala and Subbiah spoke extensively of the need to combat the colonization of French India, Anasse believed that the people of French India had never been conquered or colonized, but instead had been *adopted* by France.<sup>61</sup> France, in the worldview of Anasse, had provided French-Indians with certain rights (*droits*) that separated them from Indians in the surrounding areas, and that these rights were worth defending and retaining within independent India.

Anasse worked closely with French authorities following India’s independence to ensure the rights and needs of the *French-Indian* community were preserved. Anasse wrote that his primary goal in working with officials in Paris, including the then Ministre

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<sup>59</sup> Arthur Anasse, *Les Comptoirs Français de l’Inde (1664-1954): Trois siècles de présence française* (Paris: Le pensée universelle: 1975).

<sup>60</sup> Anasse, 115-120.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 134: : “La population de l’Inde française, vieux peuple civilisé, adopté et non conquis ou colonisé...”

de la France d’Outre-Mer, François Mitterrand, in 1951, was to “travailler au maintien des droits et intérêts des ressortissants français de l’Inde.”<sup>62</sup> (work to maintain the rights and interests of the French nationals of India). This objective led him to found, with the support of French officials, the *Patriotes de l’Inde française*, a political interest group dedicated to convincing the people of French India to support the referendum, in the interest of protecting their rights of French nationals (*ressortissants*). Beginning in 1949, the group produced materials in both French and Tamil outlining the importance of maintaining a unique identity as French-Indians, a mission Anasse considered successful until he “began to hear the speakers in the neighboring territories haranguing the people of Pondicherry and insulting France.”<sup>63</sup> Throughout his book, Anasse made it clear that he believed the Indian state did not have the best interests of the French-Indians in mind when they asked for France to relinquish their territories – a stance consistent with many other groups in South Asia, including religious groups (Muslims), regional-cultural groups (Tamils, Hyderabadis, Kashmiris), and other interest groups, such as Dadala’s All India Scheduled Castes and Tribes Liberation Organisation.

Dadala and Anasse represent two ends of the spectrum, as both men, who considered themselves to be French-Indians in some capacity, chose to defend the interests of one nation-state over the other. There were, however, many people who fell in the middle of these two positions. One such individual was the leader of the French India Socialist Party, a man named Edouard Goubert (1894-1979). Following the independence of India in 1947, Goubert worked closely with the French colonial administration and was elected, as a representative of the FISP, to the National Assembly.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.,187.

<sup>63</sup> Anasse, 163.

For years, he was the prime enemy of Subbiah and the Communist Party, and was viewed by many as a tool of the French colonial administration. However, in 1953, Goubert suddenly changed his position, resigned from the National Assembly, and demanded the immediate integration of French India into India. Goubert was a member of an important *créole* community in Pondicherry: his father was the son of a French family that had been rooted in Pondicherry for several decades while his mother was an “untouchable from the village of Arcot.”<sup>64</sup> His compatriot Dadala noted that Goubert “had his own following in Pondicherry,” and was eagerly embraced by them when he left the pro-French side, leading the pro-French factions “leaderless” the “moment he crossed to India.”<sup>65</sup> After 1954, Goubert adopted the Indian name E.G. Pillai and began to wear the clothing associated with the Indian Congress Party.<sup>66</sup> After his anti-French actions in March and April of 1954, he wrote a letter to the President of the National Assembly defending his actions against “despotisme française.”<sup>67</sup> His letter echoed a sentiment that was voiced regularly amongst French-Indians, that of respect for the French but resenting the Empire. Goubert wrote, “I still like all the French people who have not left France, just as I see myself forced to hate the French who are located in the over-seas territories, except, of course, with a few rare exceptions.”<sup>68</sup> As an anti-colonial measure, Goubert had divorced himself from his relationship with France and “returned” to India.

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<sup>64</sup> Claude Arpi, *Il y a 50 ans... Pondichéry: L'intégration des établissements français en Inde Perspectives historiques et culturelles* (Auroville, India: Auroville Press Publications, 2004): 27.

<sup>65</sup> Dadala, 25.

<sup>66</sup> Arpi, *Il y a 50 ans*, 29.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Goubert to the National Assembly is reproduced in *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français, 1940-1958* v. 4 (Paris: La documentation française, 2001): 213-214.

<sup>68</sup> « Autant j'aime le peuple français qui n'est pas sorti de la France, autant je me vois bien contraint de détester les Français qui se trouvent en fonction dans les territoires d'outre-mer, à part, bien entendu, quelques rares exceptions. » *Dictionnaire*, 214.

### *The Sri Aurobindo Ashram*

The diplomatic approach to maintaining the Indian *comptoirs*, and thus the French Union, depended on the suppression of all anti-French, or anti-imperial, opinions in the territories. While many in the Francophone community in French India began to look towards forming cultural and scholastic institutions to continue their relationship with France, both governments began to look towards the Aurobindo Ashram as the potential negotiator of the situation, the representative of the in-between, a significant shift from viewing the *créole* and French-Indian community as the potential mediators in the final stages of colonialism in French India. As members of the French-Indian communities began to speak out about the future of the territories, it became clear to the French colonial administration that the hybrid communities in the *comptoirs* were not guaranteed to support continued French rule. The 1947 du Montcel report suggests that the best route to maintaining power in India would be to gain the support of the occupants of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Du Montcel stressed the importance of the Ashram to French concerns, noting that it is on “territoire française” and that “la ‘MERE’ est française,”; to ignore the Ashram would be, in the words of the author, “une erreur.”<sup>69</sup> After all, the Ashram was the project of Sri Aurobindo who had come to Pondicherry to take advantage of the protection of the French colonial state, and Mira Alfassa, who was indeed a French citizen.

The Ashram had always been located in the *ville blanche*, and while the inhabitants of the Ashram were a mixture of ethnicities, mostly Bengalis and Gujaratis from North India, with a small population of Europeans and Americans, there was a

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<sup>69</sup> CAOM: “Étude sur les possessions Français dans l’Inde,” (1947) : 14.

heavy emphasis in the Ashram on the practice of French and English language and culture.<sup>70</sup> Despite her dedication to Eastern religions and mysticism, the Mother strongly believed in the value of “classical” Western education, and stressed Greek, Latin, and French texts in the Ashram school.<sup>71</sup> She believed that every *nation* possessed unique qualities, and that these qualities should be taught to children so that they could understand “the mission their nation had to fulfill in the world.” For the Mother, France was defined by “generosity of sentiment, newness and boldness of ideas and chivalry in action.” It was these attributes that led to France “command[ing] the respect and admiration of all: it is by these virtues that she dominated the world.”<sup>72</sup> Du Montcel believed that the key to maintaining the French colonies in India was exactly the Ashram model – to blend what he saw as a specific Indian mysticism with Western education, culture, and civilization. The persona of the Mother offered the colonial administration an opportunity to appeal to the greater Indian community and project an image of France as a gregarious and benevolent cultural friend to India.

The Ashram had attracted international attention to Pondicherry. While Pondicherry loomed large in the French imagination of the Empire, it was Aurobindo and his Ashram that came to define Pondicherry. A 1949 *Life* magazine article noted that the Ashram “includes dozen of impressive buildings and covers a large part of the French-administered town,” and that “it is no exaggeration to say that Sri Aurobindo’s ashram is

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<sup>70</sup> Heehs, *Lives of Sri Aurobindo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008): 370.

<sup>71</sup> The Ashram school was founded in 1943-44, as the population of the Ashram increased and included many children. The Mother devoted herself to questions of education, producing a monthly publication, the *Bulletin d'Education Physique*, which contains articles on education written by the Mother as well as many pictures of Ashram students engaged in physical education, including posing like Greek deities.

<sup>72</sup> 4 April 1955. The Mother, *Words of the Mother* (Vol 13, Collected Works of the Mother) (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1980): 379.

Pondicherry's leading industry, attracting thousands of pilgrims annually.”<sup>73</sup> Enhancing the external constructions of Pondicherry as the home of Aurobindo were the beliefs that Aurobindo had been predestined to practice his yoga in Pondicherry. An article printed in the Ashram journal *Mother India* provides an origin myth for Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry

...On 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1910, a boat came sailing across the Bay of Bengal carrying an amazing personality – the famous political leader who had unfurled the banner of India's Independence, Aurobindo Ghose. Perhaps never before had the “moving waters at their priest like task of pure ablution round earth's human shores” fulfilled their mission so divinely. As the boat entered the harbour, once again the light of the Spirit touched the town of Pondicherry. The Power that shapes our destinies and is wiser than we are, always works with unerring knowledge of ends.<sup>74</sup>

Aurobindo is portrayed as a mystical figure, led by divine forces divorced from political realities, despite his intense participation in the Indian independence movement. Later in the story, the author comments that because of the arrival of Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry, the “once insignificant town” was “showing clear signs of slowly turning into a culture centre, a meeting ground between the East and the West.”<sup>75</sup> As we have already seen, the blending of the two worlds and two cultures, of France and India, had been fundamental to the founding and maintenance of Pondicherry long before the arrival of Sri Aurobindo. The arrival of Aurobindo and the growing fame of the Ashram began to eclipse the visibility of the colonial *créole* society in Pondicherry, as Western eyes turned to the Ashram as the primary representative for the future relationship between France and India.

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<sup>73</sup> Winthrop Sargeant, “Holy Man: Sri Ramana Maharshi has India's Answer to Most of Man's Problems” *Life*, 30 May 1949: 92-104.

<sup>74</sup> Synergist, “A Colonist from Immortality: The Coming of Sri Aurobindo” *Mother India*, March 1953: 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

The Ashram had a major presence in Pondicherry, but was officially committed to staying out of politics. A 1946 statement from the Mother reminded people, “I told you already – no politics can originate from the Ashram; it could bring a mountain of trouble.”<sup>76</sup> The apolitical stance of the Ashram did not sit well with local politicians and inhabitants who saw how the Ashram had dominated the *ville blanche*, as well as outside perceptions of Pondicherry. Nirodbaran, a devotee and physician who came to the Ashram in the 1930s, wrote in his memoir *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, “though we in the Ashram are not supposed to take part in politics, we are not at all indifferent to world affairs.”<sup>77</sup> The Ashram was widely disliked in Pondicherry, primarily because they appeared to support the colonial state. Aurobindo was of central importance to the Indian freedom movement, and his persona had brought both national and international attention to the Pondicherry. Yet, the engagement of the Ashram with the *ville noire* and the local population was extremely limited, marking the Ashram and the people within as outsiders to the region, yet insiders to the French colonial state. While Aurobindo did make the occasional public statement regarding the movement for freedom against the British, he did not involve himself with local Tamil politics, and the Mother had political connections to the French régime.<sup>78</sup> Despite the Mother’s insistence that the Ashram did hold political views or involve itself in political matters, she often received political visitors, including several French ambassadors, Governor Baron, and Jawaharlal Nehru.

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<sup>76</sup> Declaration issued on 1 April 1946. The Mother, *Words of the Mother*, 122.

<sup>77</sup> Nirodbaran, *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1972): 128.

<sup>78</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, Alfassa originally came to Pondicherry with her then husband Paul Richard, who was sent to India with as a civil servant with the Colonial Office. In addition, her brother was at one time the Governor of French Congo. During the 1920s, when the British were intent on prosecuting Aurobindo, the Mother used her political connections to make sure they were not disturbed in Pondicherry. Heehs, *Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 372.

The hypocrisy of the Ashram was evident to local activists and politicians. While the Ashram may have refrained from making public statements about political matters, they did hold a significant amount of power with the governments of France and India, a decidedly political position. Antoine Mariadassou, the president of the Students Congress of French India, recalled that when he attempted to discuss the possibilities of decolonization with Governor Baron in 1947, he was not allowed to speak to the governor, but was sent instead to the “secrétaire de la propagande,” a young man named Bernard Enginger.<sup>79</sup> Enginger, who was Governor Baron’s nephew, was also a devotee of the Mother and became one of her most important disciples, better known under the name of Satprem.<sup>80</sup> Mariadassou was not alone in his frustration with the power that the Ashram held. Internal documentation from the British Consulate in Pondicherry in 1946-47 indicates that people in French India did not trust the Ashram or, by proxy, Governor Baron; increasing quantities of anti-French propaganda were circulating in Pondicherry that stated that “Baron was a liar” and that he “took his instructions from the Mother in the local Ashram.”<sup>81</sup> Locals accused the Ashram of having great wealth and hiding it – during a time when there were few cars in Pondicherry, the Ashram owned five of their own.<sup>82</sup> The local press often complained that the Ashram was buying too much property in the *ville blanche*, chasing Pondicherians out of the “good side” of town. A report from the British Consul in January 1946 notes that the Ashram had bought more than 100

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<sup>79</sup> Mariadassou, 16.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid. Enginger published over a dozen books under the name Satprem, some autobiographical, the others devoted to the lives and thought of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

<sup>81</sup> British Library, India Office Records: IOR: L/P&S/12/4434, Letter from JO Marsland (Honorary British Vice Consul in the French Establishments) to C.H. Masterman, 9 December 1947.

<sup>82</sup> Heehs, *Lives of Sri Aurobindo*.

houses, which left a shortage of “suitable houses” in the *ville blanche*, a problem for both the French-Indian community as well as the French residents of Pondicherry.<sup>83</sup>

Baron would later admit that on the day of independence, 15 August 1947, he travelled to Delhi not in his “official capacity as Governor-General of French India” but instead as “a representative of French Culture and Literature,” and as “one who agreed with the vision of one of India’s most luminous sons: Sri Aurobindo.”<sup>84</sup> Baron envisioned a future where the integration of French India into India would be “of a cultural type” and would “bring into close rapport the great liberal traditions of France and the great spiritual traditions of India... As a French patriot I would always fly the Tricolour over my residence in India but I would simultaneously raise over my residence the Indian flag. A double or multiple symbol of human culture would be my ideal.”<sup>85</sup> Baron portrayed himself as a loyal member of two nations, an idea that did not sit well with Indian nationalists, particularly the Communist leader V. Subbiah, who accused Baron of manipulating the local populations by printing leaflets in Tamil claiming that Gandhi wished French India to remain French.<sup>86</sup> These leaflets, wrote Subbiah, were “an Independence day gift given by French Imperialism to people who demanded independence.”<sup>87</sup> It was clear to many in French India, from Subbiah and the Communists to *créole* community, that despite discussions of belonging to the same family, the French colonial government was not listening to the concerns of the majority of the family members, as they looked to the Ashram for assistance.

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<sup>83</sup> IOR/L/PS/12/4457/Coll 42/30(1) French India: reports on the general situation, *1 Feb 1946-7 Aug 1947*.

<sup>84</sup> François Baron and Surendra Mohan Ghose, “Two Documents of Historical Importance” *Mother India* 28(1976): 648-9.

<sup>85</sup> Baron, “Two documents,” 649.

<sup>86</sup> Subbiah, 261-2.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

## Independence

The months preceding 15 August 1947 were fraught for people throughout the sub-continent. While French India did not face the type of communal violence that ignited in many areas, those associated with French India began to speak publicly about the question of French colonialism, making the colonial administration notably uncomfortable. Specifically, several French-Indian politicians who had recently travelled to France called public meetings to describe the political situation to crowds of onlookers in several areas of French India. On 6 April 1947, Maurice Paquirissamypoulle, who had recently been elected as a Senator spoke at a public meeting in Mahé after his first diplomatic trip to France, reporting

All is perfect in France...we are very well liked...I was treated like a King...3.000 francs a month for expenses...but if I spoke of the situation here, of unemployment, of the misery, no one listened to me. They make fun of us...<sup>88</sup>  
Soon after, Paquirissamypoulle travelled to Pondicherry and told the people,

French India will be independent when India is free of the British. France has done nothing here...No need to fight against the French, they will disappear in a blink of the eye.<sup>89</sup>  
The Communist Party joined in these calls for independence, as the Communist leader Soubramanien spoke in Pondicherry on the same day, "We must abolish the French dictatorship... they are rabid dogs."<sup>90</sup> V. Subbiah, the leader of the Communist Party in French India, remembers in his memoir how the announcement that the British would

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<sup>88</sup> "Tout est parfait en France... Nous y sommes très aimées... J'ai été traité comme un roi...3.000 francs par mois de frais de représentation... Mais si je parlais de la situation ici, du chômage, de la misère, personne ne m'écouterait. On se moque de nous ... » CAOM: "Étude sur les possessions Français dans l'Inde," (1947) : 6.

<sup>89</sup> "L'Inde Française aura son indépendance quand l'Inde sera libérés des Britanniques. La France n'a rien fait ici...Inutile de se battre contre les Française, il disparaîtront en un clin d'œil. » CAOM: "Étude sur les possessions Français dans l'Inde," (1947) : 6.

<sup>90</sup> « Nous devons abolir la dictature française...ce sont des chiens enrages. » CAOM: "Étude sur les possessions Français dans l'Inde," (1947) : 6.

leave India sparked “the patriotic sentiments of the people” who immediately began to organize marches to express “their determination to win complete freedom for Pondicherry from French imperialism.”<sup>91</sup>

As local political leaders addressed crowds and spoke of the imperialist foundation of the French Union, students gathered in Pondicherry to protest the continuation of imperialism. Students in French India who were inspired by the “nationalist sentiments” of the Students Congress of India, founded the *Congrès des étudiants* or *Students Congress of French India* on 10 August 1946. Antoine Vallabh Mariadassou, one of the founding member of the Students Congress of French India and the president of the group from 1946-47, remembers that beginning with its inception, the group consistently organized rallies where hundreds of students would march in the streets, carrying signs that read, “A bas le colonialisme français!,” “Jai Hind!,” and “France quittez l’Inde!”<sup>92</sup> (Down with French colonialism! Hail India! France must leave India!) The primary goal of the Students Congress in 1946 was to convince the governor of French India, François Baron, to say publicly that France had the same intentions in India as the British: to leave as soon as possible.<sup>93</sup> A *Congrès de étudiants* pamphlet printed in French and Tamil in 1947 calls on all *comrades étudiants* to recognize the regime of French imperialism that they were living under, referring to the French Union as “la réforme imperialiste” (imperialist reform).<sup>94</sup> The students announced their intentions to hold a public meeting on 9 August 1947, and the French-Indian government

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<sup>91</sup> Subbiah, 252.

<sup>92</sup> Mariadassou gave a lecture recounting his involvement in the Students Congress of French India at a conference held at Pondicherry University in 1998. His speech was printed in its entirety in the CIDIF newsletter. Antoine Mariadassou, “Histoire du combat pour la liberté: du Students Congress de l’Inde Française” *CIDIF* 1998 (20): 13-33.

<sup>93</sup> Mariadassou, 16.

<sup>94</sup> CAOM: Inde/H/23/Rapports de police/agitation politique/Brochure de Congrès de étudiants, (1947).

reacted by banning all public gatherings and processions, and also reiterated that it was illegal for foreigners (including British/Indian-Indians) from speaking at political functions in the French-Indian territories.<sup>95</sup> Some French-Indian leaders sought to circumscribe these laws by having the speakers speak from British India, while the audience listened sitting on French-Indian land.<sup>96</sup>

Mariadassou, appalled by the repression of student voices in the days before independence, wrote an editorial in the local French-Indian newspaper, *Le Trait-d'Union* entitled "Démocratie?"<sup>97</sup> Mariadassou reported that Pondicherry had been saturated with police and military troops who "spread terror" in order to suppress any anti-colonial sentiment, treating students like prisoners, and depriving them of their rights.<sup>98</sup> Mariadassou was explicitly concerned with the divisions that were being drawn between "Indian brothers" as he wrote, "Now that there is no longer a great family of Hindu citizens, it is difficult to accept the expulsions where our brothers are treated as foreigners."<sup>99</sup> He continued on to say that the will of the majority should not be subsumed by minority interests, calling for all the youth of French India to stand up for their rights as citizens and denounce the censorship and abuse of civil liberties they had recently witnessed in the days before independence. The editor-in-chief of *Le Trait-d'Union*, Mohammad Houssaine, shared Mariadassou's uneasiness with the restrictions the French-Indian government placed on the people of India. A front-page editorial titled "Atmosphère d'indépendance?" notes that the coming independence in neighboring India

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<sup>95</sup> Neogy, *Decolonization of French India*, 53.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Antoine Mariadassaou, "Démocratie?" *Le Trait-d'Union*, August 1947, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> "Alors, qu'il n'y a plus qu'une grande famille de citoyens hindous, il est difficile d'admettre des expulsions où nos frères sont traités en étrangers." Antoine Mariadassaou, "Démocratie?" *Le Trait-d'Union*, August 1947, 2.

occurred amongst massive hardships, including famines, communal riots, and unemployment.<sup>100</sup> Houssaine reminds the readers of this French language newspaper that their existence is fragile, adding “slavery may have been abolished but servitude remains.”<sup>101</sup>

Tensions were high as the day of independence approached. Despite the ban on public gatherings, various groups, including the French-Indian National Congress, the Communist Party, and the French India Students’ Congress took to the streets to register their displeasure with how the French-Indian governments were addressing their many concerns.<sup>102</sup> The Students Congress organized a march on 9 August in Pondicherry that was forbidden by the government and shut down accordingly.<sup>103</sup> The French India National Congress, which organized a meeting on independence day with local unions, spoke of the integration of French India into the Indian Union and declared that “August 15 which marks, for our neighbors, the beginning of an era of liberty, must be, at the same time for us the announcement of a real independence.”<sup>104</sup> Several political groups banded together to demand the merger of French India into India, and stated that as of the 15<sup>th</sup> they would consider themselves as citizens of India.<sup>105</sup> While Governor Baron faced hostility from many parties, including one demonstration of distrust in his leadership as a “mob” attempted to overturn his car on his return from Paris just before the day of

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<sup>100</sup> Mohammad Houssaine, “Atmosphère d’indépendance,” *Le Trait-d’Union*, August 1947, 1.

<sup>101</sup>“L’esclavage a peut être été aboli mais la servitude est restée.” Mohammad Houssaine, “Atmosphère d’indépendance,” *Le Trait-d’Union*, August 1947, 1.

<sup>102</sup>Neogy, *Decolonization of French India*, 53.

<sup>103</sup> *Le Trait-d’Union*, August 1947, 7.

<sup>104</sup>“Le 15 aout qui marque pour nos voisins le début d’une ère de liberté doit être en même temps pour nous l’annonce d’une réelle indépendance.” *Le Trait-d’Union*, August 1947, 7.

<sup>105</sup> Neogy, *Decolonization of French India*, 54.

independence, he marked independence day by hoisting both the flag of India and Pakistan on the *Hôtel du Gouvernement* in Pondicherry.<sup>106</sup>

Nearby, in the Aurobindo Ashram, the devotees were celebrating not only the independence of India from the British, but also Sri Aurobindo's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Ashramite Nirodbaran noted "the whole Ashram was vitally interested in India's fight for freedom," and when the day of independence came, the Mother "hoisted her flag over the terrace of Sri Aurobindo's room. The Mother called it the spiritual flag of India."<sup>107</sup> Later that afternoon, the Mother appeared on the terrace where the devotees of the Ashram greeted her by singing *Bande Mataram*, the Indian national anthem.<sup>108</sup> Sri Chinmoy, at the time a disciple of Aurobindo, wrote in his memoirs that around the time of independence, the Ashramites "had to defend the Ashram from goondas" because "some Tamilians were displeased with us and threatened us. They were trying at random to kill some of the Ashramites."<sup>109</sup> As the British Consulate in Pondicherry prepared to host a ceremony in honor of this historic day, an Ashramite named Mulshankar Jani was stabbed in the neck and killed outside the Ashram.<sup>110</sup> The perpetrators of the attack remained at large as the Ashram attributed the death to "paid hooligans" and "goondas," as Jani became a victim of the political violence in French India.

The national and international press largely overlooked the violence that surrounded 15 August 1947 in French India, as large-scale violence engulfed many regions of India and the newly created nation-state of Pakistan. However, the beatings,

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>107</sup> Nirodbaran, 161.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Sri Chinmoy, "An Ashram Jewel: Mulshankar." <http://www.srichinmoy-reflections.com/mulshankar>. Accessed 3 May 2012.

<sup>110</sup> Heehs, *Lives of Sri Aurobindo*, 396.

harassment, and murders that occurred with increasing frequency weighed heavily on the minds of the French-Indian community. Emmanuelle Pouchepadass, a French-Indian who previously had moved to Paris and was involved there with the *Association de l'Inde en France*, wrote a letter to be published in *Le Trait-d'Union* entitled "Lettre a mon pays: de quoi s'agit-il?" (Letter to my country: what is it all about?).<sup>111</sup> Pouchepadass was distraught by all the reports he heard from his "compatriots" about the brutality that was spreading throughout French India, about the violations of homes and the "terror" that had fallen on a city normally "calm and at peace." From his home in Paris, Pouchepadass lamented the goondas who had been bribed by money and alcohol, outsiders who had agreed to descend upon French India for their personal gain and the benefit of politicians who were also more concerned with their own access to power than the people who dwelled upon French-Indian land. Pouchepadass urged his fellow French-Indians to be patient, as the details of the "fusion inevitable de l'Inde française avec l'Union indienne" (the inevitable fusion of French India with the Indian Union) were discussed by the two nation-states. He predicted that despite the numerous official proclamations, the future of French India would not be decided by the people of French India, but by international accord. By predicting that French India would merge with India, but not because of the will of the people, but because of the 'friendship' between India and France, he asks his compatriots to consider what they *can* do to retain some elements of their unique culture and history as French-Indians. He ended his letter with these words, meant to provoke French-Indian readers to consider their bonds to both the French and the Indian nations,

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<sup>111</sup> Emmanuelle Pouchepadass, "Lettre a mon pays: de quoi s'agit-il?" *Le Trait-d'Union*, October 1937, 2-3.

Tomorrow, India will be entirely rid of the last vestiges of British imperialism; when it is ready to welcome French India in its heart, the latter will come not in the form of a poor relation, but as a son who, by his time spent far from home, has been matured before his time and endowed with a proud personality<sup>112</sup>

The language of referendum focused on democracy and the right to self-determination, highlighting the strong democratic traditions of the French Republic and the commitment to democracy by the Indian government. However, the actions of the French and Indian governments in regard to the referendum were far from democratic, as violence on both sides to undermine the legitimacy of a vote. Both nations were anxious about the repercussions of losing the vote: France worried that if they lost it would set off a chain reaction in the other colonies, especially in Indochina and Algeria. For India, a new nation founded on the principles of anti-colonial nationalism, losing a vote to France could discredit their claims to ethnic unity and cause chaos in other regions of India that were seeking some amount of autonomy. As the situation throughout French India became increasingly tense and the referendum continued to be postponed, the Congress Party became more insistent on the necessity of the departure of France without a referendum. Dr. N.V. Rajkumar, the foreign secretary of the Indian National Congress, believed that if the French were to hold the election “the referendum is as good as lost to us because there will be no fair referendum.”<sup>113</sup> Rajkumar accused the French officials of hiring “goondas” and rigging all local elections, stacking the local Municipal Assemblies with pro-French politicians. None of this was acceptable, and Rajkumar encouraged the

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<sup>112</sup> “Demain, l’Inde sera entièrement débarrassée des derniers vestiges de l’impérialisme britannique ; quand elle sera prête à accueillir l’Inde française dans son sein, celle-ci devra se présenter non point en parent pauvre mais en fils qu’un séjour loin des siens a mûri très tôt et doté d’une fière personnalité. » Emannelle Pouchepadass, “Lettre a mon pays: de quoi s’agit-il?” *Le Trait-d’Union*, October 1937, 3.

<sup>113</sup> Rajkumar, 6.

French to take their cue from the British and “hand over charge to the local people and quit.”<sup>114</sup>

While a referendum was held in Chandernagore, the smallest and most remote French colony in India, on June 19, 1949, in which 7500 voters voted in favor of merger with India and 114 against it, the referendum would never take place in the other *comptoirs*.<sup>115</sup> On August 14, 1949 France officially transferred Chandernagore to India, after a near unanimous vote by the residents of this small town. Nehru welcomed Chandernagore to the Union of India, stating that the merger was “made inevitable by reasons of history, geography, culture and the spirit of the times,” a statement that revealed Nehru’s attitude towards the rest of French India.<sup>116</sup> It is surprising that the landslide in Chandernagore did not encourage the Indian government to hurry the referendum in the rest of the territories, but the vote was never allowed to happen. While the Indian observers of the elections claimed the French had hired “goondas” to win the vote, “the French version was that the elections were held perfectly fairly...the disturbances in Mahé were caused by the entry of several thousand Indians from neighbouring Madras Province, who seized control of the Residence, the Mairie (city hall) and other public buildings, hoisted the Indian flag and abducted the Resident and his family.”<sup>117</sup> Commentators ranging from the international press to local politicians, from French Senators to Indian police chiefs, placed the blame for the failure to hold the referendum on the problem of “goondas. In the final section of this chapter, I will argue

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Anoussamy, 67.

<sup>116</sup> Today, Chandernagore is the only one of the five French *comptoirs* that is *not* a part of the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Nehru, quoted in R.H. Fifield, “The Future of French India” *Far Eastern Survey* 19 (1950): 64.

<sup>117</sup> Parker, 394.

that, fearful of a public loss, both states turned to non-state actors, alternatively identified as goondas, hooligans, thugs, and very rarely, terrorists, to manipulate public opinion, media coverage, and international attention into believing that a fair election to decide the future of French India could never occur.

### **Goondas, Refugees, and Shifting Borders: 1949-1954**

Once it became clear to the Indian government that France would not agree quickly to leave India, the two countries began to apply pressure on each other. The years between the incorporation of Chandernagore into the Indian Union (1949) and the French agreement to abandon their Indian colonies in 1954 were marked by violent encounters at the many borders that separated French India from India. While the initial promise was to hold a referendum on the future of French India, both sides argued that it was impossible to have a free and fair election in the French settlements, and both sides accused each other of hiring “goondas” to influence voters, threaten violence, cause trouble on the borders between the territories, and incite the population to favor one side over the other.<sup>118</sup> Reading the colonial archive, one encounters an overwhelming use of the word “goonda” in documents originating from all sides of the debate over merger and decolonization. The residents of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram blamed the death of one of their fellow Ashramites on “Tamil goondas,” the neutral observers sent to Pondicherry to assess the possibility of conducting a fair and free election in Pondicherry reported that goondas made it impossible to vote fairly, and goondas were often blamed for troubles at the borders. One newspaper, *Matrouboumy*, a Malayalam language paper that closely

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<sup>118</sup> The term “goonda” is a Hindi word that has, since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, been used to describe the “anti-social element,” often distinguished from common criminals as they were *hired* criminals.

followed the situation in Mahé even referred to French India as a “country of goondas” (*le pays de goondas*). Commenting on a meeting the *Matrouboumy* reporters had with Prime Minister Nehru, they wrote, “We drew the attention of the Prime Minister on the situation in Mahé which has, in reality, become a country of “Goondas,” making him see that all measures taken for the integration of Mahé into India would be welcomed with pleasure by the nationalist inhabitants who have a love of liberty.”<sup>119</sup> According to this particular report, goondas were not only people who did not understand and could not empathize with Indian nationalism, they also were the enemies of “liberty,” a direct critique of the insistence of the French that they allowed all their subjects the practice of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The construction of the “goonda” was important to the maintenance of law and order in urban India under British rule. The Goonda Act, a piece of legislation that came into being under British rule in India in 1923, was the first juridical use of the word. As Sugata Nandi notes, the Goonda Act allowed the police to label any person they perceived as a threat as a goonda, and refer them to a the court for eventual deportation from the city, in an attempt to clear the criminal element from urban areas.<sup>120</sup> Originally written for use in the city of Calcutta in West Bengal, the only way an individual could avoid expulsion was to prove that “ ‘both he and his father were born in Bengal’ or were both from a family that was ‘definitely settled in Bengal’ and that he himself was also

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<sup>119</sup> « On a attiré l’attention du premier ministre sur la situation de Mahé qui est devenue actuellement un pays de « Goondas » en lui faisant voir que toutes mesures d’intégration de Mahé à l’Inde seraient accueillies avec plaisir par les habitants nationalistes qui ont un amour de la liberté. » “Le pays de ‘goondas’” *Matrouboumy* 23 July 1953.

<sup>120</sup> Sugata Nandi, “Constructing the Criminal: Politics of Social Imaginary of the *Goonda*” *Social Scientist* 38 (2010): 37. See also Vivek Dhareshwar and R. Srivatsan, “Rowdy Sheeters: An Essay on Subalternity and Politics” in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, eds., *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

settled there.”<sup>121</sup> Nandi argues that the Act was purposefully left ambiguous as to what defined a goonda, a measure that allowed for the figure of the goonda to stand in as the shadowy other, “constructed as an embodiment of anxieties of the elites and the middle class.”<sup>122</sup> The emphasis on where the individual in question *belonged*, the attention on his birthplace and the location of his family, indicate the high level of anxiety people had about “outsiders” blending in with the local population. Underlying the question of belonging was a fear that a person who was migratory could not be trusted. The goonda was the other of a citizen – unlike a citizen, who followed the precepts of a civil society and believed in the “mission” of the nation-state, a goonda was a person who did not consider himself a member of a wider community, who had no connections and thus no motivation to treat his neighbors well. Goondas were often characterized as having no moral code, as they drank alcohol, were not affiliated with religious communities, and would work for anyone who offered them money or alcohol.

The ambiguity of national identities and the shifting borders between British India, French India, and after 15 August 1947, India, certainly led to a lot of anxiety surrounding the future of French India and the question of belonging. The residents of French India who had the most to lose by the direct merger of French India into India were the various Franco-Indian communities who had constructed their identities around the existence of a French India. Some, like Edouard Goubert, feared they would lose their political and social power if French India disappeared; others, like the people living in the Ashram, were concerned that the Indian state would not allow them to stay in Pondicherry as foreigners; and still others, such as the descendants of the *renonçants*

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<sup>121</sup> Nandi, 42. It should also be noted that the figure of the goonda was always constructed as male. Women were not perceived as a threat in the same way.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

from the 1880s were concerned that the Indian state would reject them if they continued to live as French citizens on Indian land. The many anxieties wrapped up in the question of the future of French India were expressed through a constant blaming of all the ills of French India on the anonymous goonda and the tensions tied up in the border fences marking French India from India. Because of the impossible borders separating the two territories, practically everyone in the area was a migrant of some sort on a daily basis. For this reason, those who were not referred to as goondas were often labeled refugees. Either way, it was very difficult to distinguish who belonged where.

Records show that the Indian and French embassies frequently traded memos between 1949 and 1954 accusing the other of *allowing* goondas to utilize violence against French and Indian citizens, respectively. While the Indian government accused the French officials of instigating an attack on Sellane Naicker, a French-Indian and President of the *Comité de Pondichéry pour le Rattachement*, the French insisted the Indian government was behind the the violence perpetuated by Dadala at the borders throughout 1952.<sup>123</sup> In the case of Sellane Naiker, who was shot in the thigh on 29 August 1952, it was suggested that the police and government repression in French India was so severe that Naicker was forced to travel to General Hospital in Madras to have his wounds treated, as he feared that greater harm would come to him if he stayed in Pondicherry.<sup>124</sup> In fact, it was not just Naicker who was forced to seek medical attention outside of French India: according to the Indian Embassy, many injured French-Indians were being treated at the border-town hospital in Cuddalore, “as they were told that they

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<sup>123</sup> MAE: Asie Oceanie/Inde Française/ Maintien de l'ordre incidents policiers, I: 75-81.

<sup>124</sup> Memo from the Embassy of India to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 October 1953. MAE: Asie Oceanie/Inde Française/ Maintien de l'ordre incidents policiers, I: 82.

could not be rendered any medical aid in French-Indian hospitals.”<sup>125</sup> The Indian Embassy notes that the people of India were fed up with the goondaism in French India and had recently gathered into large protests to try to stop the violence. The Embassy enclosed a picture of a large gathering of “pro-mergerites” who were “stopped by the authorities” before crossing into French India. The picture had run in *The Hindu* on 21 September 1952. In the picture, a crowd so large you cannot tell from the photo where it ends, holds large sticks and other weapons. There is a man in the front of the crowd carrying an Indian flag – a group of 4 or 5 French-Indian policemen are attempting to hold the crowd back (See Figure 5).



Figure 5 From *The Hindu* 21 September 1952

<sup>125</sup> Memo from the Embassy of India to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 October 1953.

Following these incidents, the Indian government Press Information Service released an 11-page document to all the news outlets in India titled “Dark Record of Goonda Raj in French Settlements in India.” The first sentence states “Over 350 major cases of assault, arson and hooliganism are the dark record of the reign of goondas in the French Settlements in India since India became independent.” The report accuses the French-Indian police of being “party to the depredations of the goondas,” not only ignoring the complaints of those who have been victimized but also bringing further abuse on the victim. “The result,” reads the report, “has been complete freedom of action enjoyed by the goondas on the one hand and on the other, the disappearance of the freedom of speech, expression or meeting.”<sup>126</sup> According to the government of India, at least 1051 families from Pondicherry had taken refuge in Indian territory from the rampant goondaism in French India.

The neutral observers who had come to Pondicherry from March to April 1951 wrote in their report that the goondas were “rowdies recruited from the working classes and who armed with sticks and clubs attack political adversaries.”<sup>127</sup> Their headquarters are the “taverns and tea-stalls in Pondicherry.” They wander the town and enter the shops and homes of people they deem to be pro-French, to generally harass and terrorize the residents, even “molesting” the “wives of pro-merger people.”<sup>128</sup> The ‘goondas,’ while working class and this easily persuaded by money, were not wedded to a particular political party. The report suggests that when the Communists were in power, they

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<sup>126</sup> “Dark Record of Goonda Raj in French Settlements in India” New Delhi, 26 October 1952. MAE: Asie Oceanie/Inde Française/ Maintien de l’ordre incidents policiers, I: 1.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

worked for them, but now had come to work for the Socialist Party. The report goes on to state that the “goondas now form a recognised profession in the French Settlements,” and even dress in “some kind of uniform” while frequently carrying the French flag.<sup>129</sup> They were also ambivalent to religious and social customs: they were seen attacking Hindu temples as well as pulling down the veils of Muslim women in the streets and snatching the caps of Muslim men.<sup>130</sup> They looted cattle and cooking utensils, beat up men who wouldn’t sign pro-French petitions, and deprived women of their *Thalis*, “the sacred symbol of married women.”<sup>131</sup> While French India was besieged by the never-ending terror of the goondas, the report notes that “owing to the fact that the French-Indian territory is intermingled with Indian Union territory, the victims of the goondas frequently run for protection in to the Indian Union territory but are sometimes chased and there have been many cases of goondas crossing the border.”<sup>132</sup> They had, according to Government records, forced at least 1000 families “to migrate from Pondicherry into India as a result of persistent intimidation, assaults and hooliganism.”<sup>133</sup> During a violent and botched election in Mahé in 1948, 80% of the population of the 22.85 square mile town “fled to India.”<sup>134</sup>

After documenting several pages worth of incidents of abuse and terror at the hands of “political bosses,” goondas, and the French-Indian police, the report cuts to the heart of the matter: the hypocrisy of the French colonial administration and the urgent need for the liberation of French India. The violence instigated in French India “shows

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 8.

how the inspiring clarion call of ‘Liberty, Fraternity and Equality’ which resounds to the world from the glorious pages of French history has become a mockery in these territories over which the French Flag still flies.”<sup>135</sup> The troubles in French India started, the report suggests, when India became independent from the British and the “people of the French settlements sharing with the rest of the people of India the upsurge of nationalist feeling hoped to united to their Motherland.” The report goes on to compliment the British for leaving India in a “peaceful way” and suggests that the goondas stop suppressing “the natural desire of the people that these territories should form part of free India.”<sup>136</sup>

The French Ambassador in India, Stanislas Ostorog, received a copy of the Goonda Report on 27 October 1952, the same day as did Indian journalists across the sub-continent. Upon reading the report, Ostorog sent a telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noting that all the major Indian newspapers ran the text of the report immediately after receiving it.<sup>137</sup> *The Hindustan Times* preceded the report with the comment, “The criminals and goondas, with the complicity of the French police, have a free hand in the French Establishments against people who, by natural sentiment, after the reign of the British was finished in India, desire union with the “mere-patrie.”<sup>138</sup> At a later date, Ostorog commented that the great majority of the accusations leveled by the Indian government were fabricated, and that on the whole Pondicherry was a peaceful city wherein the general public were not overly concerned with political issues.<sup>139</sup> A day

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>137</sup> Telegram from Ostorog to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 October 1952. MAE: Asie Oceanie/Inde Française/ Maintien de l’ordre incidents policiers, I: 96-97.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Neogy, 206.

after the report appeared, on 28 October, Ostrorog wrote a telegram expressing his concern that the Indian Government's tactic of labeling the French as dictatorial imperialists was working on the Indian public: he reported that 10,000 people had gathered in Cuddalore to adopt a resolution that the people of India would not tolerate the "atrocities committed by French imperialism on national territory."<sup>140</sup>

The French government did not want to stage any sort of military action in India, but according to pro-Indian sources, there were no shortage of hired goondas working against the Indian government *and* Indian people in French India. Raphael Ramanayya Dadala wrote extensively about his trouble with goondas in his memoir; while the word goonda appears on practically every page of his 52-page remembrance, he never gives any sort of description of the goondas, nor does he ever make an attempt to find out who they are or seek justice for their offences, even though he insists they tried to kill him.<sup>141</sup> The goonda is a constant presence in his life and his struggle – he believed that goondas were standing in his way in his determination to liberate his "motherland." His duty was to protect the refugees fleeing French India, by housing them and feeding them on Indian land. While Dadala took careful measures to protect "refugees," it is also clear that he understands that to some people, his actions are interpreted as goondaism. Dadala was willing to use violence against the French-Indian police (his former employer) and, according to police reports from French India, against civilians. While neither government officially endorsed the use of violence during this period, many inhabitants of the areas advocated and actively engaged in direct action. The actions of Dadala and

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<sup>140</sup> Telegram written by Ostrorog to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 October 1952. MAE: Asie Oceanie/Inde Française/ Maintien de l'ordre incidents policiers, I:107.

<sup>141</sup> "The Government and the police Chief had given Carte blanche to the Government candidates and to the goondas to attack me in my station and kill me." Dadala, 13.

his compatriots were closely followed in the French newspapers. Both *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* reported that French citizens in the *comptoirs* were regularly molested and abused by both Indian police and “fugitives who had taken shelter in Indian territories.”<sup>142</sup>

The violent nature of state interests was not hidden to many people on the ground in French India. A Tamil political tract from 1952, signed by V. Aroumougame, accuses the Indian Government of allowing violence in direct defiance of Nehru’s call for negotiations through peaceful means (*les moyens pacifiques*).<sup>143</sup> Aroumougame distrusted the government in Delhi as well as the French administrators, and directly accuses Dadala of perpetuating the violence. He wrote,

It seems that Mr. NEHRU, who is theoretically in charge of 350 million inhabitants, is not being followed by his subjects, because the “peaceful means” at the borders of Pondicherry are shotguns, revolvers, and bats whose victims are frequently the inhabitants of French India, whose occupation has called them into Indian territory. Everyone knows of the existence of armed gangs at the borders under the direction of Sir Dadala, self-proclaimed agent of Prohibition, but in reality, political agent, as recognized on July 21 by Mr. Sadish Sandira, Parliamentary Secretary, in his declaration to Parliament.<sup>144</sup>

The tract goes on to accuse the Indian government of using violence and fraud to “force the opinion of the people of Pondicherry.” The writer accuses the Indian government of using the same “peaceful means employed by Hitler” to annex Czechoslovakia and

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<sup>142</sup> Neogy, 204.

<sup>143</sup> “Les moyens pacifiques,” MAE: Asie Oceanie/Inde Française/ Maintien de l’ordre incidents policiers, I: 74.

<sup>144</sup> Il semble que Mr. NEHRU qui commande, en théorie, à 350 millions d’habitants n’est pas suivi par ses sujets, car « les moyens pacifiques », aux frontières de Pondichéry, sont les fusils, les révolvers, les bâtons dont sont victimes journallement les habitants de l’Inde française que leur occupation appelle en territoire indien. Tout le monde sait l’existence, aux frontières, des bandes armées, sous la direction du sieur Dadala, soi-disant agent de la Prohibition, mais en réalité, agent politique, comme l’a reconnu, le 21 Juillet, dans sa déclaration au Parlement, Mr Sadish Sandira, Secrétaire parlementaire de Premier Indien. » “Les moyens pacifiques,” MAE: Asie Oceanie/Inde Française/ Maintien de l’ordre incidents policiers, I: 74.

Austria. It was clear to him that only those who sided with the Indian state would be protected from the violent actions of the state, in defense of their interests.<sup>145</sup>

**FRENCH DEMOCRACY IN ACTION !**



A group of refugees who had come away to Union territory following Police and goonda harassment, on September 17, 1952 in Bahour. The "thali" (sacred marriage symbol) of the woman (with the child) was removed because her husband attended a pro-India meeting. The old man (with bandage) was severely beaten by the goondas because he allowed his son to distribute leaflets showing pro-merger sympathies. Mr. Gopala Padayachi (extreme left) was severely beaten; his house was looted and properties worth Rs. 800 stolen and mobiloil was poured into his well to make drinking water unfit for human consumption.

**Figure 6 From "French Pockets in India." Madras: Free India Publications, n.d. (1953?)**

Accusations of goondaism and general "lawlessness" led to the cancellation of the referendum, which had originally been agreed upon in June 1948. A press release from the Government of India issued on 18 November 1952 contained a detailed list of all the "border incidents" that had occurred between July and October 1952.<sup>146</sup> The incidents included an Indian man being attacked at the border as he returned from the cinema in Pondicherry, two Indian women being beaten as they walked through French territory to buy food (they were "threatened not to use the French route in the future"), and an Indian Union postman being detained by the French Police Head Constable, who held him at the police station and "forcibly deprived the postman of Rs. 3, the sale proceeds of

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> See Figure 6 for an illustration from the Indian nationalist pamphlet *French Pockets in India* of a group of people who had been affected by widespread goondaism.

postcards.”<sup>147</sup> One Tamil man, Ponnusamy, identified as a “refugee from French India” had to cross into French-Indian territory to “fetch his wife and child.” During his attempt to reunite his family under the protection of the Indian Union, he was stopped by “a gang of French Indian rowdies” who assaulted him and knocked out one of his teeth. Despite his pleas to allow him to reach his wife and child, he was “driven back to Indian territory and was told not to enter French limits, as he professed merger of these Settlements with India.” His love for his motherland was keeping his family apart.<sup>148</sup>

According to the Indian state, violence tore apart any prospect for democracy in French India -- the actions of *rouge Indians* had destroyed the peace maintained under the French colonial state. Hoping to maintain “friendly” relations with each other, the Indian and the French nation-states never blamed each other for this violence, but instead faulted an unidentifiable band of outlaws, people with no claim to a legitimate identity within the nation-state. When forced to address the fact that all the goondas, “henchmen,” and thugs responsible for sabotaging attempts at the decolonization of French India were in fact *Indians*, nationalists decried the goondas as Indians whom exhibited “anti-Indian sentiment.”<sup>149</sup> This contradiction is clear in a 1953 nationalist pamphlet printed by Free India Publications in Madras (Chennai) titled “French Pockets in India.” The opening paragraph of this 20 page booklet declares that there has never been anything very French about French India, as not many French people live there, and there was neither a “racial link nor a religious bond nor even a vitally indissoluble cultural affinity” linking the

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<sup>147</sup> “Border Incidents by French India Partisans: Acts of Goondaism Detailed,” 18 November 1952. Report issued on behalf of the House of the People, distributed by the Press Information Bureau, Government of India. MAE: Asie Oceanie/Inde Française/ Maintien de l’ordre incidents policiers, I: 111-113.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-113.

<sup>149</sup> “French Pockets in India.” Madras: Free India Publications, (1953?): 12.

people of France and India.<sup>150</sup> The pamphlet never mentions the existence of a créole community, insisting that the people in these “pockets” culturally lived the “life of Tamils or Malayalees or Telegus” and *not* of French people. Despite this *strict* separation of cultural identities, the entire process of merger had been stalled by corrupted Indians, the same cultural Tamils and Malayalees and Telegus who the nationalists wanted to bring into the Indian Union.<sup>151</sup> According to this tract, all the people of French India wanted to merge with India, except for “rich merchants” and “a few Indian nationalists” who continued to profit from smuggling and goondaism.<sup>152</sup>

The question of who the “anti-Indian elements” truly were came to head when, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1954, Edouard Goubert led a movement to occupy Nettapakam and Moudoucoure, two French communes in Pondicherry, to “proclaim their annexation to India.”<sup>153</sup> Of course, up until 1953, Goubert was the leader of the pro-French lobby in French India. The insurgents took control of the French-Indian police stations and constructed a barbed-wire barrier that kept French officials from entering the “split sections of Pondicherry.”<sup>154</sup> A day later, Goubert and 300 of his comrades occupied another seven villages, seized weapons claiming them for the Indian Union, and took two gendarmes as prisoners.<sup>155</sup> Pro-India factions spread throughout the villages, hoisted Indian flags, and painted pro-merger slogans on village walls. The occupations were the latest tactic following years of sanctions on material goods and the creation of travel restrictions and increased border patrolling between India and French India. An

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>153</sup> “Border Incident at Pondicherry,” *The Times*, 3 April 1954, 6.

<sup>154</sup> “Paris Complains to Envoy,” *New York Times*, 3 April 1954, 4.

<sup>155</sup> “Approach to Chaos in Pondicherry, Puzzle of Indian Policy,” *The Times*, 5 April 1954, 7.

overwhelming feeling of déjà-vu must have descended on the residents of Pondicherry as the Indian government responded to the continuation of the French presence by enacting “travel control between India and the settlements of Pondicherry and Karikal.”<sup>156</sup> The wire fence erected decades previously by the British authorities to monitor the smuggling of revolutionaries and contraband across borders had been replaced a year earlier, in March 1953. The Indian government, much like the British Raj before, stated that the fence was meant to “put an end to the contraband which exists on a great scale at the Franco-Indian border.”<sup>157</sup> Armed guards staffed the reconstructed border and the Indian government declared “Any French citizen who wants to visit one of the other parts [of Pondicherry] must now acquire Indian permission”<sup>158</sup> and that “People resident in India wishing to travel to the settlements would be issued with identity certificates.”<sup>159</sup> By the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, newspapers reported “processions of men, women, and children filed through the streets shouting at the French, ‘Jai Hind’.”<sup>160</sup>

Crossing the fence from French India to India in the “struggle for freedom from French India”, from a hybrid space to a space under the singular purview of the Indian Union, Goubert declared himself an *Indian*, eschewing his French schooling, position in the French government, and the history of his paternal lineage. Despite the efforts of the Indian Government and the numerous Indian political groups devoted to the “freedom struggle,” it was the actions of Goubert that turned the tide against the French retaining their colonies in India. The historian Ajit K. Neogy has commented that “deserted by

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<sup>156</sup> “Border Incident at Pondicherry,” *The Times*, 3 April 1954, 6.

<sup>157</sup> Statement given by the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs in India, A.K. Chanda. CAOM: Inde/H/23/Rapports des fonctionnaires/Mahé, 6 August 1953.

<sup>158</sup> “Approach to Chaos in Pondicherry, Puzzle of Indian Policy,” *The Times*, 5 April 1954, 7.

<sup>159</sup> “Border Incident at Pondicherry,” *The Times*, 3 April 1954, 6.

<sup>160</sup> “Demonstrations in Mannadipet,” *The Times*, 7 April 1954, 8.

Goubert the chance of survival of France in India disappeared.”<sup>161</sup> It took the actions of a prominent member of the créole community to persuade French officials, especially those in the Overseas Ministry. The desertion of Goubert, not only from the French colonies, but also from his French identity, signaled the end of an era.

The figure of Edouard Goubert, a man of French name and citizenship and of both French and Indian parentage, a man who was elected to the French National Assembly and later, after 1962, was later elected as the Mayor of Pondicherry, provides a powerful representation of the French-Indian créole community in the era of decolonization. At the time of his defection from the Pro-French camp in 1953, he was seen as a deserter in the French press, while the *New York Times* called him a “rebel” and a “dismissed Minister in the Government of French India.”<sup>162</sup> Various scholars have portrayed Goubert as a self-interested politician who changed his stance on merger for political gain; it is telling that French commentators remember him as a “smiling, unscrupulous, great devil,” while the Indian government has memorialized him by naming a street in Pondicherry after him and erecting a statue that is periodically honored by local government officials.<sup>163</sup> (See Figures 7 and 8) The eminent historian of French India, Jacques Weber, has written that Goubert only supported the merger of Pondicherry once the continuation of French rule “became a threat to his own fortune and political future.”<sup>164</sup> Alternately, Dadala, himself a French-Indian who was low caste and pro-India, wrote that Goubert was “the only sincere leader in the whole lot.”<sup>165</sup> The entry for Goubert in the *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français* emphasizes that Goubert’s desire to unite Pondicherry with the Indian Union

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<sup>161</sup> Neogy, 277.

<sup>162</sup> “New Delhi Pushes Drive on Colonies,” *New York Times*, 6 April 1954, 7.

<sup>163</sup> Miles, *Imperial Burdens*, 65-66.

<sup>164</sup> Jacques Weber, in the Forward Neogy, *Decolonization of French India*: xix.

<sup>165</sup> Dadala, 24.

was due to his Indian-ness, stating “Of Indian origin, he took an active and sometimes violent role in the struggle for the merger of Pondicherry to the Indian Union.”<sup>166</sup>

Statements such as this erased the links, the cultures, and the identities created during the colonial period and highlight the underlying notion that as decolonization approached it was not possible to be an ethnic Indian who was loyal to France or an ethnic French person loyal to India. As a politician, Goubert was torn between two political powers, France and India, while his genuine fidelity may have been more towards the people of Pondicherry who, by 1954, were concerned that their future position in either country would be intermediary, that they would never be fully assimilated or integrated to either nation.



**Figure 7 Official *Assemblée Nationale* Photo of Edouard Goubert (1894-1979). Goubert was the Mayor of Pondicherry from 1951-1954, and eventually became the Chief Minister of Pondicherry between 1963-1964. *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français: 1940 à 1958.***

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<sup>166</sup> « D’origine indienne, il prend une part active et parfois violente dans la lutte pour le rattachement de Pondichéry à l’Union indienne. » ‘Goubert, Edouard,’ in *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, 213-214.



Figure 8 “The Pondicherry Assembly Speaker, M. D. R. Ramachandran, garlanding the statue of the former Chief Minister, Edouard Goubert, on the occasion of his 109th birth anniversary in Pondicherry” From “CM, Speaker Pay Tribute to Edouard Goubert,” *The Hindu*, 30 July 2003, accessed 19 December 2011, <http://www.thehindu.com/2003/07/30/stories/2003073004690300.html>

After months of stalled negotiations between the national governments of France and India, and hundreds of protests, demonstrations, occupations, and riots on the borders of French India and India, France announced it would leave India on 14 August, 1954. The *New York Times*, drawing on information gleaned from the Indian newspaper *The Statesman* ran the following blurb announcing the end of French rule in India:

“France is Reported Ready to Quit India”  
New Delhi, India, Aug. 2

The Indian newspaper *Statesman* reported tonight that France had decided to quit her small colonial enclaves in India on Aug. 14, the day before the anniversary of Indian independence. The *Statesman* said André Menard, French Commissioner at Pondicherry, capital of the French settlements in India, had announced the decision to a meeting of leading citizens there tonight. The newspaper added that the first ship to take departing French families back home would call at Pondicherry on Wednesday.<sup>167</sup>

The end had come for French India, and the first order of business was to “take departing French families back home,” assumedly leaving the Indian families in India. Notably, the

<sup>167</sup> “France is Reported Ready to Quit India,” *New York Times*, 3 August 1954, 5.

announcement did not affect any of the residents of the Ashram, although it did inspire some of them to initiate a campaign for dual citizenship, an issue I will explore in the next chapter.

On the 1st of November, 1954, the ‘de facto’ transfer of the remaining colonies of French India into India took place. Ratan K. Nehru, cousin of Jawaharlal Nehru and at the time Secretary of the External Affairs Ministry in India, spoke in front of the Government House in Pondicherry in front of thousands of people and “welcomed the French-Indians into the ‘wider family of India.’”<sup>168</sup> Soon following the transfer, Jawaharlal Nehru travelled to Pondicherry for the first time in 18 years, declaring that Pondicherry had become a “symbol of friendly solutions by negotiated settlement.”<sup>169</sup> A reporter for the *New York Times*, A.M. Rosenthal, noted that Nehru went out of his way in his talks to the Pondicherians to “say kind things about the gracefulness of the French” and noted that “he was sorry for only one thing – that he could not make his speeches in French.”<sup>170</sup>

Diplomatic relations between France and India were salvaged, however, the years of rhetorical and physical violence had taken a toll on the populations of French India - the transition from French India to India was not so smooth or easy in local practice. After centuries of intermarriage, dual-language education, and engagement with French cultural practices, many in the French-Indian community viewed itself as the hyphen between India and France, a group of people who occupied a physical space that could serve as a bridge or a link between the two nations in the future. The editors of *Le Trait-d’Union* expressed concern that if Pondicherry was incorporated into the Indian Union,

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<sup>168</sup> “India Takes Over French Enclaves,” *New York Times*, 2 November 1954, 6.

<sup>169</sup> A.M. Rosenthal, “Nehru Welcomes Former Enclave,” *New York Times*, 17 January 1955, 12.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

the position of Pondicherry, and specifically of Pondicherians, as a *trait-d'union* might vanish. The editors wrote,

Freed from its concerns in Indochina, and thanks to the disinterested efforts of the Président du Conseil Mendès-France, France will now be able to devote itself urgently to the problem on which its friendship with India depends. In this friendship, some links (*Traits d'Union*) should remain between the inhabitants of these territories, rather than the present situation of indifference which leaves the embittered population asking: "But why are we part of France?"<sup>171</sup>

The people of Pondicherry wondered what role they were to play in the “friendship” between India and France, as well as what would happen to them if they remained in French India. The next chapter will explore the decisions that the people of French India had to make as they faced the decolonization of their homeland.

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<sup>171</sup> « Libère de ses préoccupations en Indochine, grâce aux efforts désintéressés du Président de Conseil, Mendès-France, la France pourra maintenant se consacrer d'urgence à ce problème dont dépend son amitié avec l'Inde. Dans cette amitié les habitants de ces territoires doivent rester des *Traits d'Union* au lieu d'être ce qu'ils sont, des victimes d'une longue indifférence, des administrés aigris qui se disent : « Mais que fait-on en France? » “L'Inde Française” *Le Trait d'Union*, July 1954. Note that in the text ‘Trait d'Union’ is capitalized, emphasizing the importance of the publication *le Trait d'Union* as a voice for the Franco-Indian Pondicherian community.

## Chapter 4

### **There's No Place Like Home: Colonial Rupture and Postcolonial Migration (1954-1962)**

“Ultimately, the breakup of nation-states is not a rational question. Reason collapses on the bedrock of emotions. Nation-states get *embodied*; to many people, their breakup, therefore, feels like a limb tearing apart.” - Ashutosh Varshney<sup>1</sup>

“I hope I shall be allowed to adopt a double nationality, that is to say, to remain French while I become an Indian.” – The Mother (Mirra Alfassa), 15 August 1954

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 1954, Jean-Paul Weber, an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Collège Française de Pondichéry, wrote a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asking for permission to leave the colony and return to Paris. He had been sent to serve for 5 years in French India, however, as “there is no longer a French India,” he wrote, “my deployment here has ceased to be valid.”<sup>2</sup> Since his desire to become a colonial administrator could no longer be realized in India, Professor Weber wished to return to his homeland and marry a woman who lived in Paris.<sup>3</sup> While Professor Weber’s situation was particular to only a handful of Europeans employed in the French territories at the time of decolonization, the brutal truth that lay in his statement that “there is no longer a French India” highlighted a problem that troubled tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of people. When, at 6:45 in the morning on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1954, Pierre Landy, representing the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Kewal Singh, Indian Consul General, signed an agreement to transfer French India from

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<sup>1</sup> Ashutosh Varshney, “India, Pakistan, and Kashmir: Antinomies of Nationalism” *Asian Survey* 31 (1991): 1000.

<sup>2</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, 1944-1955, Inde française, Carton 80, Dossier Questions culturelles, Letter from Jean-Paul Weber to Ministry of Overseas France, 26 November 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., The French-Indian newspaper *Trait-d’Union* reported that Professor Weber left Pondichéry in May 1955.

France to India, French India ceased to exist as a geo-political entity, and the people of French India found themselves without a homeland.

Of course, French India was much more than a space on a map. As previous chapters of this dissertation have shown, throughout its 200-plus years of existence French India was a space that served as the foundation for the construction of a multitude of cultures, ethnic identities, and often as an important foil to the British Empire. While anti-colonialists and Indian nationalists hoped that the signing of the transfer agreement would erase any traces of French colonial rule in India, it soon became clear that it would not be so easy for the French-Indian people, institutions, or land itself to erase connections with France. While French India was a colony of the French Empire, it was also subject to the dominant politics and culture of the much larger nation that surrounded it – including the English language and a very specific strain of anti-colonial nationalism that did not take into account the particular circumstances of *being* French-Indian. For many French Indians, as we have already seen, who had been French citizens since the 1880s, the merger of French India into India signified the loss of an identity without an equal replacement – anti-colonial Indian nationalism was based on centuries of struggle against the British, not the French. Instead of “throwing off the yoke of French imperialism,” as advocated by the Communist leader V. Subbiah, and melting into greater India, the rupture of decolonization served as a marker for the entrance of French India into a new designation: former French colony, a moniker Pondicherry has never been able to shake. However, while the land remains marked by the allure of French tourist dollars and the mythology that French India was a colony free of colonial oppression, the people of French India who found it difficult, or even impossible, to

merge their subjectivities into greater India, continue to exist in a liminal state of not belonging to France or India.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the nation-state, in both the European form of an imperial power (France) as well as the post-colonial nation-state (India), employed a discourse of insider and outsider to foment nationalism amongst the general population. The figure of the “goonda,” the violent and immoral men allegedly hired by political groups to frighten and intimidate loyal citizens, inundated French India from 1947 – 1954, the period between the independence of India from British control and the transfer of French India to the Indian Union. Remarkably, after the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1954, when the transfer agreement was signed, all discussions of goondas disappeared from the discourse surrounding the former French colonies, a disappearance aided by the pardoning of many crimes by the now dominant Indian government.<sup>4</sup> Once the goonda disappeared from the public sphere, he was replaced by a new nebulous outsider – as the ratification of the transfer of French India from France to India loomed on the horizon, everyone living within the borders of French India became a potential foreigner – that is, any person who did not declare themselves fully French OR fully Indian became a possible threat to the stability of the nation. As the French and Indian governments entered into discussions about questions of nationality and citizenship, the people in French India and the surrounding areas began to take stock of their situation, weighing the positive and negative elements of French citizenship versus Indian citizenship. What would the future hold for those who chose French citizenship but remained in India? Would the Indian government punish those people who chose to declare their loyalty to

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, Nehru and the *Lok Sabha* chose to drop all charges against people involved in anyway in the struggle in and around French India leading to the signing of the Treaty of Cession. 16 December 1954, *Lok Sabha Debates*, extracted in Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawarhalal Nehru*, v.27: 224-231.

France? Would there be homes, jobs, and cultural acceptance for those who left India to settle in France? Could the French-Indian way of life (if there was such a thing) be preserved in any of these spaces?

In this chapter, I will show how what I call here the *two cultures thesis*, agreed upon by both the French and Indian governments, conditioned the post-colonial reality of the French-Indian people. I use the phrase “two cultures thesis” as shorthand to refer to the agreement of the Indian and French governments to promote Indian culture in France and French culture in India. This agreement, laid out in the Treaty of Cession, drafted in 1954, signed in 1956, and ratified in the French National Assembly in 1962, set the groundwork for the post-colonial relationship between France and India. I argue that the discourse of “friendship” and “respect” based on a mutual admiration of culture that dominated public rhetoric surrounding the decolonization of French India was intended to erase the colonial tensions between the two state powers, thus denying the French-Indian people the agency to construct post-colonial identities based on a shared experience of colonial rule. The specific language of decolonization in French India denied the violence of the colonial act, which, I will argue, encouraged the French-Indian diaspora to distance themselves from other colonial subjects of the French Empire. The often violent ruptures of decolonization that led to the loss of a French-Indian homeland and identity for tens of thousands of people were whitewashed by a strategic use of nostalgia that looked to an imagined and idealized past, based on the myth of a centuries long friendship between France and India, to erase the realities and the violence of the present.

The people of French India were eventually, in 1962, given the choice between French and Indian citizenship, during a six-month period known as the period of option.

The focus of this chapter is to explore what options *actually* existed for the people of French-India, and the challenges they faced in making these decisions. While the governments of France and India envisioned a clear choice between the respective nations for their once and future citizens, discussions over the meaning of nationality and citizenship proliferated throughout the period leading up to, and following, the period of option. The rupture of decolonization, specifically the loss of a place to call home, ignited a post-colonial migration from India to France, as a certain segment of the population of the former French-Indian colonies felt they could no longer live in India, the only land many of them had ever known.

I have chosen to use the phrase “French-Indian diaspora,” though I am unsure that this is a valid category for analysis. In recent years, scholars have begun to discuss the South Asian diaspora, charting the various webs cast out from the subcontinent and tracking the vast networks of South Asians who have settled in various nations throughout the world.<sup>5</sup> While the parameters of the category of “South Asian” would certainly include the people of French India, defined by what may best be described as ethnicity (or perhaps ancestry), this chapter will show that there are some elements of the French-Indian diaspora that set the population apart from the standard understanding of those in the South Asian diaspora. The two primary factors setting this migrant population from the rest are language and nationality. While it is certainly true that the South Asian diaspora in the post-war period was not united by language, as South Asia is an intensely polyglot region, the peoples who migrated from French India during the period of decolonization were united by French, a non-South Asian language. This also

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Koshy and R. Radhakrishnan, *Transnational South Asians: The Making of a Neo-Diaspora* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).

set this population apart from the massive migrations of South Asians into other European countries, as the majority spoke English, not French. Second, the history of citizenship in French India, and the number of non-European born French-Indians who were French citizens, meant that in the political, and often cultural, field, this population had “imagined” themselves as part of the French nation, not the British or the Indian, nation, for over 100 years. The status of Pondichérians in France as French nationals also sets this population apart from the over 70,000 Sri Lankan Tamils who sought refuge from the Civil War during the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Grouped together, these groups are referred to as the Tamil diaspora, although a number of problems exist with this designation, as well. First, not all French nationals of Indian origin who migrated from the former French colonies are Tamil – although the Tamil designator does represent the majority. The difficulty of categorizing and tracking the French-Indian population as they have dispersed throughout India, France, and the world, I argue, stems from the fractious nature of the French-Indian territories under colonialism. Thus, we must look at the moment of decolonization to understand the paths that led from Pondicherry to Paris.

### ***The Question of Belonging: 1954-1962***

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, 1954, as the *de facto* transfer was becoming a reality, the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, was in Beijing. He did, however, issue a message to be read aloud in Pondicherry as the Indian flag was hoisted above the Government building. Nehru insisted that in addition to English, the message should be read in French

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud, « La diaspora tamoule en France : entre visibilité et politisation », *EchoGéo* [Online], Online since 13 May 2009. Accessed 18 October 2012. <http://echogeo.revues.org/11157>.

and in Tamil, out of respect for the linguistic plurality that existed in the city.<sup>7</sup> Nehru began his speech by welcoming the people of the French settlements home to India, “A part of India long separated from the motherland is coming back to us of its own free will...I congratulate the people of what used to be the French enclaves in India and welcome them as nationals of the Republic of India.”<sup>8</sup> While Nehru expressed his joy in the decolonizing moment, bringing the nation one step closer to a united India, he also made it clear that he did not hold ill will towards France, or more importantly, French culture, which he understood is an essential part of life in Pondicherry. Nehru’s message to the crowd stated, “I am happy that Pondicherry will continue to be a centre of French language and culture and will be a cultural link between the Republic of India and the Republic of France.”<sup>9</sup> He concluded the message by noting that his only regret was that he was not capable of sharing his message to the people of former French India in French.

Nehru’s speech and the accompanying ceremony marked the end of the long struggle between the two national powers over the fate of French India. However, while the *de facto* transfer of the French territories to India was on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1954, it took two more years, until the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1956, before the Treaty of Cession was signed. The Treaty outlined the terms of the cession, primarily dealing with the details of how economic, juridical, and cultural questions would be addressed during the transfer. All that remained was for the French National Assembly to ratify the Treaty, thus allowing the *de jure* transfer of the territories. It took France another 6 years to complete this

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<sup>7</sup> Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawarhalal Nehru*, v.27: p. 221, fn. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

process; the *de jure* transfer was only ratified after France had agreed to leave Algeria, thus ending their claims to global empire.

The years between 1954 and 1962 were quite tense for the people in the French-Indian territories, as they waited to learn what directions their lives would take once the era of French rule had completely ended. The conversation about what to do about the nationality of the people living in French India began in earnest in August 1954, as agents of the French government in Paris and the Indian government in New Delhi negotiated the details of the transfer of French India to the Indian Union. One of the first steps the Ministry of Overseas took was to look back at the cession of Chandernagore for a blueprint for the remaining French-Indian territories. A report dated 3 September 1954 noted that in 1949, when Chandernagore was integrated into the Indian Union, French nationals and citizens of the French Union who were domiciled on the ceded territory would automatically become citizens of India *unless*, after a period of six months, they opted to preserve their French nationality. Very few people opted for French nationality in Chandernagore, and officials in the Ministry of Overseas France believed this would hold true in the remaining French territories as well.

Stanislas Ostorog, the French Ambassador in India, noted in 1955 that the situation in French India was “without precedent in international law,” and thus officials should be careful to follow public opinion in France on the matter.<sup>10</sup> French officials in Paris, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Ministry of Overseas France, asked those on the ground in Pondicherry, particularly Ostorog, to estimate the number of people that may chose French nationality, and what provisions would need to be made for

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<sup>10</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from S. Ostorog to Edgar Faure, Président du Conseil, 14 April 1955.

this occurrence. Both Ostorog and his colleagues, specifically a man named Armand Gandon, wrote to Paris that it was impossible to estimate what would happen in the future, but they did write of the many problems France might face as plans for the period of option went forward. Throughout his extensive correspondence on the question of granting French citizenship to the people of French India, Ostorog highlights the importance of understanding that outside of a minority of French Indians who truly showed allegiance to France, mostly by way of mixed heritage, the majority of French Indians were *too different* from *true* French nationals to join their ranks. “It is difficult to penetrate the thoughts of a people who are different from us by race, language, religion, customs and traditions,” wrote Ostorog in a 1955 memo. He estimated that of a population of 300,000 people, there were fewer than 25,000 people who could be distinguished from the “*paysans Tamils*.”<sup>11</sup> Armand Gandon, a representative from France who prepared a report for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1955, worried about “four-fifths of the population, who are pariahs” who “were so accustomed to the French regime that they forgot that it is the regime that made them like other men.”<sup>12</sup> After only 7 months of Indian rule, notes Gandon, the Brahmins had not delayed in reaffirming their “traditional” superiority, “eclipsing” the centuries of equality brought to the region by the French regime. Ostorog noted that *except* for those who had the financial means and were ready to accept the idea of leaving India for France or another territory in the French Union, those who chose to retain French nationality would have an inferior position in

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, A. Gandon, “Note sur les options de nationalité à Pondichéry,” 4 June 1955.

India.<sup>13</sup> They would also find that they would have limits on their professional life due to restrictions placed on foreigners, and would not have access to public services. For these reasons, Ostorog wrote that limiting the option of French citizenship to those who already had ties with France would be the “humanitarian” path to take.<sup>14</sup>

Government officials noted that this was a bit tricky for the métis population, and predicted that most of métis would choose to be French and subsequently move to France. Just 6 weeks following the *de facto* transfer, in December of 1954, the following statement appeared in the *Journal de la République Française*:

Among this mass, one can distinguish those who have always been legally French, being born French of recently European parents, or many generations before – those who have become French by voluntary choice of renunciation and confirmed almost always by service in the army or the administration, and finally those who were born of renouncing parents or who were themselves descendants of renouncers. When one says that the inhabitants of this country are rejoining their homeland, those in the first group have the right to protest, because although born here, they have never been Indians. No matter, they are given over like the others.<sup>15</sup>

While “race” is never referred to explicitly in these discussions, it is immediately clear that any person in the *comptoirs* with at least one white-French parent (signaled by the term “European born,”) had a right to be French and migrate to France. It was the population at large, comprised primarily of “ethnic Indians” that gave them concern. In April of 1955, Ostorog wrote a report detailing the various groups that were angry with

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<sup>13</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from S. Ostorog to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 22 June 1955.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> « Parmi cette masse, on peut distinguer ceux qui ont légalement toujours été français étant nés français de parents Européens immédiats ou avant plusieurs générations – ceux qui le sont devenus par la choix volontaire de la renonciation et confirmé presque toujours par des services dans l’armée ou l’administration et enfin tous ceux qui sont nés de parents renonçants ou descendants eux-mêmes de renonçants. Quand on dit que les habitants de ce pays rejoignent leur mère patrie, ceux du premier groupe ont le droit de protester, parce que bien que nés ici, ils n’ont jamais été indiens. Peu importe, ils sont cédés comme les autres. » MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Extrait du *Journal de la République Française*, « Nationalités, » 15 December 1954.

the transfer of French India to India. These groups included: the functionaries who believed that their official roles would be diminished under Indian rule, certain young men who had joined and/or fought with the French military and were concerned about their future pensions, the milieu of old French-Indian families who were “sincerely attached to France,” French nuns and missionaries who remained in India, and a group of people whose language, religion, and education was “closer to the West” than to India. Another report, written by Gandon, noted that there were three groups of people that were incontestably French citizens: the descendants of Metropolitan French, the métis (“called here Créole”), and the naturalized and their descendants.<sup>16</sup> For these people, who Ostorog believed comprised a small minority, he suggested that right of option of nationality should be offered.<sup>17</sup> However, Ostorog believed, the French authorities must not forget that the “majority of Tamil peasants, like all the neighboring Indians” vote according to the discretion of public authorities (*gré des Pouvoirs publiques*).<sup>18</sup> Ostorog blamed this “voting bloc” of “Tamil peasants” for consistent election fraud in French India. Furthermore, in order to garner favor with the Indian government, French officials would now have to depend on the “same politicians who betrayed us when they left our cause” to advocate for merger with India.<sup>19</sup> It would be important to keep an eye on the *métis* population, as they had betrayed France in the past.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, A. Gandon, “Note sur les options de nationalité à Pondichéry,” 4 June 1955.

<sup>17</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from S. Ostorog to Edgar Faure, Président du Conseil, 7 April 1955.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from S. Ostorog to Edgar Faure, Président du Conseil, 7 April 1955.

<sup>20</sup> Edouard Goubert, the former National Assembly member who “betrayed” France to fight for merger, and is the object of Ostorog’s scorn, did choose Indian citizenship, although the remainder of his family retained French citizenship, creating a great divide in the Goubert family. Jacques Weber, *Pondichéry et la comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix: La démocratie au pays des castes* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1996): 404.

The diplomatic goal was to maintain a “strong friendship” between France and India – two nation-states – while encouraging French Indians to retain citizenship with their “true homeland.” This leads us to the question, how do we define a person’s true homeland? French officials agreed that it would be wise to discourage the “Tamil peasants” from claiming French citizenship, as they were unlikely to ever visit France, and only stood to be a drain on French resources. However, Ostorog’s greatest concern was that the French-Indian adults who chose to conserve their French nationality would pass it on to their children who would surely “not retain any ties to the French nation, and quickly integrate with the Indian nation.”<sup>21</sup> For Ostorog, and many of his supporters, in the colonies, nationality ties to France were generational, and if France could manage to limit the option of French citizenship, particularly to the *métis* who had “French French” ancestors, they could avoid problems in the future. In this way, Ostorog believed that unless a family was likely to move to France, they should be encouraged to become citizens of India, saving their children the difficulty of carrying a foreign nationality.

We can see from the correspondence between French intergovernmental agencies as well as between the French and Indian governments that the issue of citizenship was tied to the issue of culture. The idea to use “culture” to construct strong links between post-colonial India and France preceded the decolonization of British India. As early as 1946, François Baron, the Governor-General of Pondicherry, communicated his desire to create multiple French cultural institutions throughout French India that would keep

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<sup>21</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Nationalité et Options, Letter from the Ministre de la France d’Outre-Mer to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, 3 September 1954.

French history, culture, and language alive after colonialism had died.<sup>22</sup> The Treaty of Cession, containing 35 articles, was drafted on 21 October 1954 in New Delhi. Amongst articles detailing the plans for the future citizenship of the people of French India was a clause assuring France the right to continue their cultural projects in India. This was quite explicitly meant to reassure the people of French India that although they may become Indian citizens, they could still perform a French identity. Article 24 of the Treaty of Cession read, “India accepts the maintenance of the existing French institutions of science and culture and will facilitate, by agreement of the two governments, the opening of institutions of the same order.”<sup>23</sup> French interests in India, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs *and* the Francophone community in French India, were willing to sacrifice the territories’ status in the French Union on the condition that French culture continue to be promoted in the now *former* French colonies. This plan was fully endorsed by the Government of India; Prime Minister Nehru remarked on numerous occasions that “India has given assurances that it would help to maintain Pondicherry as a centre of French culture and the French language,” a move that he believed “has brought India and France even closer to each other than ever before.”<sup>24</sup> Nehru stressed the importance of the “peaceful” negotiations that had taken place between France and India to come to terms in the Treaty of Cession. However, while both India and France were committed to

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<sup>22</sup> Baron’s plans were recorded in a note written by the Ministry of Overseas France in 1946. MAE: Asie-Océanie, 1944-1955, Inde française, Carton 80, Dossier Questions culturelles, “Établissements français de l’Inde,” 17 September 1946.

<sup>23</sup> « L’Inde accepte le maintien des Établissements d’ordre scientifique ou culturel français existants, et facilitera, par accord des deux gouvernements, l’ouverture des Établissements du même ordre. » Article 24, Treaty of Cession, 21 October 1954. Reprinted in Alain Coret, *La Cession de l’Inde Française* (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1955): 737.

<sup>24</sup> Remarks made in a press conference to Radio France on 31 October 1954 in Saigon. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawarhalal Nehru*, v.27, 99.

making sure French culture remained visible in India, the future of the people of French India was far from clear.

While Nehru welcomed the people of French India into the nation as an act of “free will”, there continued to be protests amongst French-Indian communities who argued that French law had been violated in signing of the Treaty of Cession as a referendum had never taken place. Despite Pandit Nehru’s warm welcome, there were vocal oppositions to joining the Indian family. Take, for example, the following editorial printed in the Pondichérien newspaper *La République Française* on 13 August 1954, which argued, “Though we may well be of the Dravidian race, we take no comfort to be with our Tamil brothers, held in bondage by the master of the Northern capital, which is not ours. Our so-called freedom will only lead to sharing the misery of a nation of our brothers.”<sup>25</sup> The lack of enthusiasm for the Congress Party and the national government of India, based in North India, and culturally, linguistically, and ethnically different than the South, was common throughout South India, and it is not surprising that those living in the French *comptoirs* felt the same. The French authorities were aware of this, and some feared that the North/South division would push many French Indians to migrate to France rather than “become” Indians. R. Duvachelle noted in a 1954 memo titled “Sur les options de nationalité française,” “many people in the Establishments are very fond of our civilization” and that “the new masters frighten” some people in the French-Indian territories, and certainly “do not inspire confidence” in the remainder of the population.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Nous avons beau être de race dravidienne, nous n’éprouvons aucun soulagement à être, avec notre frère Tamoul, mis en servage par l’orgueilleux maître de la capitale nordique, qui n’est pas la nôtre. Notre soi-disant liberté ne sera que le partage de la misère de tout un peuple frère.” *La République Française*, 13 August 1954, reprinted in Coret, *La Cession de l’Inde Française*, 742.

<sup>26</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, R. Duvauchelle, Note “Sur les options de nationalité française,” 21 December 1954, p. 2.

Duvauchelle worried that without a serious effort by Indian authorities to make the people in the former territories feel as if they would not be swallowed whole by India, people would choose French citizenship and would find themselves foreigners in “leur propre pays.” This would lead to this population being subject to all the difficulties that foreigners in India regularly experienced, such as the threat of expulsion, limited ability to travel without prior government approval, and other bureaucratic procedures. He refers to a friend of his who had been a Chandernagorian, living in Calcutta with a French passport. “Proud of his nationality,” wrote Duvauchelle, “he lived as a an outcaste (*paria*) in his own town.”<sup>27</sup> One possible solution to this problem would be to offer people in French India dual nationality, a solution advocated by several groups, including French-Indians who had opposed merger, former soldiers in the French military, and the people who resided in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

The movement for dual nationality for the people of French India began in 1947, at the moment of independence. During his early negotiations with the Indian government in Delhi, the Governor of Pondicherry, François Baron, has advocated for the option of dual nationality, an idea that was struck down by the French Government.<sup>28</sup> Internationally, the idea of dual citizenship was discussed during the interwar period, with most Western countries agreeing that, as it states in the preamble to the Hague Convention of 12 April 1930, “it is in the general interest of the international community to have all its member acknowledge that every individual should posses one nationality

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<sup>27</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, R. Duvauchelle, Note “Sur les options de nationalité française,” 21 December 1954, p. 2. “Fier de sa nationalité, il vivait en paria dans sa propre ville...”

<sup>28</sup> Neogy, *Decolonization of French India*, 51.

and only one.”<sup>29</sup> After the conclusion of the Second World War, as decolonization loomed on the horizon, nations around the world agreed that it was best to belong to only one nation, for an individual who belonged to nations could not foster a sense of belonging to his or her proper nation. Yet, as the prospect of decolonization became a reality, campaigns for dual nationality became increasingly popular, especially in the colonies.

A letter dated 26 October 1954 from the President of *the Comité de Défense des Intérêts Français de l’Inde Française*, a Pro-French group formed in the wake of the liberation of India from British rule, made a case for dual nationality, in the interests of the people “of Indian origin” who served France as soldiers and civil servants throughout the colonial period. They emphasized the importance of recognizing the long history of French citizenship in India, and the great sense of French nationalism amongst those French citizens of Indian origin who had fought for France during the two world wars. The letter reads,

A great number of French citizens of the Establishments are retirees, either military or civilian, in the care of the metropolitan budget. One of the conditions of these pensions is that they are dropped if the beneficiary loses their French nationality. All these brave men are therefore at risk of losing their civic rights by staying French, or their right to pension by accepting to become Indian. Moreover, most do not want to become Indian, but they would be equally sinful to deprive them of their civic rights. The only equitable solution will be a double nationality, which would be automatically enjoyed by all French citizens by birth or renunciation, natives of the Establishment, that they find in India at the moment of transfer or in some other country. It is indeed unacceptable not to think of all those who currently serve in Indochina or elsewhere who, sooner or

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<sup>29</sup> Géraud de la Pradelle, “Dual Nationality and the French Citizenship Tradition,” in Randall Hansen and Patrick Weil, eds., *Dual Nationality, Social Rights and Federal Citizenship in the U.S. and Europe: The Reinvention of Citizenship* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002): 192.

later, will be called to return to their native country. They can be treated there neither as outcasts nor as strangers.<sup>30</sup>

The desire for dual nationality was not limited to the people of French origin. It is important to note here that by 1954, Pondicherry had attracted international attention because of the growing popularity of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Although Aurobindo had passed away in 1950, the Mother continued to run the Ashram, and had begun to discuss plans for the construction of an “international township” called Auroville to be built just outside Pondicherry.<sup>31</sup> The Ashram housed hundreds of devotees, many whom were foreigners, originating from nations across Europe, as well as the United States. Many of them had been there for decades, and had benefitted from the French status of the territory, as well as the Mother’s relationship with the French colonial administration, and had avoided any interaction with the Indian state over issues of visas and passports. Unlike former French military officers of Indian origin or people of mixed French and Indian parentage, who were tied to both nations by threads of family and history, the people in the Ashram desired “double nationality” because they believed it was “an inevitable step in the evolution of human unity, a substantial contribution to the onward march of world interaction.”<sup>32</sup> While they had no familial or physical ties to India, they

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<sup>30</sup>« Un grand nombre de citoyens français des Établissements sont des retraités, soit militaires, soit civils, à la charge du budget métropolitain. Une des conditions de ces pensions est qu’elles tombent si la bénéficiaire perd sa nationalité française. Tous ces braves gens sont donc dans l’alternative de perdre leurs droits civiques en restant français, ou leur droit à pension en acceptant de devenir indiens. La plupart ne veulent d’ailleurs pas devenir indiens, mais il serait également inique de les priver de leurs droits civiques. La seule solution équitable serait une double nationalité, dont bénéficieraient automatiquement tous les citoyens français par naissance ou renonciation, originaires des Établissements, qu’ils trouvent dans l’Inde au moment du transfert ou dans une quelconque autre contrée. Il est, en effet, inadmissible de ne pas penser à tous ceux qui servent actuellement en Indochine ou ailleurs et qui, tôt ou tard, seront appelés à revenir au pays natal. Ils ne peuvent pas y être traités en parias, ni en étrangers. » MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from Comité de Défense des Intérêts Français de l’Inde Française to the Ministry of Overseas France, 26 October 1954.

<sup>31</sup> The construction of Auroville is the subject of Chapter 5, “Post-Colonial Crossings.”

<sup>32</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, 22 December 1954. The letter was signed by 6

felt that they belonged there, that India was their true home. In a letter sent to Prime Minister Nehru in December 1954, 6 Ashramites, including one Frenchman, one American, one Briton, and three Indians, asked Nehru to consider the possibility of dual nationality. They begin their plea by explaining that they are all on the staff of the Sri Aurobindo International University Centre, and would very much like to become Indian citizens, but would also like to retain their primary citizenships as well. They write that allowing dual nationality would be a great opportunity for India, as she could “make a pioneering advance in this area of international relations.”<sup>33</sup> The Ashram group included with their letter a report that they had compiled with supporting evidence on the benefits of allowing dual nationality. They argue that not only double nationality but also multiple nationalities were a fact of modern life, but had been denounced and ignored “in international affairs.”<sup>34</sup> The historical moment of

the merger of the French Settlements with the Indian Union provides a natural opportunity for a happy reciprocal agreement at this time by India. There are no doubt a large number of persons who would welcome an opportunity of exercising double nationality in furtherance of Indo-French amity.<sup>35</sup>

The final argument of the Ashramites lies in the visions of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who “saw dual or multiple citizenship as a substantial not merely a sentimental step towards world integration.”<sup>36</sup> They encourage India to “become all the more, not a ‘no-

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members of the Ashram, one French, another British, and the third American, and three Indian nationals: Barbier Saint-Hilaire (Pavitra), Norman Dowsett, Jay Holmes Smith, Nolini Kanta Gupta, Indra Sen, and K.D. Sethna.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, 22 December 1954: 2.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 3.

man's land' between hostile blocs in the Cold War, but an "everyman's land" in the vanguard of world citizenship for a new world order."<sup>37</sup>

In addition to petitioning the Indian and French governments for dual nationality, the Ashramites also sent editorials to French newspapers advocating for the passing of laws that would allow dual citizenship. The Frenchman Bernard Enginger (Satprem), a high level Ashramite who was very close to the Mother, had an editorial published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on 2 October 1954 that echoed the sentiment that dual nationality was the first step towards the elimination of national antagonism.

It seems, therefore, that a movement exists that is attempting to authorize, within certain categories of French nationals or even strangers settled in our Establishments, this claim to a dual nationality. Apart from the idealistic spirit which, very probably, inspires the leadership of the ASHRAM, more material considerations can act equally in favor of a system of dual nationality.<sup>38</sup>

The "international interests" of the people in the Ashram were at odds with the general population in the French-Indian colonies. The anti-colonial theorist and revolutionary Frantz Fanon wrote, in his important treatise against French colonialism in Algeria and the future of former colonies, *The Wretched of the Earth*, that the movement for dual citizenship was one example of the "liberal project" of "the intellectual who, for his part, has adopted the abstract, universal values of the colonizer" and is "prepared to fight so that colonist and colonized can live in peace in a new world."<sup>39</sup> As Fanon suggests, the dreams of post-colonial unity envisioned in the metropole as well as by Europeans in the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>38</sup> « Ils semble donc qu'il existe un mouvement tendant à accréditer chez certaines catégories de nationaux français ou même étrangers fixés dans nos Établissements cette revendication d'une double nationalité. En dehors de l'esprit idéaliste qui, très vraisemblablement, inspire les dirigeants de l'ASHRAM, des considérations plus matérielles peuvent agir également en faveur du système de la double nationalité. » MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, "Nationalité: Établissements Français de L'Inde," Report prepared by the Minister of Overseas France for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 23 February 1955.

<sup>39</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961): 9-10.

colonies was at odds with both the interests of the state as well as the population that had lived under the colonial system.<sup>40</sup>

While India and France both listened to the arguments of those advocating dual citizenship, neither was willing to offer it. Ostorog had made it clear that he thought dual nationality would only lead to future problems for France and was essentially a bad choice for any nation interested in protecting national interests.

Dual nationality would establish for its beneficiaries of the same regime the privilege of playing on both tables. Being able to apply simultaneously for Indian or French administrative careers, to enlist in one or the other army, in short to complain to the Indian about the French and to the French about the Indians, they would constitute a separate class, having the ability to resume in a new form the plots that have compromised the French regime and provoked such serious over the course of recent years. M. GOUBERT, deputy to the French Parliament, who crossed over to abruptly to the opposing camp, is an example of such behaviors. We have an interest in not favoring the support of it.<sup>41</sup>

Ostorog uses the “treason” of Goubert in 1953 to illustrate the danger of dual citizenship. Of course, Goubert was in the position he was in *because* he was a product of a colonial system that actively required him to choose between two national interests that were in conflict, that of France and that of India. During the colonial period, it was ordinary to think of the interests of French Indians, meaning the people who lived in French India, but the tensions of the post-colonial world turned figures like Goubert into traitors.

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<sup>40</sup> In the following chapter, I will show how the desire for “global citizenship,” illustrated here by the people in the Aurobindo Ashram, became a call for Westerners to migrate to India, a place they believed they could experiment with new forms of citizenship, community, and belonging.

<sup>41</sup> « La double nationalité établirait pour le bénéficiaires de pareil régime le privilège de jouer sur les deux tableaux. Pouvant postuler en même temps pour les carrières administratives indienne ou française, faire acte d’engagement dans l’une ou l’autre armée, enfin se plaindre aux Indiens des Français et aux Français des Indiens, ils constitueraient une classe à part ayant faculté de reprendre sous une forme nouvelle les intrigues qui ont compris le régime français et provoquée des difficultés si sérieuses au cours des années récentes. M. GOUBERT, député au Parlement français, qui passa si brusquement au camp adverse, est un exemple de pareils comportements. Nous avons intérêt à ne pas en favoriser le maintien. » MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from S. Ostorog to Daniel Mayer, President of the Commission of Foreign Affairs, 18 January 1955.

***Decolonial Rupture: The Period of Option***

Despite the many numerous concerns that French and Indian government officials had about offering everyone in French India the option to choose between French and Indian citizenship, by 1956, when the Treaty of Cession was made official, the decision had been made that the Treaty could not contain any discriminatory language and must include everyone. Pushing aside his doubts, Ostorog wrote in 1955,

Indeed whatever the nature of the act by which the renouncers have become French citizens, they will not be aware of being placed in a situation different than that of French citizens in full right. They must exercise their right of option if they wish to remain French, even if their families are natives of the metropole. No racial discrimination is conceivable in the matter.<sup>42</sup>

Accordingly, the Treaty was written without any reference to race or ethnicity. Articles 4 and 5 of the Treaty outlined the parameters of the option of citizenship that would take effect when the National Assembly in Paris ratified the Treaty:

Article 4: French nationals born in the territory of the Establishments and domiciled herein at the date of the entry into force of the Treaty of Cession shall become nationals and citizens of the Indian Union, with the exceptions enumerated under Article V hereafter.

Article V: The persons referred to in the previous article may, by means of a written declaration drawn up within six months of the entry into force of the Treaty of Cession, choose to retain their nationality. Persons availing themselves of this right shall be deemed never to have acquired Indian nationality. The declaration of the father or, if the latter be deceased, of the mother, and in the event of the decease of both parents, of the legal guardian shall determine the nationality of unmarried children of under 18 years of age. Such children shall be mentioned in the aforesaid declaration. But married male children of over 16

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<sup>42</sup> « Quelle que soit en effet la nature de l'acte par lequel les renonçants sont devenus des citoyens français, ils ne sauraient être placés dans une situation différente de celle des citoyens français de plein droit. Ceux-ci devront faire exercice de leur droit d'option s'ils veulent rester français, même si leurs familles sont originaires de la Métropole. Aucune discrimination de race n'est concevable en la matière. » MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from S. Ostorog to Monsieur Armand Gandon, Representant Français, 18 March 1955.

years of age shall be entitled to make this choice themselves. Persons having retained French nationality by reason of a decision of their parents, as indicated in the previous paragraph, may make a personal choice with the object of acquiring Indian nationality by means of a declaration signed in the presence of the competent Indian authorities, within six months of attaining their eighteenth birthday. The said choice shall come into force as from the date of signature of the declaration.<sup>43</sup>

Beginning on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1962, the people of French India would have 6 months, until 15 February 1963, to submit the appropriate documentation to receive French citizenship. While the citizenship clauses in the Treaty of Cession were written in a language meant to showcase how committed both France and India were to the will of the people, many issues faced the populations of French India during the period of option. For those who were born French (of French national parents, many who had one or two parents of Indian origin) but had lived their whole lives in India, if they were to remain in India, they would become foreigners on the only land they had ever known. The only other option for those wishing to remain French was to migrate to France, a decision that would require uprooting entire families, moving half way across the world, and finding a job, a home, and a community in a new country. Needless to say, this was a very difficult decision for most people to make.

Emile Appavou was born in Pondicherry in 1944.<sup>44</sup> His family had been French nationals for several generations, and he grew up attending French schools. He remembers that in school he was taught about French history, not Indian history, and thus knew very little about India, despite his Tamil ethnicity. Although he learned Tamil and

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<sup>43</sup> Treaty between the Republic of France and India establishing cession by the French Republic to the Indian Union of the French Establishments in India; Text taken from Animesh Rai, *The Legacy of French Rule in India (1674-1954): An Investigation of a Process of Creolization* (Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, 2008): Appendix I, 200-210.

<sup>44</sup> Emile Appavou, "PONDICHERY, En 1962, on n'imaginait pas que d'un seul coup, Pondichéry serait abandonné et cédé à l'Union Indienne.." Oral history collected by Frederic Praud. <http://www.parolesdhommesetdefemmes.fr/pondichery-en-1962-on-n-imaginait-pas-que-d-un-seul-coup-pondichery-serait-abandonne-et-cede-a-l-union-indienne-article00319.html>. Accessed 10 September 2012.

French, he used French more often. He remembers how he felt, as a child of 14 years old, in 1962 when the French prepared to leave India for good:

In 1962, one would not imagine that just like that, Pondicherry would be abandoned and ceded to the Indian Union. At that moment, it was therefore necessary to make a choice. A good many people like me asked themselves if by remaining, they would have to retrain! We had known French instruction, we had been French speaking and from then on, it was the reign of English! It was necessary to turn back! And so even if it was difficult, my friends and I chose to leave. Those who had the means went to finish their studies in France, and I decided to enlist in the French army.<sup>45</sup>

Appavou opted for French nationality, along with his parents and six siblings. He had one sibling who chose Indian citizenship – this brother decided to stay in Pondicherry as an English teacher, and was separated from his family when they moved to France. In his writings, Appavou claimed that everyone who wanted to remain French was forced to leave India and move to France. While this is not technically true, Appavou was not the only migrant who felt that this was the only choice for French nationals. The people in French India that desired French status began to realize the obstacles they would face as they considered remaining in India as juridical foreigners. French-Indians of Indian origin wondered how the Indian government would treat them if they remained in India, especially since the many of them had lived under the restrictions of the Indian state placed on Pondicherry to pressure the French to leave.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Appavou, “En 1962, on imaginait pas que d’un seul coup, Pondichéry serait abandonné et cédé à l’Union Indienne. Á ce moment-là, il fallait donc faire un choix. Pas mal de gens comme moi se demandaient si en restant, ils devraient se recycler ! Nous avons connu l’enseignement français, nous étions francophones et désormais, c’était le règne de l’anglais ! Il fallait revenir en arrière ! Alors même si c’était difficile, mes camarades et moi avons choisi de partir. Ceux qui avaient les moyens sont allés terminer leurs études en France et moi, j’ai décidé de m’engager dans l’armée française. »

<sup>46</sup> Miles, *Imperial Burdens*, 45.

While the Indian government was not immediately forthcoming with information about this, there were hints of what life would be like as a French citizen in a post-colonial French India. One glimpse into the future of life in the region came from the continued travel restrictions and border checks that had made daily life difficult during the colonial era. In addition, they would have to conform to the regulations set by the Indian state for foreigners living in India: they would need to obtain the necessary visas for residence, register with the police, and obtain various permits of residence from the Indian state.<sup>47</sup> There was also widespread anxiety that Pondicherry would be incorporated into the surrounding state of Tamil Nadu, and would lose any autonomy that it had gained as an entity separate from the neighboring areas.<sup>48</sup> This was especially troubling for civil servants who spoke neither Hindi nor English, the two official government languages of the Indian state.<sup>49</sup> In addition, there was no guarantee that the Indian government would continue to allow foreigners to remain in India.<sup>50</sup>

The difficulties of migration prevented many people in French India from choosing this option – they simply could not afford, economically or socially, to be French. Others were excluded from declaring French citizenship by the number of documents required by the French Government to prove your right to declare French

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<sup>47</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie, Inde Française, Carton 79, Dossier Questions judiciaires, Letter from K.S. Matthews, Secretary General of the Cabinet of the High Commissioner, Pondicherry, to Armand Gandon, Représentant Français, 12 February 1955.

<sup>48</sup> Weber, *Pondichéry, et les comptoirs*, 404.

<sup>49</sup> Nehru assured the people in Pondicherry that French would remain the primary language in government until the people decided otherwise. By 1965, the Legislative Assembly of Pondicherry had decided that English, Tamil, Malayalam (in Karikal and Mahé), and Telegu (in Yanam), would be official languages. French was hardly spoken by government workers by this time. David Annoussamy, “The Merger of French India,” in K.S. Mathew, ed., *French in India and Indian Nationalism: (1700-1963)* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corp, 1999): 580-1.

<sup>50</sup> The Government of India did eventually grant the French nationals of Indian origin who resided in the Union Territory of Pondicherry the right to live as Indian citizens, removing the need to follow the regulations placed on resident foreigners, this was not known at the time of option.

citizenship, including, for instance, the birth certificate of your grandfather.<sup>51</sup> Some Pondichérians have claimed that French officials at the Consulate discouraged people from opting for France on the spot.<sup>52</sup> As Sophie Dassaranayadou has written, “the negotiations took place without the knowledge of the key stakeholders, and the most humble populations were kept ignorant” of the option.<sup>53</sup> Outside of the center of Pondicherry, no one even knew that they had an option.<sup>54</sup> The eminent historian of French India, Jacques Weber, has noted that neither the French nor the Indian governments did much to advertise the option, as the Indian state did not want to encourage people to leave any more than the French authorities wanted to encourage a wave of migration to France.<sup>55</sup> By the final day of option, 4,944 adults had submitted their written declarations to the French Consulate in Pondicherry; including the children of parents who opted, 7,106 people declared their French citizenship during the six-month period, about 2% of the population. The remaining 368,000 residents of French India became Indian nationals, ending their relationship with the French state.<sup>56</sup>

In his book on French India, *Imperial Burdens: Countercolonialism in Former French India*, William F.S. Miles argues that France has been burdened with the continued citizenship requests of French Indians, and the incorporation of French Indians into France, a price that France has paid “for her colonial ambivalence” born of the paradoxical idea of equality, the foundation of the French Republic, and the practice of

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<sup>51</sup> Sophie Lakshmi Dassaranayadou, “Tamouls indiens: de Pondichéry à la France” *Hommes & Migrations* 1268-69 (2007): 71.

<sup>52</sup> Miles, *Imperial Burdens*, 45.

<sup>53</sup> Dassaranayadou, 71.

<sup>54</sup> Miles, *Imperial Burdens*, 45.

<sup>55</sup> Jacques Weber, *Pondichéry et la comptoirs*, 404.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

colonial rule.<sup>57</sup> Miles' argument suggests that the former colonial subjects of French India have forced France to pay for her colonial sins, signified by the continued presence of French Indians in France and the continued requests for citizenship, based on the 1956 Treaty of Cession, into the present day. The flow of post-colonial migrants into France in the post-war period has certainly led to the notion that France has been made to sully a racially homogenous population with the incorporation of non-white colonial bodies into the general populace as a result of decolonization. In the remainder of the chapter, and into the following chapter, I will examine how decolonization effected the populations and geography of the French-Indian colonies, by following the French-Indian migrants to Paris, and then, in Chapter 5, examining how Western ideas of global unity and utopian dreams landed in Pondicherry in the aftermath of the decolonial rupture.

### *From tourist to migrant*

Many Pondichérians who migrated to France following the *de jure* transfer of French India to India in 1962 have commented on the racialization they faced when they reached France. It became clear to many of them upon reaching France that French Indians were not considered “French French,” as their brown skin precluded their inclusion in the White space of metropolitan France.<sup>58</sup> Emile Appavou, the Pondichérian who moved to France in 1963, noted that when in Pondicherry, he felt French, and all his friends were French. He writes that he “hardly knew any Indians.”<sup>59</sup> However, once he joined the French Air Force, his fellow airmen would often ask, “where are you from, and

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<sup>57</sup> Miles, *Imperial Burdens*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Appavou, “PONDICHERY.”

what are you doing here?”<sup>60</sup> While Appavou would quickly respond, “I am French! I am from Pondicherry, which was once part of France!” the others would not understand how he could be French. He wrote, “Most people like me, who also came from Pondicherry, had a very hard time.” Eventually Appavou and his wife, who was also from Pondicherry, moved to the village of Sarcelles<sup>61</sup>, in the northern suburbs of Paris, where other people from Pondicherry had settled. According to Appavou, in Sarcelles they were able to make other French-Indian friends who understood their French identity, although he was disappointed to live so far from the center of Paris.<sup>62</sup>

Appavou’s remembrances echo a sort of existential homelessness felt by many in post-colonial diasporic communities.<sup>63</sup> It was common, in the period of migration following the option, for French-Indian migrants in France to express their dismay at being seen as not-French, despite their belief, when they left India, that French society would accept them more readily than Indian society. While the racialized discourses of the nation that “constructed people of African and Asian descent as being outside the ‘nation’”<sup>64</sup> were quite common in post-colonial England, France claimed to be colorblind, a notion that was promoted in the colonies through the granting of citizenship rights to colonial subjects in India. In order to look closely at the history of French Indians migrating to France, we must first ask ourselves how race and ethnicity were understood in this particular time and in these particular places. While it is easy to see the many differences between the French and Indian governments when it came to managing racial

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Sarcelles was also a primary spot of resident for the *pied-noirs* who came to France after the end of the war in Algeria in 1962.

<sup>62</sup> Appavou, “PONDICHERY.”

<sup>63</sup> Andrea L. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>64</sup> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (New York: Routledge, 1996): 3.

categories and ethnic divisions because of their geographic locations and recent histories, the two Republics shared an important ideology during this time period: both nation-states endorsed a color-blind approach to governance, the color often blinded by a discourse of secularism. One of the foundational beliefs of the Republic, that all citizens should be equal before the state, means that the state has to engage in actively managing and policing citizens to ensure that equality amongst the people is maintained. When the state refuses to recognize “race” as a policy of color-blind governance, there is a divide between how the state defines difference within the population and how the public sphere, separate from the government, understands these same differences. As an imperial power, France had gained millions of non-white subjects throughout the world, many of whom found their way to France at some point during the colonial era. The number of non-white laborers in France dramatically increased during the interwar years, a moment that, as Tyler Stovall has argued, redefined notions of whiteness and French identity in the metropole.<sup>65</sup> As many scholars have argued in the case of France, avoiding the use of racial categories never eliminated racism in France, but has instead led to the racialization of certain populations, such as immigrants, laborers, linguistic groups, and religions.<sup>66</sup>

India was established as a Republic when the constitution came into effect on 26 January 1950. The Indian Republic was established as a secular and a democratic state, ready to show their former colonizers that India was more than capable of self-rule and modernization. While the newly born Indian Republic faced deep issues as it sought to

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<sup>65</sup> Tyler Stovall, “National Identity and Shifting Imperial Frontiers: Whiteness and the Exclusion of Colonial Labor After World War I,” *Representations* 84 (2003).

<sup>66</sup> On the issue of race in France see the edited volume Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003).

bring dozens of linguistic groups, ethnic identities, caste divisions, religious groups, and cultural communities together in the name of the national cause, race remained an issue of colonialism. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has written, as the Indian government went about creating special voting rights and political seat reservations for low-caste groups and expressing concern over continued “communal violence,” the question of racism was relegated to the past, to a colonial practice that pitted the white colonizer against the brown colonized subject.<sup>67</sup> Unlike the racism of colonialism, perpetuated by *outside sources* foreign to South Asia, “what Indians do to one another is variously described as *communalism, regionalism, and casteism, but never as racism.*”<sup>68</sup>

Despite the efforts of the French and Indian governments to circumvent discussions of race in their official discourses, Pondicherry remained divided into “White Town” and “Black Town,” a linguistic marker of the history of racial segregation. As I previously argued, the lack of a strong white-European community in Pondicherry elevated the importance of the *métis* population of French India, a situation well understood by the French colonial administration. As discussions about the future of the people of French India progressed in the post-1954 period, it seemed obvious to French officials that the *métis* would choose to leave India and settle in France, a situation they felt they would be able to deal with, as the majority of the *métis* understood the French language and culture. The real problem for French authorities was the possibility of the migration of the non-*métis* French Indians, most of whom they believed would not be able to assimilate, and would thus become a burden on the French state and the French people. It was imperative to convince the people of French India that each person should

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<sup>67</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Governmental Roots of Modern Ethnicity,” in *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press: 2002).

<sup>68</sup> Chakrabarty, “Governmental Roots,” 82.

chose to belong to their “true homeland.” While the French were willing, in this case, to adopt the *métis* who they admit may feel more comfortable in France than in independent India, French Indians who were not mixed-race belonged in India.

Until the 20-century, there were few South Asians who had settled in France permanently. Under the *ancien regime*, South Asians in France were classified as “gens de couleur,” a designation that makes it difficult to distinguish them from the much larger population that had come to France from Africa. Some of these early migrants came as domestic servants, travelling with *colon* families that were returning from the French-Indian *comptoirs*, while others were sailors, merchants, or *grands bourgeois*.<sup>69</sup> Outside of these small populations of South Asians living in France, upper class South Asians were not strangers to travel in Europe by the turn of the twentieth-century. In fact, many South Asians who studied and traveled in Europe wrote travel memoirs and guidebooks about major European cities, most often London and Paris, detailing their observations of European culture, society, and “civilization.”<sup>70</sup> The writing of travel memoirs was so common by the end of the nineteenth-century that one author, Romesh Chunder Dutt, who penned *Three Years in Europe, 1868 to 1871*, suggested to his editor that there was no need for a new edition of his book as “it is an old story now...many of my countrymen have travelled in Europe, and know all about Europe.”<sup>71</sup> Perhaps understanding the

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<sup>69</sup> Catherine Sevrans-Schreiber and Vasoodeven Vuddamalay, “Les étapes de la présence indienne en France,” *Hommes & Migrations* 1268(2007): 10-11.

<sup>70</sup> On South Asian travel writing on Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, see Antoinette Burton, “Making a Spectacle of Empire: Indian Travelers in Fin-de-Siècle London” *History Workshop Journal* 42 (1996).

<sup>71</sup> R.C. Dutt, *Three Years in Europe, 1868 to 1871, with an Account of Subsequent Visits to Europe in 1886 and 1893*. Calcutta: S.K. Lahiri & Co. , 1896: iv.

economic appeal of publishing travel stories, the Calcutta based editor replied, “it may be an old story, but none the less interesting to us.”<sup>72</sup>

Dutt and his companions arrived in Paris on 15 August 1871, during the period immediately following the end of the Franco-Prussian War, and perhaps more significantly to Dutt, the siege of Paris and the fall of the Paris Commune. Dutt remarks that it was a shame that the “rising of the communists have caused a great deal of injury to the town,” destroying many symbols of the grandeur of Paris, such as the *hotel de ville*.<sup>73</sup> After several days of seeing the Louvre, the *Arc de Triomphe*, and imbibing many cups of coffee and “glasses of liquor,” Dutt was surprised when a police officer approached him at the train station in Versailles and asked to see his passport. Instead of simply examining it and letting him go, he asked them to follow him to the “guard house” for further questioning. “I believe our foreign costume had aroused his suspicions!” exclaimed Dutt by way of explanation, suggesting that the police officer “took [them] for communists!”<sup>74</sup> The guards arrested the men on the basis of being “strangers without proper papers,” despite the fact that the men carried passports with the appropriate visa from the French consulate. Dutt wrote that the guard “treated the passport with contempt and peremptorily demanded proof of our identity!” Despite their various papers, and over many objections from the travelers, they were “locked up for the night in a miserable cell” and kept there for twelve hours.<sup>75</sup> After they were released the men spent some amount of time attempting to report their improper detention to the authorities, with little

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., iv.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 86.

success. Dutt finally commented, “We were fortunate that we were not tried and shot on mere suspicion, as many an innocent man has been in these dark days!”<sup>76</sup>

Dutt’s “unfortunate adventure,” nestled in-between descriptions of the gardens at Versailles and the landscape of Belgium, served as a cautionary tale to his readers about the dangers associated with travel. As a South Asian, one could, with the right credentials and sufficient wealth, see the wonders of Europe. However, being South Asian meant looking different than those around you, because of both skin tone and dress, and put you in danger of imprisonment, or as Dutt noted, even death. Dutt was a tourist, economically well off, with the skills and the money and to spend several years touring Europe. Yet, he was treated as a potential criminal by the French authorities. While Dutt’s temporary status as a tourist sets him apart from the migrant, both groups shared the common experience of being the subjects of xenophobic policies and societal norms.

What separates a tourist from a migrant? Perhaps the most obvious distinguishing marker between the two is the length of time spent in the location that is not home: tourists are temporary visitors, whereas migrants are long-term, potentially permanent, residents. As a tourist, one is usually considered a foreigner, as someone who is outside the nation, but will soon depart and thus does not pose a threat to that nation itself. Today, tourists are often welcomed, in most cases, with open arms by local residents eager to accept the tourist’s money. Visitors, or outsiders, who arrive without money and with no intention to leave quickly are, on the other hand, treated as threats to the safety and the livelihood of the people who live in the particular space entered by the migrant. Tourism is, of course, a modern phenomenon, the idea of “mass tourism” arising in the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 87.

mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of agencies such as Thomas Cook in London that arranged group and package tours, largely for a growing middle class. Post-Colonial migration, on the other hand, was not an industry invented for a leisure class, but is instead a foundational element of human life, elevated for colonial subjects who became the primary laborers sent to fill guest work programs when the needs of European industry could not be met with local populations.

Romesh Chunder Dutt, who saw himself as *legitimate* tourist, with the proper papers and economic means to travel for several years without working, found that he was not always treated in the way that he thought his background afforded him while in Europe. At first, Dutt's experience stands out as an anomaly of the South Asian experience in France. As Catherine Servan-Schreiber and Vasoodeven Vuddamalay wrote, in nineteenth and twentieth-century France, India evoked positive reactions from the population at large, as Orientalist art and literature had created an appreciation for the "old civilizations of India" as well as the embodiment of spirituality.<sup>77</sup> For centuries, French intellectuals, *philosophes*, journalists, writers, artists, and travelers spoke and wrote of an enchanted land, rich with history, philosophy, myth, and material luxuries ready to be exported.<sup>1</sup> While the fascination with South Asia was certainly not free of value judgments in comparison to Western civilization, India held an admirable place in the hierarchy of foreign cultures and peoples.<sup>78</sup> By the late nineteenth-century, it was not uncommon for upper class Indians to travel to France, as tourists and as students, and many of them found a warm welcome from the metropolitan French, albeit a welcome

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<sup>77</sup> Servan-Schreiber and Vuddamalay, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Kate Marsh, *India in the French Imagination: Peripheral Voices, 1754-1815* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009); Jackie Assayag, *L'Inde fabuleuse: le charme discret de l'exotisme français (xviiie – xxe siècle)* (Paris: Editions Kimé, 1999).

that was contingent on a continuous performance of South Asian identity.<sup>79</sup> Tourists and students that travelled to France with the overt objective of studying the greatness of French culture and civilization, and in return shared their knowledge of Indian culture and civilization, and promised eventually to return to the place from which they came, were generally rewarded with a friendly and curious, if paternalistic, reception in France. However if these tourists and/or students stepped outside the boundaries of their perceived identity, they were treated with suspicion and the threat of deportation.

As the 20<sup>th</sup>-century progressed and increasing numbers of colonial migrants (mostly North African) made their way to France as laborers, the image and place of South Asians in France began to change. The transition of South Asians in France from tourists to immigrants, as the end of empire and the period of decolonization caused attitudes towards non-white visitors to the metropole to change. The post-war period had brought tens of thousands of North African laborers to France, and by 1962, as the war in Algeria was coming to an end, hundreds of thousands of *pied-noirs* or European-Algerians fled Algeria and settled in France. Both groups of migrants originating from the former colonies, whether of North African background or *pied-noirs* were unwelcome in many sectors of French society. While South Asians were generally not seen as a threat to the fabric of French society, the general level of xenophobia rising throughout France in the post-war period created an atmosphere of uncertainty in French-Indian migrant communities. In the remainder of this section, I will show how South Asian migrants from the former colonies adopted “traditional” Indian identities in France in order to

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<sup>79</sup> While students and tourists represent distinct groups, in this time period, they were the two groups that experienced Europe as temporary residents. More often than not, South Asian students in France spent a significant time travelling throughout Europe as a part of their wider studies, creating a similar experience to the non-student South Asian tourist.

capitalize on the French fascination with India, especially in the 1960s, when Western popular culture began to fetishize “Hindu practices” such as yoga, and South Asian music and fashion were incorporated into “hippie culture.”<sup>80</sup>

French Indians who traveled to Europe were often confronted with the most common stereotypes and representations of India familiar to the local populations. A Pondichérien who called himself Belvis traveled to Europe in 1954 and reported in *Le Trait d'Union* that in Italy, everyone remarked to him that they thought all Indians had a large beard and a turban, and in Spain, people told him that they were under the impression that Pondicherry was an island. It was in France, however, that the author came face to face with the reality that the people with whom he shared a nation thought of him as an exotic artifact from the colonies. His commentary on his time in Paris is as follows,

In Paris, at a show, in the metro, as soon as someone learns that the person speaking is a gentleman from Pondicherry, there's great amazement. *Pondicherry! The Indies!* Then, like music, the reciting beings. *Pondicherry, Karikal, Mahé and Yanaon.* The gentleman from Pondicherry does not know how to answer this litany. *You know a bit about our territory. You have perhaps read something...No sir, but it's a memory from primary school.*

Then a woman to add: *Pondicherry, India! The land of yogis and fakirs, of tigers and serpents, of temples and palm trees!* And point-blank, a student who will earn his degree in July asks me: “*You must be an astrologer. Tell me if I will pass my exam this time*” I try to dodge: “*I don't have everything necessary for this study, but I can tell you that you have good luck.*”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> The Beatles fascination with India is one example of the incorporation of South Asian culture into Western culture, and issue that will be explored more in-depth in Chapter 5, “Post-Colonial Crossings.”

<sup>81</sup> A Paris, au spectacle, au métro, dès qu'on apprend que l'interlocuteur est un monsieur de Pondichéry, c'est le grand étonnement. *Pondichéry ! Les Indes !* Puis comme une musique la récitation commence. *Pondichéry, Karikal, Mahé, et Yanaon.* Le monsieur de Pondichéry ne sait plus que répondre à cette litanie. *Vous connaissez un peu notre territoire. Vous avez peut-être lu quelque chose... Non, Monsieur, mais c'est un souvenir de l'école primaire.*

Puis une dame de renchérir : *Pondichéry les Indes ! le pays des yogis et des fakirs, des tigrés et des serpents, des temples et des cocotiers !* Et à brûle pourpoint une étudiants qui affronts sa licence en juillet me demande : « *Vous êtes certainement astrologue. Dites moi si je passerai mon examen cette foi.* »

Unlike in the other countries this young Pondichérien visited, people in France generally knew that Pondicherry was related to France through the Empire. However, Belvis also found that he was confronted with a laundry list of stereotypes on India common throughout his travels, from snakes to yogis to coconuts. The popular images of India in the French imagination were not of their fellow citizens living in the colonies, but instead repetitions of stereotypes common throughout Western culture.

Migrants from Pondichéry and the other *comptoirs*, many of whom had been naturalized French citizens for decades and chose to retain their French citizenship following the transfer of the colonies from France to India, found themselves migrating to France amongst a storm of anti-immigrant sentiment, racialization of migrant bodies and communities, and the continued whitewashing of French citizenship. Although there was a South Asian community in France prior to the cession of the French territories in India, the first wave of migration from the *comptoirs* was in 1956, after the Treaty of Cession became official.<sup>82</sup> The majority of French Indians came to Paris in 1962, after the Treaty was ratified and decisions about citizenship were made.<sup>83</sup> Today, it is difficult to know how many French Indians live in France, because the French census (*Recensement général de la population*) only recognizes ethnic distinctions based on the country of origin of non-French nationals: because migrants from the former colonies were French nationals, often from birth, they are counted as part of the non-migrant population. Still,

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*J'essaie d'esquiver* : « Je n'ai pas tous ce qu'il faut pour cette étude, mais je puis vous dire que vous avez de la chance. » Belvis, "Pondichéry?" *Le Trait-d'Union*, May 1955, 1.

<sup>82</sup> According to an article in *The Hindustan Times*, there were about 50 Indians living in France in 1947. Reprinted in Gopaljee Sambo, *Les Comptoirs Français dans l'Inde Nouvelle (de la compagnie des Indes a nos jours)* (Paris: Fasquelle Editeurs, 1950): 171.

<sup>83</sup> Dassaranayadou, "Tamouls indiens," 69.

researchers have estimated that out of a population of over 100,000 South Asians living in France, almost 50,000 have connections to the former colonies.<sup>84</sup>

The reception of migrants from the French-Indian colonies in France was conditioned by the presence of a small but visible Indian community in Paris. Prior to 1940, there were about 300 Indians living in France – while some were involved in the jewel trade, many were Indian nationalists, refugees from British India.<sup>85</sup> The majority of the Indians in France left in 1940, after the French government surrendered to Germany.<sup>86</sup> Following the war, and the liberation of France, the Indian community emerged once more, although in even smaller numbers. The first *association* formed by the Indian community in post-war France was the *Association de l'Inde en France* (AIF), presided over by Dr. Gopaljee Samboo, founded in 1946.<sup>87</sup> Professor Georges Paillet, the Vice-President of the Comité France-Inde in February of 1950, spoke of the goals of both organizations, stating that they would “endeavor to inform French opinion, through publications, conferences and meetings, and cinema.” Paillet went on to say that he was “confident that the Hindu intellectuals who come to study in France” would maintain in their country the friendship that many of their compatriots have already experienced.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> See Dassaranayadou, “Tamouls indiens,”; Christine Moliner, “Indian Migrants in France: Country Report,” CARIM-India RR2012/11, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute, 2012.

<sup>85</sup> See Chapter 2 of this work for a discussion of British Indians in France in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>86</sup> Samboo, *Les Comptoirs*, 150. Samboo also claims that all the British Indians who were present in France in 1940 were sent to “German concentration camps.” Samboo does not provide any evidence for this, but it is an interesting proposition.

<sup>87</sup> Samboo, *Les Comptoirs*, 148-9. Earlier in the century, in 1920, the small community of Indians in Paris had founded the Association Sociale et Commerciale Hindou, which served as a sort of refuge and meeting place for the many political figures who traveled through Europe during the interwar years. The inauguration of the Association de l'Inde en France took place on 12 December 1946 – a month later, on 16 January 1947, Comité France-Inde was also established.

<sup>88</sup> Extract of speech given by Georges Paillet at the Palais de Chaillot on 4 February 1950. Samboo, *Les Comptoirs*, 153.

In May of 1954, Samboo wrote an essay, published in the AIF newsletter *France-Inde*, which provided details of the “Indian community in France.” In 1954, Samboo estimated that there were about 100 Indians living permanently in France.<sup>89</sup> He added to that number another 120 students -- 80 in Paris, 30 in Montpellier, and a handful in Bordeaux -- as well as a “floating population” of tourists, who did not really interact with the Indian community in France. The small number of Indians in France at this time allowed Samboo to gather them all together and engage in community building activities, which included regular meetings and dinners, receptions for high-ranking government officials, including Jawaharlal Nehru, ambassadors, and UN officials, as well as cultural programs of Indian dance performances, and lectures by Indologists on topics such as contemporary Indian literature, the life and philosophy of M.K. Gandhi, the works of Romain Rolland, and Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>90</sup> One of the primary goals of the AFI was to create relationships between Indians in France and French people who were interested in India, in order to “form links to restore the long Franco-Indian chain” that were “momentarily broken.”<sup>91</sup> Samboo insisted that the group was composed of sincere anti-colonialists, both French and Indian, who desired a solution to the problem of French colonies in India that would be favorable to both countries.<sup>92</sup> In fact, the Comité France-Inde did include many non-Indian French nationals, including Jean Rous, at one time secretary general of the “Congrès des Peuples contre l’Impérialisme,” Jules Bloch, Professor and member of the Institut de Civilisation indienne (housed at the Sorbonne),

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<sup>89</sup> Gopaljee Samboo, “La communauté Indienne en France,” *France-Inde*, 6 May 1954.

<sup>90</sup> For a complete list of activities sponsored by the AFI and the Comité France-Inde from 1946-1950, see Samboo, *Les Comptoirs Français*, 172-177.

<sup>91</sup> “forment des maillons indispensables dans le rétablissement de la longue chaîne franco-indienne, momentanément rompue.” Samboo, *Les Comptoirs*, 143.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

Krishnan Menon, High Commissioner in London, and an assortment of other professors and intellectuals affiliated with the Musée Guimet, a museum that showcased Asian art and artifacts.<sup>93</sup>

Samboo and the members of the Comité France-Inde believed that while the colonial power held by France in India was outdated and should end, it would be easy for France and India to separate the history of colonialism from their post-colonial relationship.<sup>94</sup> In 1955, after the *de facto* transfer had been set into motion, Samboo wrote in the *Trait-d'Union* that the friendship between France and India in the process of decolonization would be “remembered by history.”<sup>95</sup> Samboo argued that while the discussion of colonialism may bring forth memories of racism, Indians have always been welcome in France, as French laws have protected all people in France from the social ills of racism and xenophobia.<sup>96</sup> He noted that France had served as a refuge for Indian nationalists wanted by the British government<sup>97</sup>, a sort of distorted truth encouraged by the French state to improve their image against the imperial atrocities of the British. The literature of the AFI stressed the great importance of the friendship between France and India, which Samboo made clear, would be necessary for Indians to prosper in France. The mission of the AFI, regularly printed in newsletter *France-Inde*, was to “better understand India in France and France in India,” because while “France is a country of liberal and universalist tradition; India is the source of spiritual unity.” The AFI believed that France and India were complimentary, that when they worked together, the “two

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 151, 169. See <http://www.guimet.fr/fr/> for more on the Musée Guimet.

<sup>94</sup> Gopaljee Samboo, “Le message tolerance de l’Inde, *Trait d’Union*, November 1955, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Samboo, “Le message,” 5.

<sup>96</sup> Samboo, *Les Comptoirs*, 148.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 148.

civilizations are complete.”<sup>98</sup> The mission of the AFI, to bring together the universal Republicanism of France with the spirituality of India, was of course a familiar trope, popular in the media and the academy, which separated the logical, modern West from the spiritual and ancient East. The AFI and the Comité France-Inde fully embraced the two cultures thesis promoted by the French and Indian governments, and the associations were rewarded for their support with visits from dignitaries, including Prime Minister Nehru, and many visiting ambassadors and intellectuals.

The existence of French-Indian cultural associations became increasingly important to the Pondichérien population in France throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as the population of South Asians in France rapidly increased, and diversified. The appearance in France of over 50,000 Pakistanis, Indo-Mauritians, and somewhere between 80,000 -10,000 Tamil Sri Lankans fleeing the Civil War, displaced Pondichériens as the primary group of South Asians in France.<sup>99</sup> Sri Lankan Tamils have become the most visible working-class group of South Asians, while the growing population has led to the creation of a multitude of new associations for Indians in France, including the IPA (Indian Professional Association), the GOPIO (Global Organization for People of Indian Origin), and the EIEBIG (Euro-India Economic & Business Group), populated by a thriving South Asian business class.<sup>100</sup> A recent report on South Asians in France notes that for the most part, South Asians are considered a “model minority,” and notably, in comparison to South Asian immigration to neighboring England, “invisible.”<sup>101</sup> Just as the historian Vijay Prashad has argued that South Asians

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<sup>98</sup> *France-Inde*, September 1955.

<sup>99</sup> Servan-Schreiber & Vuddamalya, 17.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Christine Moliner, « Invisible et modèle ? Première approche de l’immigration

in America have been used as a model minority by the state to “show up rebellious blacks for their attempts to redress power relations,” the model minority status of South Asians in France stands in strong opposition to the image of North African, particularly Muslim, migrants who are viewed as a danger to the stability of the French state.<sup>102</sup> The Indian cultural associations, run by French-Indians with links to the former colonies, helped promote the interests of the Indian and French states, interests based on the idealization and friendship of two “classic civilizations” that buried the history of French colonial interests in South Asia, while also distinguishing French-Indians from other post-colonial migrants in France, which has earned French-Indians, as well as other South Asians, a privileged model-minority status within French society.

### ***Embodied Nationalism, Embodied Colonialism***

The primary frustration expressed by Pondichérian migrants in Paris was, and remains, that the French do not understand that they, too, are French. The concept of extending citizenship to colonized populations did not translate into acceptance once the Empire was dissolved and the subjects came “home.” In fact, the decision made by people of Indian origin to retain or adopt French citizenship made people, both in France and in India, extremely uncomfortable, and has resulted in the widespread construction of this population as somehow laying outside either nation. Since the final merger of French India into India in 1962, there has been a notable amount of hostility, in both France and India, directed towards the Pondichérian community, in Paris and Pondicherry. The population of French nationals of Indian origin in Pondicherry today, which numbers

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sud- asiatique en France », Rapport d'étude pour la Direction de l'Accueil, de l'Intégration et de la Citoyenneté, MIINDS, septembre 2009.

<sup>102</sup> Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000): 7.

around 15,000<sup>103</sup>, has consistently been constructed and stereotyped as lazy, materialistic, opportunistic, and perhaps at the root, generally out of tune with the general population, vestiges of the colonial past. The media, as well as numerous academic studies, claim that no one particularly respects the choice to choose France over India - it is seen as an act of desperation, of greed, or of both.

In 1989, the Calcutta based newspaper *Sunday* ran a story that referred to the Pondichérien population as “The Nowhere People.”<sup>104</sup> The author of the article, a cynical on-looker from the Bengali north, begins by stating that “the Tamils in Pondicherry who opted for French citizenship now find they belong to neither France nor to India.”<sup>105</sup> Assumedly speaking for India, this journalist, Monideepa Banerjie denies the Pondichériens entry into the Indian community, on the basis of their French nationality and their inability to speak English, while at the same time, ridiculing them for not being *really* French: “They may have never visited France, may speak at best a pidgin French and imbibe Bordeaux wines with the same gusto as *rasam* and *sambhar*, but address them in English, leave alone Hindi, and the shrug of the shoulders is so eloquent, it would put a white Frenchman to shame.”<sup>106</sup> Banerjie creates a connection with the white French population by claiming that despite the Pondichériens’ (who she calls “French Tamils”) great desire to be French, “neither the sizable white French population living in Pondicherry nor the Indians think” that they are. In addition, she suggests that white French people were uninterested in the Pondichériens because they were not *real Indians*.

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<sup>103</sup> Servan-Schreiber & Vuddamalay, 16.

<sup>104</sup> Monideepa Banerjie, “The Nowhere People,” *The Sunday Review* (Calcutta), 4 April 1989, 78-79.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* Rasam and sambhar are traditional South Indian soups.

Towards the end of the article, Banerjee goes so far as to suggest that the remaining Pondichérians were simply what remained of “the white man’s burden” to the French.<sup>107</sup>

Whether or not the Pondichérian people thought of themselves as existing in a state of cultural liminality, the people who encountered them have been suspicious of their membership in (either) nation-state. The idea that persons of Indian origin would chose to align themselves with France, a foreign nation, even though that alliance had come about under the system of colonial rule, destabilizes strongly held beliefs that national consciousness is fostered through common traits such as race and ethnicity. Pondichérians in France in the 1960s and 1970s were not able to escape the South Asian identity carried in their bodies, projected to a non-South Asian society as the reflection of a national (usually mainstream Indian) identity. However, while South Asians in France who do not have connections to the former colonies are perceived as the embodiment of the Indian nation, Pondichérians, who are explicitly connected to the *comptoirs*, are considered to belong outside the Indian nation, by choice, and the French nation, by race, and thus continue to represent the embodiment of colonialism, straddling the two nations. While India and France are both Republics, founded on the principles of democracy and government for the people, there is of course an important global divide between France, a Western power who once held a vast Empire, and India, a post-colonial democracy, built on a foundation of anti-colonial nationalism. As nation-states entrenched in the same system of global capitalism, although at different levels and in different positions of power, they share the need to deny the legitimacy of persons who do not submit fully to

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

one nationalism. After all, how can a person be loyal to the potentially competing interests of two separate and distinct nation-states?

This question has vexed many migrants, and is certainly not unique to the Pondichérien population. I included two quotes as the epigraph for this chapter, in the hope that they can help us understand the many paradoxes of nationalism, national belonging, migration, and the post-colonial body. The first quote, taken from an article written about the partition of India, Pakistan, and Kashmir by Ashutosh Varshney, states,

Ultimately, the breakup of nation-states is not a rational question. Reason collapses on the bedrock of emotions. Nation-states get *embodied*; to many people, their breakup, therefore, feels like a limb tearing apart.<sup>108</sup>

The importance of this statement lies in the visual depiction of the re-bordering of nations and the creation of new nations causing *physical pain* to the people affected by the process. The violence involved in the partition of India in 1947 and the subsequent migrations due to the new borders, stand as prominent examples of the violence inherent in nation-building during this period.<sup>109</sup> Scholars and writers who have written about the experience of partition often discuss how the re-bordering of nation-states placed national identity *into/onto* the bodies of individuals who are seen as either nationals or foreigners, and are treated accordingly. For example, in her book of testimonies from the time of partition, Urvashi Butalia details how her uncle, a Hindu in Lahore, chose to stay in the newly created nation-state of Pakistan after partition.<sup>110</sup>

Amidst the protests of his seven siblings, her uncle Rana chose to convert to Islam to stay

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<sup>108</sup> Varshney, "India, Pakistan, and Kashmir," 1000. (Emphasis added)

<sup>109</sup> One might also look at the division of Palestine and creation of Israel in 1948 as an important parallel useful for understanding the consequences of colonial bordering practices.

<sup>110</sup> Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1998).

in Lahore, also making this choice for his mother. Decades later, he tells Butalia about how difficult it has been to be accepted as a Muslim, even though he had “married a Muslim girl, changed [his] religion, and took a Muslim name.”<sup>111</sup> He tells Butalia that everyone still knows he was a Hindu, 40 years after the partition, and that people whisper “Hindu, Hindu” as he walks through the market, because “they never forgive you for being a convert.”<sup>112</sup> Except for a very small number of people who were wealthy and well connected, the majority of the estimated 10 million people forced to migrate as a result of the partition were never able to return to their homes again, nor, as Rana’s story exemplifies, escape the identity inscribed on their bodies.

The partition of India, a result of decolonization, had irreversible consequences for the people of the region, ranging from massive deaths to homelessness, the breakup of families to the reification of colonial-era Muslim/Hindu conflicts, consequences that are still being fought out in contemporary South Asian politics, society, and culture.

Contrasting the trauma of partition, I turn towards a quote, spoken by the Mother of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1954, which represents here the position of the non-colonized person at the time of decolonization. Standing on a balcony that emerged from the Ashram to allow her access to her followers below, the Mother spoke of the now inevitable decolonization of French India, explaining to her audience that from the moment she arrived in India in 1914, she knew that India was her “true country, the country of my soul and spirit.”<sup>113</sup> She noted that she was French by both birth and education, but believed that spiritually and emotionally, she was Indian. Launching into

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>113</sup> The Mother, 15 August 1954, *Words of the Mother*, Vol 13, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1980: 43. This statement originally appeared in *Mother India*, August 1954, n.p.

what would be the official stance of the Ashram, she said “I hope I shall be allowed to adopt a double nationality, that is to say, to remain French while I become an Indian.”<sup>114</sup>

What would it mean for the Mother to become Indian? As we can see through the Mother’s writings, she understood “Indian” to be a word that implied a spiritualism and philosophy, based on a belief system attributed in this space and time to ancient Hindu writings. For the Mother, becoming India would mean being able to call India “home,” while retaining her preference to speak French and associate with French disciples.<sup>115</sup> Becoming Indian *would not mean* being racialized when travelling in international spaces, it would not carry any connotations of ethnicity, caste, or religious identity, and it would not limit her freedom to travel freely throughout the world, all issues faced by South Asians as the colonial world transformed into a post-colonial system.

The privileges of embodied French nationality, expressed through physical appearance, language, and life experience, would always bar people like the Mother from “becoming Indian” in any meaningful way. As we have seen throughout his chapter, the Mother was not the only individual to desire the recognition of possessing two national characters. Many French-Indians desired some type of dual recognition, but were pushed to migrate to France to express this dualism, as it was not, at the time, allowed in independent India. On the contrary, for Westerners in India, like the Mother, decolonization meant instability only insofar as not knowing if independent India would allow the same sort of foreign presence as the colonial regime had permitted. The Mother

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> A document prepared by the French Consulate in Pondicherry in May 1969 noted that Mother chose to surround herself with Frenchmen in the Ashram. Beginning in the 1920s, her second in command was a Frenchman named Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire, also known as Pavitra. Following his death in 1969, her companion was Bernard Enginger, known as Satprem, who had served in the French colonial government under the last Governor of Pondicherry, François Baron, who was also a devoted follower of the Mother. MAE: Asie-Océanie/Inde/378 (Dossier Auroville): Letter from the French Consulate in Pondicherry to the French Ambassador in India, 19 May 1969.

was, of course, Sri Aurobindo's closest companion before he passed away in 1950. While followers and admirers of Aurobindo did not universally trust the Mother, she was closely associated with him. Because Aurobindo had once been a deeply influential and important Indian nationalist, and continues to be remembered as one of the greatest champions of anti-colonial nationalism, Indian politicians and dignitaries took the Mother quite seriously as a cultural force in Pondicherry. This association with a revered anti-colonial nationalist infused the Mother with the social capital to continue her projects in India unabated, a privilege not afforded to the majority of people affected by decolonization.

Since its founding in the 1920s, the Ashram was always a foreign presence in Pondicherry, often out of sync with the local populations, full of European and North Indian devotees and global tourists. National and international attention centered on Pondicherry often focused on the Ashram, and specifically Sri Aurobindo's role as an anti-British nationalist. As French India became India, the Mother and the Ashram focused on retaining the power they had in Pondicherry, a power based primarily on the legitimacy granted to the project by both the French and Indian national governments. In the following, and final, chapter, we will look at the construction of Auroville, a utopia envisioned by the Mother as the answer to colonial divisions. Founded in 1968 just 8km outside the city center of Pondicherry, Auroville was meant to be a "universal city," where people could become "global citizens." By looking at the foundations of Auroville and the history of its creation, we will be able to follow a parallel migration to the one examined in this chapter, that of spiritual tourists, who descended on India from Western countries in search of something the West could not provide.

## Chapter 5

### Post-Colonial Crossings: Europeans in India and the Construction of Post-Colonial Utopia, (1968-1974)

“I remember I was in the holy city of Hardwar, standing by the river. I looked down and saw that in one hand I carried my passport, the guarantee of the President of France that I was free to travel anywhere in the world. But where was I to go? In my other hand I carried my mala. Those beads were also a passport, to the ways of the spirit. I could only follow one of them.”<sup>1</sup>

Beginning at the moment of transfer in 1962 and continuing into the present day, Pondicherry and the other *comptoirs* (Karikal, Yanam, Mahé), now officially titled under one name - the Union Territory of Puducherry - have been known, almost universally, as the “former French colonies” or the “former French territories in India.”<sup>2</sup> Despite the merger of Pondicherry into India in 1962, the area has never been able to shake the colonial connection with France. Pondicherry has remained a point of fascination throughout the world exactly because of this “French connection”, and is often portrayed as a sort of village frozen in time, an alternative story to the well-known narrative of centuries of British rule in India.<sup>3</sup> Because of the relative obscurity of the French *comptoirs* within British India, the colonial relationship between France and India is most often remembered, in travel writing and historical scholarship alike, as a cultural oddity

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<sup>1</sup> This quote comes from a young French woman living in India, relayed to (and retold by) author Gita Mehta in her exploration of Europeans in India in the late 1960s and 1970s. Gita Mehta, *Karma Cola: The Mystic Marketing of the East* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979): 136.

<sup>2</sup> Pondicherry, Karikal, Mahé, and Yanam are all administered as the part of the Union Territory of Pondicherry (now called Puducherry). There are currently 7 union territories in India, which are, unlike states, administered directly by the Federal Government. Other union territories include Diu and Daman, both former Portuguese colonies, and the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

<sup>3</sup> And, as Kate Marsh has argued, for many French people, the history of Pondicherry provides the French imagination with a sort of counterfactual account of an alternative history of French imperial expansion, one which has the French defeating the British in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and “saving” India from its future domination by the British Empire. Kate Marsh, *Fictions of 1947: Representations of Indian Decolonization, 1919-1962* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

that continues to enjoy a close relationship with France. A 1994 article in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* titled “Les souvenirs très français de Pondichéry,” begins by noting that the people in Pondicherry had done a very good job of “preserving our customs, like playing the game of *pétanque* and drinking pastis.”<sup>4</sup> The author goes on to encourage French people to visit Pondicherry and experience a piece of the French past, well preserved in this strange “accident of history.” Describing the oddity of Pondicherry has not been limited to the French press: a 2008 travel article in the *New York Times* titled “Pondicherry’s French Connection” begins by noting that Pondicherry was “never more than a stopover on the way to Indochina.”<sup>5</sup> Even after the territories joined India, wrote travel journalist Matt Gross, Pondicherry “languished, out of step with the rest of the nation.”<sup>6</sup> Repeating the words familiar to anyone who has encountered Pondicherry throughout the past two centuries, Gross suggests that Pondicherry “is like India seen through a French lens, or maybe vice versa.”<sup>7</sup> This French connection, seen through the eyes of these contemporary travel writers, is what continues to make Pondicherry unique, interesting, and deserving of people’s tourist dollars. The lack of knowledge, or acknowledgement, of the colonial-era struggles faced by the people of Pondicherry, makes it safe for tourists uncomfortable with the colonial past.

Tourism and Western interest in South Asia was certainly not a new phenomenon in post-colonial India, although, as many other scholars have shown, the end of foreign imperial rule did change the landscape and demographics of tourism and tourists, not

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<sup>4</sup> François Gautier, “Les souvenirs très français de Pondichéry,” *Le Figaro*, 20 August 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Matt Gross, “Pondicherry’s French Connection,” *New York Times*, 30 March 2008: TR1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

only in India, but also throughout the non-Western world.<sup>8</sup> While the rule of imperialism had brought European military personnel, civil servants, and middle class families to India, the end of empire saw the departure of a generation of colonialists, and the introduction of legions of hippies who blazed their way through the subcontinent, seeking release from what they saw as a conservative, constrictive, soulless Europe.<sup>9</sup> The practice of Westerners following Indian (usually understood as Hindu, although sometimes Buddhist) spiritual leaders did not start in the 1960s, but as Western celebrities like the Beatles followed their chosen yogis to the ashrams of India, the chance to “turn on, tune in, and drop out” of society (as the psychologist and LSD proponent Timothy Leary suggested at a gathering of over 30,000 hippies in San Francisco in 1966)<sup>10</sup> often translated into permission for Western youth to leave their comfortable surroundings and venture into what was becoming known as the Third World. As migrants from the East moved West in search of economic security, post-colonial citizenship, and First World privileges, certain segments of the West moved East, seeking spiritual fulfillment and an escape from the material excesses of capitalist life. As the Beatles donned brightly colored silks and learned to play the sitar in preparation for their pilgrimage to the Maharishi’s Ashram in Rishikesh, Bollywood filmmakers were paying homage to the clean-cut, matching-suit Beatles of the early 1960s in films such as *Janwar* (1965), and

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, C. Michael Hall and Hazel Tucker, eds., *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested Discourses, Identities, and Representations* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> On the 1960s, hippies, and new religious movements see Antony Copely, ed., *Gurus and their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Leary, *Flashbacks: An Autobiography* (Los Angeles, CA: J.P. Tracher, 1983).

making films about Indians travelling in Europe (*An Evening in Paris*, 1967).<sup>11</sup> (See Figure 9)



Figure 9 (Above)Hindi Beatles/ Tom Lyon and the Cubs (Asha Bhosle, Mohammad Rafi, S.D. Batish. S. Balbir)

From the 1965 film *Janwar*, Singing “Dekho Ab To” (I want to Hold your Hand).

(Below) The Beatles go to India

Ringo Starr, George Harrison, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, 1968



<sup>11</sup> The “Hindi Beatles” were featured in the film *Janwar* (Dir: Bhappi Sonie, 1965) singing a Hindi version of the Beatles “I Want to Hold Your Hand” (“Dekho Ab To”); see also *An Evening In Paris* (Dir: Shakti Samanta, 1967).

The end of the colonial era gave cultural icons like the Beatles, as well as filmmakers, artists, and other producers of cultural objects, the freedom to travel the networks of the colonial world without the direct political association of representing the imperial forces. The colonial-era, or in the words of Edward Said, *orientalist*, trope of essentializing India as a spiritual and sacred space burst into the global public sphere in the 1960s, as Westerners eagerly sought images, sounds, and “spiritual” texts from “the mystic East.”<sup>12</sup> As the woman in the epigraph to this chapter said, she felt that she had to choose between her Western identity, represented by her French passport, the epitome of political and social mobility, and her “mala beads,” the representative of her potential to engage in a spiritual life not available to her in the West.<sup>13</sup> While the previous chapter explored the creation of post-colonial space in France by examining the experiences of the French-Indians who migrated to France following the merger in 1962, this chapter will look at a simultaneous, and in some ways contrary, migration. While many French youth throughout the 1960s quite famously fought against the increasing power of the French state by joining forces with workers and immigrants in a series of powerful general strikes, which culminated in the events of May-June 1968, others took the opportunities available to them as Western peoples in a decolonizing world to set off to former colonial spaces and establish new communities and identities there. It is those individuals who chose to leave the confines and comforts of the Western world to meet in a space on the outskirts of Pondicherry that I will explore in this chapter. While the generation of youth who made their way to India in the 1960s was the first generation to

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979). On the fascination of the Western world with India, see also Jeffery Paine, *Father India: How Encounters with an Ancient Culture Transformed the Modern West* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998); and Gita Mehta, *Karma Cola*.

<sup>13</sup> Mala beads, sometimes called “prayer beads,” are used by some Hindu and Buddhists in various rituals.

travel with the ease of trans-continental flights and without a direct connection to imperial power, the easy migration of white, Western men and women to India in the post-colonial period was possible because the foundations for their arrival were laid in the preceding decades by the many complex forces of colonialism. In this chapter, I will show how, despite an often explicit declaration of anti-colonial politics, the semi-permanent tourists that came to Pondicherry as a part of the Auroville utopian project reinforced, reinterpreted, and renamed colonial institutions of racial, ethnic, and economic oppression.

### **The Settler Inside: Europe and Decolonization**

Just as imperial expansion and colonization changed the culture, demographics, and landscape of Europe, the end of the empire brought massive changes to the metropole as well. While there is a growing body of scholarship on the demographic and cultural changes fomented by the end of empire in the metropole, little attention has been paid to the question of the decolonization of the European people. The need to rupture the imperial mindset was acknowledged by the French existentialist philosopher and public intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote, in the preface to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*: "This book had not the slightest need of a preface, all the less because it is not addressed to us. Yet I have written one, in order to bring the argument to its conclusion: for we in Europe too are being decolonized: that is to say that the settler which is in every one of us is being savagely rooted out."<sup>14</sup> Sartre's words in regard to the decolonization of Algeria are particularly important to thinking through how decolonization affected the metropole, as the Algerian War was a key moment in the awakening of the political

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<sup>14</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface" in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 24.

consciousness of a large segment of the first post-war generation.<sup>15</sup> Some have suggested that the post-war generation in France represented a new beginning to the people who lived through the horrors of the first half of the 20th-century.<sup>16</sup> Historian Richard Jobs has suggested that the generation that had survived the wars took a particular interest in the post-war generation and noted that this new generation “reflected a desire to repress issues of adult responsibility for the past,” an extension of what the French historian Henry Rousso identifies as the “Vichy Syndrome,” or the strategic forgetting in the post-war period of the collaborations and connections between French people and the Nazi party under the Vichy regime.<sup>17</sup> While Russo’s work deals with the amnesia of German-French collaboration and the other hidden atrocities of the Vichy regime, Todd Shepard has shown, in a similar vein, the importance of another sort of strategic amnesia, about the colonial relationship between France and Algeria.<sup>18</sup> Shepard argues that French political and social institutions invented the idea of decolonization to erase over a century of debates about inclusion of colonial subjects in the French Republic. Decolonization, according to Shepard, was constructed to permanently exclude Algerian Muslims, and by extension many other colonial bodies, from membership in the Republic. Shepard’s work shows just how difficult it would be for people in France, the “French French,” in common parlance, to, as Sartre suggested, “savagely root out” the settler inside of every European, as the imperial mindset was deeply rooted in French identity.

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<sup>15</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Jobs, *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after the Second World War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007): 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Jobs, *Riding the New Wave*, 39; Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006).

Who were the people of the post-war generation? In 1957, the *Institut Français d'Opinion Publique* (IFOP), in conjunction with the magazine *L'Express*, conducted a survey consisting of 25 questions, sent to over 15,000 French men and women who were born between the years of 1927 and 1939.<sup>19</sup> The survey asked a variety of questions about religion, politics, material culture, race, love, perceived differences between generations, and the place of France, and the French individual, in the world. The survey suggests that the *nouvelle vague* were basically happy (24% reported they were 'très heureux' and 61% 'assez heureux') in life, but quite dissatisfied with the state of political affairs in France (96% replied that *la politique* was the worst thing about France, and 90% blamed De Gaulle's regime for the problems).<sup>20</sup> Françoise Giroud, a writer and journalist who wrote the accompanying text for the survey, observed that this generation was "less dogmatic" and "less convinced that France is the center of the world and that anyone born outside its borders is an animal that lacks something to deserve the name of man."<sup>21</sup> Another question which asked, "Do you believe you would be happier if you lived outside of France? If yes, in what countries and why?" asked the respondents to step outside of the national framework that shaped the survey. While a majority of respondents (57%) thought they would be happier living in France than elsewhere, 33% envisioned that they could have happier lives outside of France, and indication that a significant faction of the

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<sup>19</sup> The survey was issued on October 3, 1957, so this would make the eligible participants between the ages of 18 and 30. The complete results of the survey, along with an introduction by the journalist Françoise Giroud, as well as quotes pulled from the surveys, were published as a book. See Françoise Giroud, *La nouvelle vague: portraits de la jeunesse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958): 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

generation in question was not particularly attached to their country of birth and/or exhibited a sense of wanderlust.<sup>22</sup>

Patriotism was obviously waning in the post-war era, as skepticism and rebelliousness came to characterize French youth by the early 1960s. In another poll conducted by IFOP in 1961, researchers looked at the generation born *during* the war (1937-1945), making them between the ages of 16 and 24 at the time that they responded to the survey.<sup>23</sup> The IFOP, referring to this generation as “les enfants de la guerre,” (the children of the war) remark that the French youth of the 1960s idolized the quintessential bad-boy actor James Dean, French actress and sex symbol Brigitte Bardot, and deeply believed in “la rage de vivre” (lust for life).<sup>24</sup> The rise of the “blousons noirs” (black shirts), working class youth who were seen as openly rebellious and interested in American Rock n’ Roll music, as well as the bourgeois “blousons dorés” (gold shirts), alerted the older generations to a rising tide of “juvenile delinquency” from all sectors of French youth. One survey respondent said of his generation, “We youth have a systematic skepticism and have been disillusioned early.” Another participant remarked, “It is true that I am cynical and insolent and rebellious.”<sup>25</sup>

The IFOP survey predictably identifies Catholicism as the predominant French religion, remarking that 89% of those surveyed identified themselves as Catholic (although not necessarily practicing). The number had reduced from 92% a few years earlier, which the IFOP considered to be a sign of a “dechristianization” amongst the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>23</sup> Jacques Duquesne, *Les 16 – 24 ans: Une Enquête de l’Institut Français d’Opinion Publique* (Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1963): 8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 5. “Nous les jeunes, nous avons le scepticisme systématique et la désillusion anticipée”; “C’est vrai que je suis cynique, et insolent, et révolté.”

younger generations.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, only 7% of those surveyed thought that religion was more important to their generation than it had been to their parents, while 47% specifically stated that religion was *less* important to them than their parents.<sup>27</sup> While these two surveys can only offer us a small glimpse of the changing worldviews and philosophies of French youth in this period, the openness that many of those surveyed showed towards exploring the world beyond France, including the exploration of non-Christian religious practices, echoes the stories of how people began to leave the Western world and travel to India. Instead of rooting out the settler inside of themselves, some chose to wander until they found the right place to settle.

### ***European Dreams, Tamil Land: from Colony to Utopia***

From the spiritual point of view, India is the foremost country in the world. Her mission is to set the example of spirituality. Sri Aurobindo came on earth to teach this to the world. This fact is so obvious that a simple and ignorant peasant here is, in his heart, closer to the divine than the intellectuals of Europe. All those who want to become Aurovilians must know this and behave accordingly; otherwise they are unworthy of Auroville.

The Mother, 8 February 1972<sup>28</sup>

On the morning of 28 February 1968, six years after Pondicherry was officially incorporated into the Indian Union, the caravans began to arrive.<sup>29</sup> The buses and vans

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 219. This was not unique to France. See also Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain : Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (New York : Routledge, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Duquesne, *Les 16-24 ans*, 220.

<sup>28</sup> The Mother dictated this message to Ashramite and Auroville advisor Shyam Sundar in response to rising tensions between Europeans and Tamils at the Auroville Health Centre. Shyam Sundar Jhunjhunwala, *Down Memory Lane* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo's Action, 1996): 123.

were filled with a variety of people, from European and American tourists who had heard about the construction of Auroville while blazing the hippie trail through India, to residents of the near-by Aurobindo Ashram, to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) officials who travelled to this plot of land just outside of Pondicherry to bestow their bureaucratic blessings.<sup>30</sup> (See Figure 10)

An air of internationalism pervaded the ceremony as delegations from around the world arrived carrying the soil of 124 different nations, specially flown to Madras courtesy of Air France.<sup>31</sup> As participants made a circle around a container holding the imported earth, the *Charter of Auroville* was read in 16 different languages and broadcast over speakers to reach the burgeoning crowd, beginning with French and English, followed by Tamil (the language of the local population), Sanskrit, Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Tibetan. The program handed out at the ceremony read, “Greetings from Auroville to all men of good will. Are invited to Auroville all those who thirst for progress and aspire to a higher life.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The British quite famously left India in 1947, the French, less famously, in 1962.

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO had endorsed the creation of Auroville two years prior, in “UNESCO Resolutions on Auroville” (Paris: UNESCO Publications, 1966). In practically all press releases and publications about the creation of Auroville, the UNESCO Charter is mentioned as a legitimating force behind Auroville.

<sup>31</sup> Air France advertisement in *Equals One: The Quarterly Journal of Auroville* 3 (1968). The city of Madras is now known as Chennai.

<sup>32</sup> Auroville Archives (AA). *Auroville: 28 February 1968*. Program from the opening ceremony/dedication.

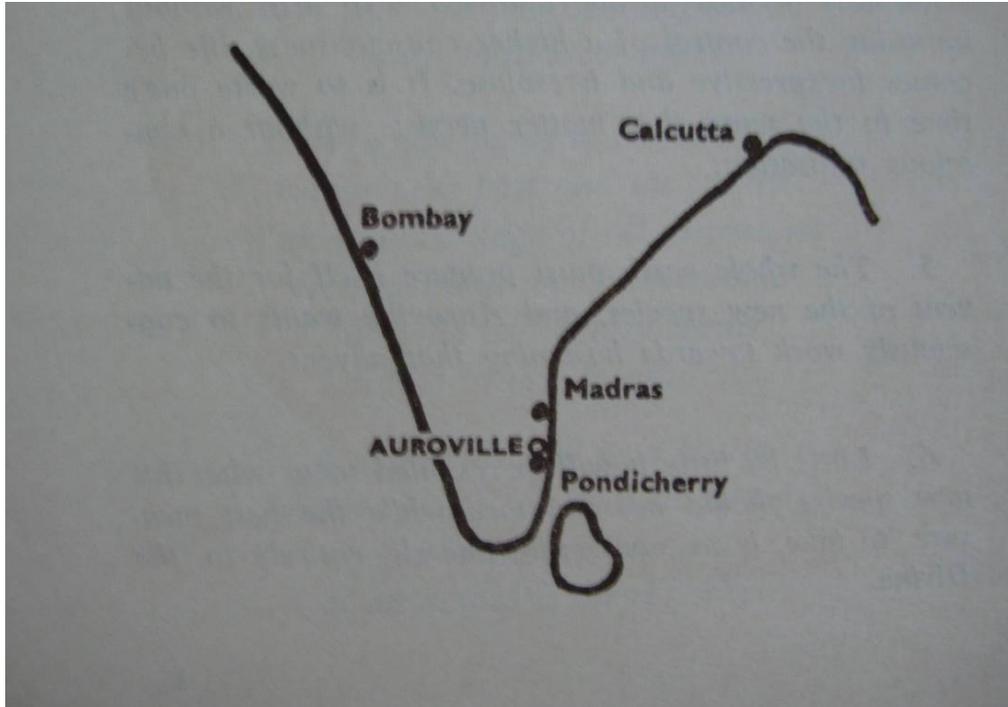


Figure 10 Map of showing the location of Auroville relative to major cities. From *Auroville: The Journey* (Auroville Archives).

While most of the people in attendance had traveled from afar to witness this inauguration, one Western Aurovilian remembered that “a section had been reserved for the people from the nearby villages, and although it was a large enclosure already you could see it was going to be inadequate. You could see people coming from every direction across the fields.”<sup>33</sup> As Europeans and Indians from the north descended on this Tamil land to embark on a self-proclaimed utopian experiment, which espoused a new-age mixture of socialism, biological evolutionism, and spirituality, the people who lived on the land were kept together behind a barrier, invited to witness the ceremony as long as they stayed in their designated space distant from the international participants. The segregation of the founding ceremony was no surprise to the local people who had lived

<sup>33</sup> *The Auroville Experience: Selections from 202 Issues of Auroville Today, November 1988 to November 2005* (Auroville: Auroville Today, 2006): 4.

under French and British colonial rule for hundreds of years previously. While the French administration left Pondicherry in 1962, the Ashram remained, and seemed to many in Pondicherry like the last vestige of the French colonial system.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother envisioned the construction of Auroville during the colonial period – they wanted to construct a space free from the restrictions of national belonging where people could work together, to be “global citizens,” an idea already firmly in place in the Ashram.<sup>34</sup> The initial plans for Auroville, designed primarily by the French architect Roger Anger (1923 -2008) in consultation with the Mother, called for facilities to eventually accommodate 50,000 people. Auroville quickly took on “other-worldly” qualities, the village taking the shape of a galaxy.<sup>35</sup> (See Figure 11) It was divided into four sectors, one to house a significant industrial zone, another devoted to cultural institutions, another to residential areas, and lastly an “international zone,” dedicated to pavilions representing the different nations of the world.<sup>36</sup> When the first stone was laid in 1968, there were approximately 150 people working on the construction of Auroville – a project that is still in progress today, maintaining a steady population of between 1800 and 2000 residents. Unlike many intentional communities constructed in the 1960s and 1970s, Auroville remains a functioning, and expanding, project. Over the past 40 years, Aurovilians have created schools, communal dining rooms, health care centers, libraries, and dozens of small businesses producing incense, jewelry, clothes, art, and books, amongst other goods, for export. According to the government of India,

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<sup>34</sup> AA, “Auroville,” (pamphlet, 1968).

<sup>35</sup> Anger actually proposed several designs, starting in 1965, based on more traditional city designs, but the Mother rejected all of them until the “galaxy” model was developed in 1968, just in time for the inauguration ceremony. See “Towards a Township” in *The Auroville Experience*, 44.

<sup>36</sup> AA, The plans for Auroville were laid out in detail in many promotional brochures, including this one from 1969 titled “Auroville” (4-10).

Pondicherry and Auroville together attract nearly a million visitors a year.<sup>37</sup> Many of these tourists spend a large amount of their time, and tourist money, staying in the many guesthouses run by Aurovilians and participating in the life of the community in various capacities.



Figure 11 Auroville's Galaxy Configuration. From *Auroville: Cradle of a New Man* (1968) (Auroville Archives)

Despite the many successes of Auroville, there remains a sharp divide between Auroville and the local Tamil communities.<sup>38</sup> The visionaries behind Auroville considered India, and Indians, to be spiritually evolved, the only physical location and population in the world that could support the “evolution of a new man.” A “simple and ignorant [Indian] peasant” was, according to the Mother, “closer to the divine than the

<sup>37</sup> <http://tourism.pondicherry.gov.in/statistics.html>

<sup>38</sup> Jukka Jouhki, a Finnish ethnologist who conducted fieldwork in Auroville and the surrounding communities in the early 2000s, suggests that the European view of the local Tamil populations mimics a classical orientalist binary, employed to enforce a division between the Westernness of the European and the foreignness of the Tamil. See Jukka Jouhki, “Imagining the Other: Orientalism and Occidentalism in Tamil-European Relations in South India” (Ph.D. diss., University of Jyväskylä, 2006).

intellectuals of Europe.”<sup>39</sup> Auroville sought to foster social equality through spiritual transformation, “to be the cradle of a better humanity, united by a common effort towards perfection.”<sup>40</sup> However, as the utopian dreams became a lived reality, the tensions between the local population and the Aurovilians escalated. Despite official proclamations that the “Tamils are the original Aurovilians,”<sup>41</sup> the Tamil population was largely excluded from Auroville based on their lack of material resources *and* a perceived spiritual incompatibility with the project. The exclusion of the Tamil population has been an undesirable outcome for the visionaries and architects behind the city, as well as for the people who came to take part in the utopian experiment, who believed that Auroville could be a “global community” wherein every person would be a “citizen of the world.” Instead of an international utopia free from the colonial past, Auroville quickly became a colony of foreigners who faced challenges of assimilation and integration similar to those faced by European colonizers throughout the previous centuries of expansion.

How did an experiment grounded in the liberatory ideals of anti-capitalism, anti-nationalism, and anti-colonialism become a microcosm of capitalist neo-colonialism? The original Aurovilians failed to effectively communicate and collaborate with the local Tamil communities, causing their utopian experiment to resemble a neo-colonial settlement, a post-colonial extension of the colonial “civilizing mission.”<sup>42</sup> One way to explain this reversal is to explore the links between colonial ideology and utopian thought, particularly during the period of decolonization, when people all over the world

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<sup>39</sup> The Mother, was the force behind, and remains the godhead above, Auroville. This quote was recorded by her devotee, Shyam Sundar Jhunjunwala, and printed in his *Down Memory Lane*, 123.

<sup>40</sup> AA, Cabinet 3, File No.1 “Information on Auroville, 1966-1974,” “Note of Information” (1969).

<sup>41</sup> The Mother (1972) reprinted in Jhunjunwala, *Down Memory Lane*, 123.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the civilizing mission see Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

were struggling to define what it meant to be post-colonial, both theoretically as well as temporally. The creation of Auroville, a Western utopia, in India, a site of Western colonial expansion, reproduced colonial institutions, specifically those of race, class, and nation, thus maintaining continuity between the colonial and the post-colonial periods that the architects and visionaries behind Auroville had explicitly hoped to avoid.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, in the aftermath of empire, individuals were forced to re-examine their subjectivities, to re-think their identities and positions in changing communities, nations, and world systems. This was true for those who were colonized, as well as for those who identified with a colonial power (even as an anti-colonialist), such as the present example of the Mother, who considered her spiritual studies and practices in India to be explicitly anti-colonial.<sup>43</sup> In the case of Pondicherry and Auroville it is telling to see that even when the French colonizers left, their spirit remained, drifting below the surface of a supposedly anti-colonial rhetoric heavy with the possibilities of equality and harmony through adherence to a specialized version of “the Divine,” a “universal spirituality.” When confronted with the reality that the local Tamil population was largely uninspired by this utopian project, and viewed the Aurovilians as neo-colonizers who had come to take their land and exploit their labor, the Aurovilians believed that if they could convince the Tamils that their spiritual practices were the *way to the future*, they could live in harmony. However this emphasis on the future was to the detriment of understandings of the past. Like the colonizers before them, the Aurovilians failed to recognize the different subjectivities of the local populations, shaped and re-shaped through centuries of struggles with colonizers from all over the world. The

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<sup>43</sup> For more on the relationship between Europeans and anti-colonialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

Aurovilian insistence on the need to create a “universal city” to espouse a “universal spirituality” failed to recognize the Tamil people as composed of multiple communities distinct from their Western colonizers, their struggles for autonomy throughout their history, and the political realities at the core of their efforts to avoid assimilating into Auroville.

### **Divine Unions: The Foundations of Utopia**

Auroville was the brainchild of two of the most well known residents of Pondicherry, the Indian freedom fighter turned yogi Sri Aurobindo and the Parisian spiritualist and head of the Aurobindo Ashram, Mirra Alfassa (the Mother). As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, Aurobindo had come to Pondicherry through Chandernagore in 1910, in order to escape British persecution for alleged crimes against the Empire. Once he had spent some time in Pondicherry, he dropped his political persona and transformed into a serious yogi and philosopher. While Aurobindo had been a major figure in the Indian independence movement and thus attracted significant political attention in addition to his spiritual work, the Mother’s philosophical works were published throughout Europe and North America, in French and English. Bengalis, the ethnic brethren of Aurobindo, as well as French nationals familiar with the work of the Mother, were well represented at the Ashram.<sup>44</sup> While Aurobindo spent his days in meditation, the Mother dealt with everything from the oft-complicated economic situations of running the Ashram to the opening and operation of a school, and the

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<sup>44</sup> The Frenchman Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire is a good example of the type of European who came to live in the ashram. Saint-Hilaire became interested in Theosophy and travelled to Japan and Africa before landing in Pondicherry and joining the Ashram in 1926. See Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire, *Itinéraire d’un enfant du siècle: Correspondance de Pavitra avec son père (1918-1954)* (Paris: Buset/Chastel, 2001).

quotidian needs of the ashram devotees. One devotee, Dyman, remembered often having to sell the Mother's jewelry to raise money for the Ashram, for double the market value, to people sympathetic to the projects of Aurobindo and the Mother.<sup>45</sup> People from around the world supported her and her projects with monetary as well as spiritual support.

Aurobindo passed away in 1950.<sup>46</sup> At the time of his passing, the ashram was a growing community. As early as 1950, Ashramites remember the Mother talking about the need to expand the ideas of the Ashram into a larger community that could concern itself with issues outside of the intense study of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, which was the principle mission of the Ashram. By 1967, the Ashram housed about 1400 people, including 600 children, and it was easy for the Mother and her devotees to see thousands more coming to join them in their expansion.<sup>47</sup> Auroville was the next logical step, promoted as an experiment as well as a shelter for those looking to escape the "modern" realities of the Cold War, of widening economic inequalities and polarizing political ideologies. "Auroville is the shelter built for all those who want to hasten towards a future of knowledge, peace, and unity," wrote the Mother in the promotional materials for Auroville. The first condition to live in Auroville was "to be convinced of the essential unity of mankind and the will to collaborate in the material realisation of that unity."<sup>48</sup>

The foundational texts of Auroville were predicated on the possibility of "unity," and while Auroville rejected formal religion, all Aurovilians were required to subscribe to a particular spiritual world-view that the Mother believed would lead to unity. Robert

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<sup>45</sup> Kumari, *How they Came to Sri Aurobindo*, 15-16.

<sup>46</sup> Ashramites and Aurovilians alike prefer to say that Aurobindo "left his body" in 1950. They believe that although his physical body expired, his spirit remains alive. The same is true for the Mother who "left her body" in 1973.

<sup>47</sup> AA, Box 1 'Information on Auroville,' File No. 1 1966-1974, "Auroville, Background Information," (1967), 3.

<sup>48</sup> AA, Box 1 'Information on Auroville,' File No. 1 1966-1974, "Auroville, Background Information," (1967), 3.

N. Minor argues that despite the Mother's strict adherence to the necessity of spirituality, the "direct relation to the Divine," her definition of spirituality as different from religion was ambiguous and self-serving.<sup>49</sup> Minor shows that for the Mother, "'spiritual' teachings are those that agree with the teaching and evolutionary goals of Aurobindo and the Mother...if they do not do so, they are defined as 'religious,' not 'spiritual.'"<sup>50</sup> Minor's critique points to one of the foundational paradoxes of the Auroville experiment, one that closely mimics the paradox of the modern, liberal nation-state: creating a unified group requires excluding others, producing boundaries that protect the rights and identities of only those who meet the requirements for inclusion.<sup>51</sup>

The idea that "all people are equal" was, of course, fundamental to anti-colonial movements that struggled for state based autonomy. However, as the freedom struggles of anti-colonialists like Sri Aurobindo show, the idea that all humans have equal abilities to think and perform actions regardless of biological/racial characteristics, does not indicate that they have equal opportunity to exercise these powers. This was a lesson that took Sri Aurobindo the first 20 years of his life to learn, and subsequently shaped his political and spiritual philosophies. Thus, it is important to investigate this union, and perhaps more importantly, what the figures of Aurobindo and the Mother *represent* individually as well as together. Both exhibit the defining features of a particular sort of colonial-era cultural hybridity, a melding of western thought and eastern spirituality, though their bodies embody this hybridity in significantly different ways.

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<sup>49</sup> Robert Minor, *The Religious the Spiritual and the Secular: Auroville and Secular India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999): 45.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Minor's work also traces the transformation of Auroville from an experimental "world city," inhabited and operated by its members, to a project overseen by the Indian "secular" state in the 1980s. On the paradoxes of the modern nation-state, see also Uday S. Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion" in Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

The psychological effects of colonialism permeated the relationship between Aurobindo and the Mother.<sup>52</sup> Throughout their presence as a spiritual force in Pondicherry, their efforts were lauded by both the French and the Indian states. Over and over again, French colonial officials noted the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the Mother in an effort to keep the French language and culture present in Pondicherry, even after the territory was decolonized. The Mother was trusted as a French citizen, unlike, for example, Edouard Goubert, who was eventually marked as untrustworthy by the French state, given his loyalty to his “Indian roots.” As Chapter Three showed, both the Indian and the French states were threatened by the overtly political discussions of the French-Indian people, who, in various ways, struggled against state powers to construct a post-colonial French-Indian space. While the decolonization of French India pushed the *métis* and *créole* peoples to migrate to France, the same state powers legitimated and promoted the non-racial hybrid union of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, realized in the construction of Auroville.

Aurobindo and the Mother often portrayed their spiritual partnership as a bridge between east and west, as well as a transition from an old world to a new world, a non-linear evolution to a higher plane of consciousness. The links drawn between spirituality and science, between meditation and evolution, speak to their attempts not only to combine Western science with Eastern spirituality, but also to move beyond this hybrid spirituality. The Mother wrote,

The old spirituality was an escape from life towards the divine Reality, leaving the world where it was, as it was. Our new vision, on the contrary, is the

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<sup>52</sup> On the psychology of colonialism it is impossible not to cite the importance of the work of Frantz Fanon, especially *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) as well as Ashish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (1983).

divinization of life, the transformation of the material into a divine world...A New World has been born. It is not the old that is being transformed, it is quite a new world that been really concretely born.<sup>53</sup>

On the one hand, as the scholar Leela Gandhi has noted, the Mother spoke as an anti-imperialist, making her an outcast in mainstream Western society as she created strong anti-colonial alliances with Aurobindo.<sup>54</sup> Gandhi has argued that the Mother's adherence to a type of "anarcho-socialism" or anti-colonial socialism sought to bring spirituality back to a secular politics that was scorned in the West, an attempt at the creation of an anti-imperialism not based on Western ideas.<sup>55</sup> Gandhi, arguing against Nandy, wants to show that the Mother was an important type of anti-imperialist, representative of a fin-de-siècle European generation equally interested in socialism and Theosophy, in Eastern spirituality and a rejection of Western imperialism. While Gandhi makes an important point, the anti-imperialism exhibited by the Mother is typical of a certain type of what I call here *anti-colonial colonialism* that was common in India during this period. The Mother, and other Westerners similar to her, espoused an anti-colonialism that denied the key claims of imperial ideology, particularly claims to Western superiority and the inability of non-Western nations to practice of self-rule. However when the ideology of the Mother was put into practice, particularly in the case of Auroville, we quickly see how colonialism reinserts itself into the anti-colonial mission of self-rule and self-determination. The creation of Auroville exemplifies the phenomenon of anti-colonial

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<sup>53</sup> The Mother, quoted in Huta D. Hindocha, *The Spirit of Auroville* (Pondicherry, India: The Havyavahana Trust, 1974): 1.

<sup>54</sup> Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, esp. Ch. 5, "Mysticism and Radicalism at the End of the Nineteenth Century", 115-141.

<sup>55</sup> Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 124. The attempt to merge Eastern spiritualism and philosophy with Western secular politics did not originate with the Mother, but is often associated with Theosophy and Annie Besant, the English woman who moved to India in the name of anti-imperialism and Theosophy and eventually became a member, and then President, of the Indian Congress Party. On the life and work of Annie Besant, see Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in India* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

colonialism, a key concept in understanding neo-colonialism in a post-colonial world. While the discourse of anti-imperialism was present, the actions carried out by the Aurovilian pioneers exemplify the construction of a neo-colonial space and culture. Western ideas of the Indian Other, constructed through centuries of orientalism, converged with the realities of a post-colonial India to produce racialized divisions of class, labor, and culture, casting the indigenous Tamil population as an underdeveloped, backwards people in need of spiritual and material awakening through Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of integral yoga.<sup>56</sup>

### *Visions of Utopia: The Universal City of Dawn*

The name Auroville honors Sri Aurobindo, the builder of the bridge between East and West... 'Auro' was the name his father called him. But auro also means aurora, Latin for dawn, which in turn is a contraction of aurea hora, the golden hour. 'Ville' is the French word for town, and has been used in honor of The Mother. Ville has become an international expression and indicates also the universal destiny of **Auroville**. =1 (*Equals One*): the *Quarterly Journal of Auroville*<sup>57</sup>

The word utopia, coined by Thomas More in 1516, literally means "no place," a concept hard to enact at home, on known land.<sup>58</sup> Ideally, constructing a utopian society requires a stretch of vacant land, uninhabited by people who possess distinct cultures, languages, and ways of living. The experiments of socialist utopianists in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, such as the Saint-Simonians and Fourierists who moved throughout the French Empire advocating colonial reforms under the guise of the civilizing mission, sought to create intentional societies, often to the detriment, or at the least exclusion, of indigenous

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<sup>56</sup> Sri Aurobindo published a prolific amount of work on "integral yoga." In 1997, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram began to publish the Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo in a library edition. Twenty-six volumes have been issued thus far. Upon completion, there will be 37 volumes. His principal works on yoga are *The Synthesis of Yoga, I-II*, written between 1914-1921.

<sup>57</sup> "A City for the Golden Age" (Experiment), =1 (*Equals One*): *The Quarterly Journal of Auroville* 3 no. 1 (1968): 1.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): xi.

cultures and peoples in non-Western areas of the world.<sup>59</sup> While the organizing principle of socialist utopianism often set it apart from the capitalism of colonialism, both colonialism and utopianism imagined many non-Western lands as empty and available for their experiments. Lucy Sargisson has argued that the process of estrangement has a “profoundly positive relationship with utopianism” as it permits the members of an intentional community to create a critical distance between the reality of the present time and the future “goodplace” of the utopia.<sup>60</sup> This distancing was critical to the foundational beliefs of Auroville. More’s utopia took the shape of a newly discovered island somewhere in the new world, while Auroville was conceived of as a “city of the future” on “ancient” land. Imagined utopias take place far from home, in often-unimaginable places, in order to provide enough distance from contemporary forms of living to construct a community critical of the present time. This distancing has very different consequences in practice.

The hundreds of pieces of promotional materials about Auroville printed and distributed around the world during the 1960s and 1970s emphasized the concept that Auroville was a physical space wherein individuals could leave both the past and the present behind, and head towards the future. The 1971 promotional booklet *Auroville: The Cradle of a New Man* has this printed on the inside cover:

Earth needs a place where men can live away from national rivalries, social conventions, self-contradictory moralities and contending religions, a place where human beings, freed from the slavery of the

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<sup>59</sup> Osama W. Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Lucy Sargisson, “Strange Places: Estrangement, Utopianism, and Intentional Communities” *Utopian Studies* 18 (2007): 393.

past, can devote themselves wholly to the discovery and practice of the divine consciousness that is seeking to manifest itself. Auroville wants to be this place and offers itself to all who aspire to live the Truth of tomorrow.<sup>61</sup>

While a fictional utopia could potentially provide the metaphysical space for an escape from an earth riddled with “national rivalries” and “social conventions,” it would be impossible, especially by 1968, to create a space removed from the realities of global capitalism, colonial relationships, and, indeed, “the slavery of the past.” Auroville not only wanted to be free from the horrors of history, but also from the reality of the present, failing to recognize that the material conditions of the past were the basis of—and limits of enactment for—their projections of the present into the future.<sup>62</sup> In another promotional pamphlet, the Mother is quoted as saying of Auroville, “at last a place where one will be able to think of the future only.”<sup>63</sup> Sargisson views the relationship between utopia and estrangement to be essential in the practice of intentional communities, yet paradoxical, as the members of the community struggle with the side-effects of estrangement. Estrangement is also, I argue, essential to the act of colonization and particularly settler colonialism; the key difference between colonialism and utopianism being that colonizers were transparent in their goals to exploit the land and people they were colonizing, while in the case of Auroville, this exploitation was buried beneath a rhetoric of post-colonial equality and color-blindness.

The transformation of a fictional utopia into a utopian experiment, or, in other terms, the translation of ideas into social practices, must confront the realities of locating

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<sup>61</sup> AA, *Auroville: The Cradle of a New Man*, (1971), 1.

<sup>62</sup> As Karl Marx wrote, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” Karl Marx, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852).

<sup>63</sup> The Mother, January 1967, quoted in AA, “Auroville” (1969).

an area of the world that is secluded from the known (or normative) lives of the future residents. There were two major factors that led to the construction of Auroville in India. First, the obsession the West had with India as a breeding ground for spiritual enlightenment and metaphysical experimentation dates back to early days of European exploration and trade in the fifteenth century. Colonial authorities studied the ancient cultures of India, obsessing over the history and practices of what they called Hinduism, and the caste system.<sup>64</sup> Ancient India was revered as a great, lost civilization that had degenerated into a state of decay. Colonial knowledge production familiarized the West with the land, food, art, religion, and people of India. Hundreds of years of colonialism led to, among other things, a well-travelled tourist's path through India, both mentally and physically.<sup>65</sup>

Secondly, Auroville was the result of political relationships developed throughout the colonial period, a prime example of anti-colonial colonialism. As we have already seen, the Mother came to Pondicherry with her second husband, a French colonial administrator. Of course, the only reason Aurobindo was in Pondicherry was as a result of his involvement with the Indian independence movement, and his need to leave British India. The Ashram always had a significant number of European residents, who had accessed the Mother's writings in French and English while in Europe and had subsequently made pilgrimages to live in the Ashram. While the British, and in Pondicherry, the French, remained in power, these individuals did not require special permission to stay in India – it was an extension of their rights as British and/or French

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<sup>64</sup> Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Jeffery Paine, *Father India: Westerners Under the Spell of an Ancient Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999); Gita Mehta, *Karma Cola Marketing the Mystic East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

citizens. While many of them, like the Mother, sympathized and even supported anti-colonial struggles, they depended on their racial privileges inherent in their national belonging to support their lives in India.

The call for people to come to the south of India and participate in the construction of the “universal city” was spread widely through the international press and networks of new age spiritual enthusiasts, yet the Mother and her collaborators tightly controlled the admittance process. Everyone who wanted to come to Auroville was required to submit an application, with a picture of the applicant, which would go directly to the Mother. The initial application had 24 questions, beginning with name and nationality and ending with “what can you donate to Auroville?”<sup>66</sup> Potential Aurovilians were asked to explain why they wanted to come to Auroville, and questioned if they were familiar with the philosophies of the Mother and Aurobindo. The Mother and the other organizers knew their goals appealed to a type of person they did *not* desire: those without any money, who showed up lost and poor. They wanted to make sure that the people coming to Auroville were not simply drifters or people looking for welfare. M.P. Pandit, the secretary of the Sri Aurobindo Society who oversaw the application process admitted “we have a hard time keeping out the hippies. We do not want them, they are not serious about anything.”<sup>67</sup>

However, the hippies were already in India, on the beaches of Goa, the hills of Darjeeling and the alleys of Benares (Varanasi). As the hippies continued to seek refuge at Auroville, the rules in Auroville became stricter. Auroville was to be a place of education and spiritual advancement through meditation, not drugs. In 1971, as more

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<sup>66</sup> AA, Auroville Application.

<sup>67</sup> Rangan, “Utopian Town in India Built on a Dream,” 8.

people arrived at Auroville hoping to join the community, the Mother issued a statement forbidding drug use. She said, “Drugs are prohibited at Auroville. If there are any who take them, they do so deceitfully. The ideal Aurovilian, eager to become conscious of the Divine Consciousness, takes neither tobacco, nor alcohol, nor drugs.”<sup>68</sup> A small book of guidelines for the first Aurovilians, which consisted of short statements made by the Mother, includes the following dictate: “Begging is not permitted in Auroville. Persons found begging will be distributed as follows: Children to school, the old to a home, the sick to the hospital, the healthy to work.”<sup>69</sup> Everyone who was approved to live in Auroville was meant to have an active role in society. According to the Mother, active labor was essential to spiritual evolution.

What really set apart the Aurovilians from the hippies? At the beginning of the experiment, it was perhaps impossible to tell the difference. Numerous interviews and memoirs from the original Aurovilians confirm that many of them were first attracted to India as a spiritual oasis that would provide them with the space to “discover” themselves. Daniel Roucher, a French Aurovilian born in 1945, told the *New York Times* that he and his wife “stumbled on” Auroville during their “aimless wanderings in the East.”<sup>70</sup> Their daughter was born in Auroville soon after, one of the first children to be born an Aurovilian. Verne, an American Aurovilian, came to Auroville while on a quest “to discover [his] soul” and “unravel the mysteries of life.”<sup>71</sup> An American woman he had been involved with in Spain sent him a postcard from Auroville, urging him to come

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<sup>68</sup> The Mother, February 1971, reprinted in AA, “Auroville Guidelines”

<sup>69</sup> AA, The Mother, “Auroville” (1969), p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Rangan, “Utopian Town in India Built on a Dream,” 8.

<sup>71</sup> The following oral histories were collected by Kripa Borg and Toby Butler, mostly in 1999. They have been transcribed and are now kept in the Auroville Archives for researchers to access. For this reason, I treat them here as written texts and not as lived interviews. Verne, April 1999, transcription from audio recording.

there with the statement “this is the place I’ve been searching for my entire life.” Paul Pinton, a French Aurovilian born in Algeria in 1950, was a member of a series of caravans that, while destined for Auroville, took several months to reach it, travelling over-land from Europe.<sup>72</sup> Their caravan consisted of a Mercedes bus and two smaller vans, transporting 34 people, “mostly French.”<sup>73</sup> Judith, born in 1946 in Manchester, England, took a bus from London to Delhi in 1971, after someone told her about Auroville in her local pub.<sup>74</sup> Lisbeth, a Dutch Aurovilian born in 1948, that while in Holland, she kept having dreams about India.<sup>75</sup> Her and her partner soon left for India, travelling first to Goa and traveled from there to Pondicherry. Lisbeth remarked that upon arrival at the ashram “we really looked like hippies. We hadn’t worn shoes in a long time and had long hair, bells on my ankles and long skirts.” At the ashram, people said to her “you really look like pioneers – you should go to Auroville.”<sup>76</sup> Once she arrived at Auroville, she saw that people looked like her, Europeans “dressed in loin cloth[e]s, smoking their beedies, looking brown and healthy.” She felt she had finally arrived at her new home.

Auroville was envisioned as a post-colonial city that would eschew the worst offenses of colonialism – rejecting the constraints of national alliances, global capitalism, racism, and religious strife. The Mother proposed to create this utopia through a combination of innovative architecture, progressive educational programs, and a socialist society that would require everyone to work in equal capacities, and operate in a money-

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<sup>72</sup> AA, Paul Pinton and Laura Reddy interview, March 1999.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> AA, Judith interview, March 1999.

<sup>75</sup> AA, Lisbeth interview, 24 March 1999.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

less economy. Labor was seen as one of the primary means to spiritual advancement in Auroville. As the Mother wrote, “money will be no more the Sovereign Lord.”<sup>77</sup>

The support of the international community, especially France, was important to the principal architects of Auroville, for reasons of both economic gain and cultural and social legitimacy. Roger Anger, the chief architect of Auroville, a native Parisian, and the son-in-law of the Mother, paid a number of visits to French government officials, including the French Ambassador to India, promoting Auroville in the years before it was built.<sup>78</sup> The French diplomatic corps was largely in favor of promoting French culture through the auspices of the Auroville project, especially given their close relationship with the Mother. For the French government, particularly the Department of Foreign Affairs and the cultural ministry, the creation of Auroville presented an opportunity to retain/regain some amount of cultural influence in and around the region of the former French colony. François Baron, the last French governor of Pondicherry, expressed his enthusiasm towards the creation of Auroville in a series of letters to government officials. M. Jean Daridan, the French ambassador to India, sent a report to the Minister of Foreign Affairs outlining a meeting he had with Anger in April of 1966, most importantly that Auroville was designed to be an *international* space, expressed through a series of pavilions devoted to the study and performance of a number of national identities.

International recognition was especially important to the people in the Ashram, as the Ashram itself was regularly the target of local populations who saw the Ashram as contrary to local interests. Following the transfer of Pondicherry from France to India, the Ashram lost the support of the local government, which had been very friendly to their

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<sup>77</sup> *Auroville: The Cradle of a New Man*, 17.

<sup>78</sup> MAE: Asie-Océanie/Inde/378 (Dossier Auroville): Lettre de M. Jean Daridan à M. Couve de Murville (7 avril 1966).

interests while still in the hands of the French. While the Ashram continued to enjoy the support of the national government, which they enforced by plastering photos of the Mother with government officials, including Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter and future Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, all over their promotional materials, many of the local populations saw the Ashram as representative of both foreign colonial powers and the power of the central Indian government. This opposition was expressed, in one example, on the night of 11 February 1965, when a group of young people thought to be students associated with Anti-Hindi movement torched the Pondicherry railway station, and then set their sights on the Ashram. According to Ashram sources, they showed up in the evening while most Ashramites were in meditation, armed with sticks and stones. They looted and destroyed the Ashram food store, called the Honesty Society, and burned several Ashram residences.<sup>79</sup> Windows were broken in the main Ashram building, and “a stone reached the room of the Divine Mother herself.” Eventually, several young men who resided in the Ashram were called to chase of the band of “hooligans,” who “retreated against the rush of our boys.”<sup>80</sup>

Despite the many claims of the Ashram to be the spiritual and cultural center of Pondicherry, the blessed meeting of East and West, students in Pondicherry who were taking part of the Tamil Nadu-wide protests against Hindi as the national language attacked the Ashram for their promotion of Hindi, English, and French. The Ashram issued a pamphlet following the riots, noting that as a “spiritual institution” it was “above all such issues” but was “nevertheless made a target of the movement.”<sup>81</sup> Udar, an

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<sup>79</sup> Udar, “The Impact of the Anti-Hindi Movement on the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.” Included as a supplement to *Mother India* 17 (1965).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

Ashramite who wrote the pamphlet, believed that the Ashram *should* be well loved in Pondicherry for several reasons: because it was founded by Sri Aurobindo, a great freedom fighter, “because it has benefitted the town considerably by its example and practice of discipline and hygiene,” because it has brought income and development to the State, and because, they believed, it had “done such good work in its housing and departments and projects.”<sup>82</sup> He characterizes the groups who opposed the Ashram as jealous and petty, and blames the Catholics for not understanding the role of spiritual leaders in India. “The Anti-Hindi agitation was launched by the students and so they must take full responsibility for the accompanying violence. It is an open question, however, whether many of them actually took part in the attacks, which was largely composed of the hooligan element.” While the students attacked the Ashram for perpetuating colonial legacies of language instruction and Western practices, the Ashram declared the “hooliganism” of the students to be the problem, the foreign element disturbing a peaceful city, with the Ashram at the spiritual center.

Udar stressed that the Ashram was strictly apolitical “one of the few fundamental rules that govern the behaviour of members of the Ashram is the interdiction against politics. The Ashram is above all political affiliations or ideas and does not participate in any political movements,” a statement that Ashramites had issued during the tumultuous years of anti-colonial agitation between 1947 and 1954. The Mother also issued her response to the incident, and the role of the Ashram in Pondicherry: she began by asking, “How is it that the Ashram exists in this town for so many years and is not liked by the population?” Her response, “The first and immediate answer is that all those in this

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

population who are of a higher standard in culture, intelligence, good will and education not only have welcomed the Ashram but have expressed their sympathy, admiration and good feeling.” In plain language, anyone who had sympathies with the colonial regime, and considered themselves a part of the French cultural milieu *understood* the importance of the Ashram, in a way the local, not Westernized populations could not. She points her finger at four groups who continue to oppose the Ashram: the Catholics (“because they are convinced that whoever is not a Catholic must be an instrument of the devil”), the Communists, the D.M.K. (“who cannot tolerate the presence on their soil of people coming from the North”), and lastly, “a rather low category of the population who had succeeded in taking advantage of the French rule and are dead against all change and progress.”<sup>83</sup>

### **Constructing Utopia: Barren Lands, Active Laborers**

#### *Conditions for living in Auroville*

From the psychological point of view, the required conditions are:

1. To be convinced of the essential unity of mankind and to have the will to collaborate for the material realization of that unity.
2. To have the will to collaborate in all that furthers future realization.

The material conditions will be worked out as the realization proceeds.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the hassle of obtaining a visa, Europeans and Americans came to Auroville. During the first few years of construction, beginning as early as 1966, newspapers in the West, from France to the United States, published numerous articles lauding the efforts of the Aurovilians. In 1970, the French magazine *Marie-Claire*

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<sup>83</sup> The Mother, “A Declaration” 16 February 1965, in *Mother India* 17 (1965). The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) is the primary Tamil political party, still prominent in both Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu.

<sup>84</sup> AA, The Mother (1967), *Auroville Guidelines*.

declared Auroville the new “capital of a spiritual empire,”<sup>85</sup> while one year later the *New York Times* profiled the “utopian town in India built on a dream.”<sup>86</sup> The coverage provided by the international press, along with a deluge of promotional materials produced and distributed by over 80 Sri Aurobindo Centers scattered throughout the world, encouraged anyone who believed in the possibility of spiritual harmony and the betterment of all humans to come join the effort to construct an “international township” where everyone would be considered “citizens of the world.” While the initial plans for Auroville called for a population of 50,000 people, the actual population during the first five years (1968-1973) fluctuated between 150 and 400 people.<sup>87</sup> The population data for 1972 lists 320 residents, 121 of whom were Indian, and 190 Western. Of the 121 Indian residents, approximately 15 were Tamil.<sup>88</sup>

After the excitement of the inaugural ceremony settled down, the immense amount of work that lay ahead of the Auroville pioneers began to emerge. While Roger Anger and his team of French architects were busy creating plans for this “city of the future,” the caravans of people recruited from around the world began to arrive to the sight of a large stretch of red desert, surrounded by desiccated farms and small villages. Roy Chyat, a newcomer to Auroville in its early years, remembers, “there was nothing here. No trees. It was like a desert.”<sup>89</sup> Bob and Deborah Lawlor, an American couple who were among the first to settle on Aurovilian land, “slept under a keet overhang in the open, and felt very isolated.”<sup>90</sup> As they had no local source of water, they had to wait for

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<sup>85</sup> Marie-Claire, June 1970, 102.

<sup>86</sup> Kasturi Rangan, “Utopian Town in India Built on a Dream,” *New York Times*, 16 Oct 1971, 8.

<sup>87</sup> AA, Auroville Population and List of Aurovilians, Box No. 1, File No.1, 1971-74.

<sup>88</sup> AA, Auroville Population and List of Aurovilians, Box No. 1, File No.1, 1971-74.

<sup>89</sup> AA, Roy Chyat interview, October 1999.

<sup>90</sup> “There was a kind of magic...” *Auroville Experience*, 8.

a jeep to deliver milk containers full of water from Pondicherry every few days.<sup>91</sup> “It was a moonscape. Nothing was growing,” remembered Francis, another early Aurovilian.<sup>92</sup> These pioneers all remember the challenges that faced them when they arrived in Auroville, and consistently remarked that when they arrived there was nothing to see but red dirt and the Bay of Bengal in the distance. They were faced with constructing an entire city on an inhospitable land: dry, infertile, uncultivated, and hot.

A “progress report” on the initial phases of the construction of Auroville, produced in November 1968, stated that the particular land chosen for the construction of Auroville was chosen because “the land is sparsely populated [and] a city can be built with minimum disturbance to the local population. Much of the land is uncultivated.”<sup>93</sup> Despite countless allusions to the “deserted” land, there was a sizeable local population that watched curiously as Westerners and north Indians descended on their land. The local populations greatly outnumbered the initial migration of foreigners. During the first few years of Auroville’s existence (at least until 1974), the population did not top 400.<sup>94</sup> The surrounding villages, meanwhile, held thousands of people who were somewhat bewildered, and frustrated, by the presence of these new arrivals. When asked about the presence of the Aurovilians in 1974, the local villagers gave a variety of responses, from “I don’t know about Auroville. It should not disturb the village people,” to “it may be slavery again, as before, because they find us black, ugly and poor,” and “previously the white men were cruel. Now they look nice and quiet.”<sup>95</sup> It slowly became clear to the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> “Looking Forward, Looking Back,” *Auroville Experience*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> AA, *Auroville International Township Progress Report*, 1 November 1968.

<sup>94</sup> AA, *Auroville Population and List of Aurovilians*, Box No. 1, File No.1, 1971-74.

<sup>95</sup> AA, *Auroville: January, 1974*, 9.

Aurovilians that despite the “spiritual superiority” of the Tamils, they were going to have to work hard to integrate their project with the lives and interests of the local villagers.

From the beginning, the Mother had insisted that all Indians were spiritually in-tune with the ideals of Auroville. Neither she nor any of the planners predicted encountering any resistance from the local Tamil population. Her view was that “Auroville belongs to nobody in particular” but to “humanity as a whole.”<sup>96</sup> This meant that all people, including the local population, could choose to become an Aurovilian by accepting the spiritual life that it offered. However, this universal ideal did not always manifest itself into material reality. The tensions between the Aurovilians and the local population started before the inauguration, as representatives from Auroville began to purchase the desired land. Dhanapal, a Tamil man born in the neighboring village of Kuilapalayam in 1968, remembers the changes that Auroville brought to the local communities early on. “My family owned large plots of land,” he recounts, “and they sold much of it to Auroville. Sharnga [a French-run Auroville guest house that is still operating today] is largely built on land once owned by my father; the land of Prayathna belonged to my Uncle. But the sales did not make us rich.”<sup>97</sup> Impoverished local farmers who needed money sold their land to Auroville, only to find themselves unemployed and landless. “I don’t know anything about Auroville,” remarked an anonymous Tamil villager, “it is a secret. And I don’t care much, but I need Rs. 2000 for my marriage so let them buy my one-acre. Then I can marry and get work in Auroville.”<sup>98</sup>

The financing for the initial land acquisition and construction in Auroville came primarily from Aurovilians, although there were some other donations sent in from

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<sup>96</sup> AA, Auroville Charter, 28 February 1968. Reprinted in *Auroville Guidelines*, 1.

<sup>97</sup> “Constructing the City: A Portrait of Dhanapal,” *Auroville Experience*, 200.

<sup>98</sup> AA, *Auroville: January, 1974*, 8-9.

members of Sri Aurobindo Centers around the world. Aurovilians were expected to “lose the sense of material possession” and give their belongings to the group, to be distributed to all of Auroville. Once in Auroville they would then realize that “work, even manual work, is something indispensable for the inner discovery.”<sup>99</sup> The emphasis on the importance of manual labor was repeatedly stressed, largely because the people coming from the West were unaccustomed to working in this capacity. As the planners bought the land for the creation of Auroville, the Aurovilians found themselves in an unfamiliar environment, needing to cultivate the land and learn about local varieties of plants and foodstuffs, as well as adjusting to the climate and diet of the region. Very few of these pioneers had any experience with farming or manual labor, and they quickly realized they could hire the local people as laborers. Roy Chyat remembers, “you couldn’t do anything without help from the village people. So everything was basically them. In those days, you would hire a laborer who would work all day for three rupees twenty. Which is really like nothing. Even in those days. Well, the dollar was nine to the rupee then, still, nothing. So you’d have a lot of Tamil people.”<sup>100</sup> Speaking about the building of the *Matrimandir*, the spiritual orb that is at the center of Auroville, Francis remembers the mysteriousness of the groups of Tamil laborers that were hired to aid in the construction. “I don’t really know where they came from, but they hired themselves out as a full village to dig...it was amazing to watch because it was just like ants on the move. You couldn’t believe that these little *ammās* (village women) carrying that little bit of soil...but it was continuous and down [they] went in the hole...”<sup>101</sup> Statements such as

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<sup>99</sup> The relationship to material possessions and the importance of labor for spiritual discovery are numbers three and four in the list “To be a True Aurovilian” (1970) printed in *Auroville Guidelines*.

<sup>100</sup> AA, Roy Chyat interview.

<sup>101</sup> “Looking Forward, Looking Back,” *Auroville Experience*, 12.

these make it clear that many Aurovilians viewed the labor of the Tamilians as less valuable than their own. While they took pride in their own labor, believing that they were serving a greater spiritual purpose through their work, they viewed the Tamil laborers as different than themselves: they lived a “traditional,” or old, lifestyle, and were not ready for the *progressive* ideas of Auroville. The social and cultural separation, or estrangement, between the Aurovilians and the Tamils made it easier for the Aurovilians to exploit the labor of the Tamilians, never considering them as equals. Both Tamil land and Tamil labor were essential to the building of Auroville, although once they sold their land, they no longer had any claim to the products of their labor.

The loss of land for the local villagers did not appear as a problem to the Mother, who conceived of Auroville as a collective, money-less society. She believed that eventually the Tamilians would understand the Aurovilian project, and would thus regain use of the land along with the collective whole. Progress reports on land acquisition noted that while Auroville had not convinced all the villagers to sell their land, it would be better for the villagers if they did sell it, as it would be “given back to all after their and our transformation.”<sup>102</sup> The Mother implored the pioneers to “explain to the villagers that we are there to make life better and easier for them and not more difficult. We will like to take them as people of Auroville if they collaborate and are willing for it...one has to convince them that we are their benefactors.”<sup>103</sup> While the Mother continued to insist that the local population should be integrated into the Aurovilian way of life, the first Aurovilians quickly realized that it was easier to change the landscape than the people.

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<sup>102</sup> AA, *Auroville: The City of the Future*: 1974, 19.

<sup>103</sup> Jhunjhuwala, *Down Memory Lane*, 121.

Despite the Mother's announcement that the Tamil people "are the original Aurovilians," many of the non-Tamil Aurovilians found themselves at odds with the local populations. Deborah Lawlor remembers thinking she was "an object of great curiosity, being the first non-Indian many villagers had seen."<sup>104</sup> Deborah would often ride her bicycle between Auroville and Pondicherry to buy food and other supplies. When she would cycle through the Tamil village of Kottakuppam, "children would tease [her] by throwing stones and calling *vellakari* [meaning white woman]."<sup>105</sup> There were violent incidents in the early years between the Aurovilians and local Tamil villagers who were hired as security guards or manual laborers, when Tamilians were accused of stealing equipment or not fulfilling their duties.<sup>106</sup>

The Mother instructed the Aurovilians to go into the villages and explain their good motives and intentions to the villagers, but few Aurovilians were able to communicate with the people. While some Aurovilians were able to learn Tamil and communicate with the local villagers, most of the first Aurovilians admit that they never were able to learn the language. "People picked up workable Tamil," remembers one pioneer, "but the Tamils are much quicker at picking up English."<sup>107</sup> A 1974 booklet on Auroville-Tamil relations stated, "it takes over three years to learn that difficult Tamil, so hardly anyone knows it yet."<sup>108</sup> While the Aurovilians learned that they could get by with just a few Tamil phrases, those Tamil villagers who hoped to gain employment from their

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<sup>104</sup> "There was a Kind of Magic," *Auroville Experience*, 8. Although it seems unlikely that after 200 years of colonial rule by Europeans, the villagers had never seen a white person.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>106</sup> *Auroville Voice*, 1970-74.

<sup>107</sup> AA, Shyama interview, March 1999.

<sup>108</sup> AA, *Auroville: January, 1974*, 11.

new wealthy neighbors had to become quite fluent in English, a familiar experience for hundreds of thousands of former colonial subjects seeking jobs.

One group of Aurovilians decided to establish their community next to a Tamil village called Kottakarai. In an attempt to integrate themselves with the village, they named their community Kottakarai as well. An article in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram publication, *World Union*, penned by an Aurovilian named Ronald Jorgenson, comments on this meeting of cultures and peoples by suggesting that the taking of this Tamil name by a group of Aurovilians showed the “unity between the local Indian villager’s ancient past and the international arrival’s young present.”<sup>109</sup> The Westerners who came to Auroville were generally educated, white, and with some amount of monetary security, and had been vetted by the Mother. As we have already seen, Westerners comprised about half the population, the other half being people from north India. Like the Westerners, they were often well educated with monetary security and, notably, much lighter skinned than the Tamils. The divide between the Tamils and Aurovilians was not limited to Westerners and non-Westerners, but was instead marked by distinctions of class and race. Within the discourses that created the foundations of the relationships between Aurovilian and non-Aurovilian, these distinctions were often made through a temporal language that saw the Tamil people as *ancient* and the Aurovilians as not only *modern*, but the hope for the *future*. A hierarchy which placed Aurovilian over Tamilian, established through a racialized division of labor and a reliance on the colonial discourses of ancient versus modern during the early years of Auroville, transformed the indigenous Tamil population into an “Other” on their own land.

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<sup>109</sup> Ronald Jorgenson, “ ‘In Auroville’: The Community that Lost Its Name,” *World Union* 14 no.4 (1974): 46.

*Aurovilian and Non-Aurovilian*<sup>110</sup>

You see, many Tamil Aurovilians feel inferior to the Westerners. We do not have their level of education, we do not master English well enough, and we are not so good in expressing ourselves at meetings. So there has always been a tendency to only stick to one's own work.<sup>111</sup> Dhanapal, Tamil Villager and Auroville Employee

By 1974, the year after the Mother “left her body,” it was clear to a large portion of Aurovilians that something more had to be done to improve their relations with the Tamil villagers. One Aurovilian wrote in 1974, “there is no trust, really, between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’. ‘We’ don’t know how to behave as ‘bosses’. Tend to be overly severe, heavy, threatening – or too ‘sweet’, ‘wishy-washy’ give ‘them’ the idea ‘we’ don’t really care what ‘they’ do. We must learn ‘their’ language or SOME common language must be devised, or what?”<sup>112</sup> Many of the Aurovilians seemed surprised that the Mother’s prediction that the Tamil people would come to believe in their project was not immediately coming to fruition. As they grappled with how to run Auroville without the presence of the Mother, many of them came to accept their cultural and material differences with the local community. While projects geared at “villager integration,” largely through education and employment, continued, and continue to this day, the early hopes that the Tamil community would organically integrate themselves into the spiritual realm of Auroville had largely dissipated by 1974.

The construction of a subjugated people as ancient, and thus anti-modern, is a familiar trope in colonial discourses. While Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were ostensibly anti-colonialists, their beliefs and practices in *international living* and *progress*

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<sup>110</sup> This phrasing is inspired by the excellent work by M.S.S. Pandian on another important distinction within Tamil communities in South India. See M.S.S. Pandian, *Brahmin & Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).

<sup>111</sup> Dhanapal, *Auroville Experience*, 200.

<sup>112</sup> *Auroville, 1974*, 23-24.

translated into an essentialized understanding of national identities that isolated culture from politics. Auroville was envisioned as an international city that would serve as a “bridge” between a series of binaries: east and west, past and future, rich and poor. The Mother and the original Aurovilians envisioned reforesting a land that had been “used, overused, misused, abused, neglected, [and] wasted for thousands of years,” for the greater good of all people.<sup>113</sup> They hoped for a redistribution of wealth through a commitment to a collective life governed by a spiritual understanding of the world that replaced material concerns with a common desire to “evolve to the next level.” Unlike other experiments in utopia based on Marxist or other socialist ideologies, Auroville always insisted on an understanding of “the divine” for inclusion within its borders. To understand “the divine” and to be comfortable submitting one’s life to the ideals of Auroville, one also had to have an understanding of the self that laid somewhere between the east/west dichotomy that fascinated individuals such as Sri Aurobindo and Mira Alfassa. The construction of the Aurovilian, the modern individual who could work collectively, yet still turn inwards in hope of personal attainment of a higher consciousness, was exactly the blend of east and west that Westerners and, to some extent, upper class or bourgeois “Easterners,” were seeking in the secluded spiritual enclaves of “ancient” India. Unfortunately for the local Tamil populations, who were completely immersed in the political present, they did not have the time or means to give their selves to this search for spiritual awakening. Liberal ideologies of universal equality, the basis of the Aurovilian model of utopia, depended on the exclusions of other ‘non-believers’ to isolate their community.

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<sup>113</sup> *Auroville Voice* 2 no. 1 (1978): 16.

### **Auroville Today: Some Conclusions**

Auroville has experienced many changes throughout the past 40 years. The most significant involved a separation between the SAS, the foundation that took control of the Auroville project following the death of the Mother, and Auroville. A protracted battle over the control of Auroville's assets developed over the course of the late 1970s and ended in the 'Auroville Emergency Provisions Act' in 1980, and eventually the founding of the Auroville Foundation in 1991.<sup>114</sup> This era also saw the end of the belief that Auroville would eventually have 50,000 inhabitants. The original plans for Auroville which called for the town to take the form of a galaxy, filled with skyscrapers and moving sidewalks, had been abandoned by the mid-1970s, when many Aurovilians recognized how hostile the "modern" extra-terrestrial design was towards the local landscape.<sup>115</sup> By the 1980s, one senior Auroville architect "suggested that 10,000 inhabitants was the absolute maximum which could be accommodated."<sup>116</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the numerous changes in the community, both positive and negative, that Auroville has undergone since the mid-1970s, it is telling that as a society Auroville continues to struggle with the role that Tamil people and culture should play in Aurovilian society. It is not a stretch to say that in Auroville today, the separation between Aurovilian and Tamilian, and the exploitation of Tamil labor for the operation of Auroville, continues to make Auroville a functioning community.

The struggle of the local Tamil communities to resist integration with Auroville and the enclosure of their land has been submerged by Western-style "humanitarian" efforts to bring education to the Tamil children, and to provide training for local women

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<sup>114</sup> Between 1980 and 1991, the Government of India acted as the official manager of all Auroville's assets.

<sup>115</sup> "Towards a Township" in *Auroville Experience*, 45.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

to make, for example, incense, soap, clothes, as well as jewelry and bowls out of recycled trash. A pamphlet put out during Auroville's 40-year anniversary in 2008 boasts their accomplishments in the "creation of employment opportunities for some 4-5,000 local people, some with associated training opportunities," "an active Village Action Group working to improve the life of people in 60 local villages," "5 schools, 2 kindergartens and 2 crèches for Auroville children, plus another 16 outreach schools overseen by Auroville," and, amongst many more items, "over 140 business business/commercial units under 25 trusts, several exporting to Europe, USA and other parts of the world."<sup>117</sup> Jobs are created for local villagers, largely in the fields of manual labor, craft production, and housekeeping and cooking. The production of Aurovilian handicrafts is extremely profitable, and the over 40 guests houses, which are staffed almost entirely by Tamil cooks and maids, bring even more revenue into Auroville. The state of Tamil Nadu and the near-by Union Territory of Pondicherry continue to express interest in the development of Auroville, particularly because their success brings more tourist money to local merchants and state organizations.<sup>118</sup>

Are the Western residents of Auroville tourists, settlers, or did they, as the Mother suggested in reference to herself, become Indians? In her work on spiritual tourism and "foreign swamis" in India, the anthropologist Meena Khandelwal has suggested that based on her ethnographic work, Westerners who come to India and remain there as members of ashrams and other religious communities are often transmigrants who eschew the language of displacement, as they drop any emotional attachment to their

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<sup>117</sup> PRISMA, Aurelec-Prayogashala, "Auroville celebrates 40 years" (2008).

<sup>118</sup> *Auroville Land Fund Newsletter* (41): January – March 2008.

country of origin and refer to India as “home.”<sup>119</sup> However, unlike Westerners that Khandelwal looks at, most who renounce their Western citizenship to gain Indian citizenship, and fully immerse themselves in the culture of the spiritual group they join, Auroville was built as a Western utopia on Indian (specifically Tamil) land. The majority of non-Indians who live in Auroville retain their natal citizenships, and are actively encouraged to bring their “national culture” into the life of Auroville’s global community, as evidenced by the emphasis Auroville places on the operation of national pavilions. The idea of global citizenship allows for a multiplicity of belongings and affiliations, the ability to be French, Indian, British, and American simultaneously. This chapter has shown how the idea of a global citizen worked well for Westerners, who were able, due to the power of their EU and American passports, to live in India *without* becoming Indians. For the local Tamil population, who have been integral to the construction and operation of Auroville, being anything but a Tamil remains mostly impossible, due to the limited power of their passports, and their place in the global economic order. Even those Tamils who are French nationals in France are tied to a static identity that separates them from the French population.

Auroville stands on the edge of Pondicherry, just outside the contested borders of colonial and post-colonial rule that have run through and shaped this dissertation. On the surface, Auroville claims to be a space where national cultures can be brought together, regardless of the politics that often keep cultures separate outside this specific space. Just 10 km away in Pondicherry, a city constructed by colonial interests and molded by imperial politics, French nationals of Indian origin, who today number near 15,000

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<sup>119</sup> Meena Khandelwal, “Foreign Swamis at Home in India: Transmigration to the Birthplace of Spirituality,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 14 (2007).

people, struggle to fit into a society that views them as ghosts of the colonial past.

Travelling between these two zones are thousands of Tamil laborers who support the tourist industries bringing substantial revenue to Pondicherry and Auroville. The meeting of East and West, an idea born of colonial ideology, remains embedded in systems of global capitalism and neo-colonialism, undermining the liberatory potential of post-colonial relationships rooted in decolonial ideas.

### *Conclusion*

Today French India exists as a memory, and perhaps more concretely, as a tourist destination. Recently, on 2 February 2012, the French Consulate in Pondicherry held a debate in honor of the release of a book by the French-American photographer Sebastian Cortés entitled *Pondicherry Heritage: from Perception to Action*.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, Sebastian Cortés, the photographer and primary artist behind the book, first came to Pondicherry to live in Auroville, where he continues to live today. Speaking to an audience at the Consulate, Cortés described himself as “a little bit of a nostalgic.” The preface, written by French philosopher and novelist Pascal Bruckner, is titled “An Eden that is Hard to Fathom.” Written in 2011/12, the essay invokes countless images and sentiments similar to those written by European visitors to Pondicherry during the colonial era. Bruckner writes that Pondicherry seems to have “slipped out of everyone’s memory, as it lay hopeless under the scorching sun.” The “half-caste patrician” who owned the guesthouse he was staying at possessed an “18-year old Indian mistress” who Bruckner and his associates “eyed with envy.” Bruckner noted that for the guesthouse owner, “life had stopped with the departure of the French.” To save Pondicherry from “oblivion and collapse” people have come to restore houses and buildings to their former colonial glory – a move that has saved Pondicherry from being “gobbled up by India.” “Pondicherry is visited and re-visited by people who love India, people looking for something other than a cheap thrill, who stop here to get acclimatized and breathe a subtle fragrance wafting between two continents, Europe and Asia,” writes Pascal. Referring to the book launch event held at the French Consulate, the national newspaper

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<sup>1</sup> Sebastian Cortés, *Pondicherry Heritage: From Perception to Action*. New Delhi: Lustre Press, 2012.

*The Hindu* remarked, “Tourism normally is considered a destroyer of heritage but in the case of the union territory (of Pondicherry), it has turned to be a force for preservation.”<sup>2</sup>

A great amount of importance has been placed on efforts of a group called INTACH, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage.<sup>3</sup> INTACH is a national organization, with 140 offices throughout India – the Pondicherry branch was founded in 1984. Located at 62 Aurobindo Street, INTACH includes in its mission to help in “renovation and restoration of heritage houses,” to “hold seminars, exhibitions and publish promotional material,” and to “promote tourism and cultural heritage.” The restoration of “Franco-Tamil” houses and buildings in Pondicherry helps the thousands of visitors who have come to witness the oddness of French-India to visualize the past. It gives them something to look at and point to as “hybrid,” evidence of the meeting of France and India. The plan for the preservation of French culture in Pondicherry, promulgated by the French and Indian governments in 1962 in the Treaty of Cession, seems to be working well – the image projected by institutions such as INTACH and the French Consulate is that everyone is happy with the tourist boom in Pondicherry, the continued relationship between France and India, and the growth of Auroville.

Could it be possible that no one in Pondicherry remembers the years of violence and manipulation that marked the decade leading up to independence? Has everyone forgotten the year (1963) that over 5,000 of their neighbors and friends moved to France to begin new lives? Most people who learn about Pondicherry today learn about it from tourist materials, travel writing, and historical plaques placed throughout the city. Unlike the former British India, which has thousands of statues of freedom fighters dotting the

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<sup>2</sup> “Tourism has been a boon for Puducherry’s heritage: official,” *The Hindu* 4 February 2012. <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/article2859760.ece>. Accessed 4 June 2012.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.intachpondicherry.org/>

landscape, Pondicherry has a statue of M.K. Gandhi and street signs that carry the names of French colonial rulers, such as Rue François Martin and Rue Dupleix, although now the signs carry their names in both French and Tamil. While there are streets named after figures from the anti-British independence movement, including Nehru, Aurobindo, and Gandhi, there is very little public acknowledgement of the existence of anti-French sentiment. While having negative feelings towards the British is encouraged, France largely remains in a positive light.

Throughout this dissertation, I have suggested various sites where colonialism and colonial ideology have thrived and continue to persist: on borders, within the cultures of families formed in the colonial era, and in the adoption of post-colonial nationalisms that accept the complete separation of national identities. In order to maintain a “friendly” relationship, India and France, two independent and sovereign republics, chose to erase the violence, dynamics of power, and struggles of the colonial past, and to replace these memories with a positive story of cross-cultural friendship and the meeting of East and West. The relationship between Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, for example, provided a perfect example for the forgetting of the colonial past. However idealized the relationship between this Indian man and French woman who desired universal peace continues to be, the construction of Auroville as a community that systematically excludes local peoples shows us how “the West,” and specifically the insistent tide of global capitalism, continues to rule over “the East,” how the North rules over the South.

This leads me to suggest that perhaps the most important place for us to look when searching for where colonial ideas continue to thrive is in history itself. The few scholars who have written about the history of French India stress that it is impossible to

understand the construction of French India as a space, a society, and a people, without looking to England, both as colonizer of the people and land surrounding French India, but also as a rival of the French.<sup>4</sup> While the history of French India lies in the shadows of the British Empire, the shadow was extended by the power of the Indian state that fought to bring French India into its fold, negotiating not with the people of French India, but with the French government, located primarily in Paris. Despite India being a new nation, founded on the principles of anti-colonial nationalism, the power the government possessed *as* a nation-state continued the march of domination over the French Indian land and people. In order to accommodate the inclusion of Pondicherry into mainstream Indian nationalism, the Indian government has allowed and, in fact, encouraged Pondicherry to be remembered as a space that served as a refuge for anti-colonial nationalists, as well as a space that exemplifies the possibilities of Indian collaboration with European ideas, ignoring the fact that the promised referendum of the future of French India never occurred.

The myth that lies at the heart of the post-colonial friendship between France and India is that the relationship is, in fact, no longer colonial. While I have already mentioned the importance of the British Empire in the history of French India, it is just as important to place French India into the context of the larger French Empire. There has been an undercurrent throughout this work of the anti-colonial struggles for independence in Madagascar, Indochina, and Algeria. I have often used the words of the theorist and anti-colonial writer Frantz Fanon to help explain the colonial mindset, even though the periods leading to decolonization in Pondicherry and Algeria were dramatically different

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<sup>4</sup> See Ian H. Magedera, "France-India-Britain, (Post)colonial Triangles: Mauritius/India and Canada/India, (Post)colonial Tangents," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 5 (2002).

circumstances. Although Fanon did not live long enough to see the liberation of Algeria, he predicted that the nations that emerged from the ashes of empire would be burdened by the past. In his essay “On National Culture,” Fanon wrote,

... Colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Algeria, where the hurdles towards assimilation and French citizenship were numerous and transparent for millions of Algerians living under colonial rule, acknowledged by Algerian nationalists and political groups like the FLN, the fact that many people who comprised the lower castes and lower classes of French India *did* become French citizens in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century obscured the hierarchies of race and culture, hierarchies that thrive in the post-colonial metropole, as evidenced by the Pondichérien peoples who migrated to France.

There were many people who attempted to transgress national boundaries through alternative formulations of themselves or their communities. But, how are we supposed to discuss their struggles and their history without re-producing the very categories that entrapped them into the dominant nation-based paradigm of telling and thinking about history? One of the central goals of this dissertation has been to question who the subject of a French-Indian history is – is it French colonialists who lived in India, or is it the *métis* or *créole* individual who felt some sense of both world? Is the French Indian subject a man like Subbiah, who did not care which nationality he held, but only wanted

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<sup>5</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1968): 210.

to access as many resources as possible in order to spread his message of global communism? Is it Mirra Alfassa, a French woman who came to French India and never left, devoting herself to constructing a new vision for all of humanity from her post in Pondicherry? Or is it Raphael Ramanayya Dadala, a Dalit who fought for the freedom of French India, but in the end regretted his choice not to opt for French nationality? What of Edourad Goubert, a *métis* who chose to assimilate to Indian political and cultural practices in a post-colonial India? Is it possible that all these people could be French-Indians?

Over a decade ago, the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty wrote a book that suggested that the categories we use to discuss political modernity, such as concepts of the subject, democracy, social justice, rationality, and a whole range of other commonly used categories of analysis are rooted in “European thought and history.”<sup>6</sup> It is very difficult, he makes clear, even for historians of the non-West to write a history divorced from Europe and European thought. What then are we to do with the issue of using colonial categories to write colonial history? One of the suggestions Chakrabarty, amongst others, makes is to destabilize the dominant narrative, to find the cracks in the static notions of modernity and civilization that allow us to examine how time and history are flexible, and that many histories are hidden beyond our ability to understand them with our current tools.

The concept of decolonization is rooted in political process: according to the Oxford English Dictionary, decolonization is “the withdrawal from its former colonies of a colonial power; the acquisition of a political or economic independence by such

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<sup>6</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000): 4.

colonies.” Decolonization is seen as happening at the level of national and/or state governments; it does not occur at the level of community or of the individual. I hope that throughout this dissertation I have convinced the reader that while decolonization is certainly central to state-based discourse, it is also an idea essential to the construction of the post-colonial subject. As Walter D. Mignolo has written,

The crooked rhetoric that naturalizes ‘modernity’ as a universal global process and point of arrival hides its darker side, the constant reproduction of ‘coloniality.’ In order to uncover the *perverse logic* – that Fanon pointed out – underlying the philosophical conundrum of modernity/coloniality and the political and economic structure of imperialism/colonialism, we must consider how to decolonize the ‘mind’ and the ‘imaginary’ – that is, knowledge and being.<sup>7</sup>

The intimate relationship between the “coloniality of power,” that of economic and political processes, and the “coloniality of knowledge and of being,” (race, gender, subjectivity, knowledge), suggests Mignolo, is made transparent in decolonial thinking, a move away from relying on a canon of Western theorists to explain the persistence of colonial mind-sets in our contemporary world. The term ‘decoloniality,’ in Mignolo’s work, refers to the need to delink knowledge and history “from the colonial matrix of power underlying Western modernity” in an attempt to build global futures based not on exploitation and wealth accumulation but on global connections that promote mutual aid and solidarity.<sup>8</sup>

I began this dissertation by suggesting that it would be difficult to understand the history of French India through the national lens of either France or India, that the

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<sup>7</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of Decoloniality” *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 449-514; 450.

<sup>8</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

shifting borders and flexible subject identities created by the colonial system transgressed traditional methodologies based on the interests of nation-states. Imperial expansion was, of course, a project of national expansion, and thus needs to be understood in the colonial context. My goal then, within this context, was to destabilize the borders and fixed identities of the colonies and colonial society to suggest that a life existed outside of the nation and outside of the colony. This work has only shown a small glimpse of that life – I believe that extensive ethnographic work must be undertaken in order to further this project. Rather than suggesting that there was some better of decolonizing French India, I am suggesting that we ought to seek decolonial ways of understanding the history of the land and people known as French India. My hope is that this dissertation can serve as a first step towards decolonizing global knowledge of French India, and clear a space for further exploration and inquiry into the many groups and movements on the borders of colonial society that were dispersed and forgotten by the end of empire.

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- AN           *Archives Nationales*  
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- IOR          British Library  
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- MAE         *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères Archives*  
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