

# The Creation and Maintenance of a Divided City

*The case of Pondicherry*

Konrad Markus Moss



Master's Thesis in South Asian Studies -  
Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS)

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

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Master's Thesis in South Asian Studies – 40 Credits

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# Summary

This thesis looks at the historically segregated city of Pondicherry. Once a symbol of French colonial power, the small urban area of city was divided into “White Town” and “Tamil Town” in order to maintain political and economic control – thus dividing its population. The creation and maintenance of identity in contemporary Pondicherry is linked to *belonging* and the use of urban space – further juxtaposed by certain ethnic stereotypes and expectations towards “us” and “them”. By expanding upon the historic background of colonial Pondicherry – this thesis aims to understand how the identities of Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens interact with urban space, each other and the defined roles superimposed on other members of urban Pondicherry.

In order to better understand the creation of a divided Pondicherry, this thesis works with the segregated urban structure of Pondicherry in a historic context, before entering and exploring the contemporary urban spaces within its city limits – and discussing the contrasting anticipations regarding future heritage preservation and development in Pondicherry. This will serve as a canvas to better understand how divided cities are created and maintained.

# Acknowledgements

*“Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is” – Clifford Geertz, 1973*

This thesis has become my everything. Researching the topics of Pondicherry became more than an interesting field; it changed my academic perception, my engagement and understanding of academia. I have felt times of stress in field, the tired long evenings of writing, the happiness of discussion and the development of insight.

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Oslo, Norway - December 2017

Konrad M. Moss



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# 1 Introduction

Post-colonial writing in India has largely focused on the former British and Portuguese areas. Colonial segregation was common, as colonial families sought private areas divided from the general population. The idea of segregating space was nothing new; segregation of towns can be linked several centuries in the past towards the ancient European ideas of building cities where political rank separated the higher members from mere members of society, at the same time as city-dwellers were separated from foreigners (Nightingale, 2012, p. 19). As Nightingale discusses in *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities*, the British, after earlier attempts of dividing the cities themselves, later often built quasi-cities outside of the urban area in order to separate the local population and the members of the British company. Often residing in hillside stations, this development kept the minority of British nationals “safe” from the urban life (Nightingale, 2012, pp. 113-133). As most post-colonial theory is built around the larger availability of British and/or Portuguese background, interestingly the former French colonies, albeit smaller enclaves in colonial India saw a different development of divided cities. The union territory of Pondicherry, with its smaller and spread geographical areas including the city of Puducherry (Pondicherry) and the territories of Mahé, Karikal (Karaikal) and Yanam (Yanam) kept the urban segregation inside the urban regions without developing external suburbanized areas. As in Puducherry, then Pondichéry, the area lacked major construction prior to colonization. The development of urban areas was of planned segregation – building a “Ville Blanc” (White Town) and “Ville Noir” (Black Town) from early on. These architectural traits, heavily inspired by French and Portuguese building plans in Europe, created a symmetric, grid-system of streets, easily creating several urban spaces allocated to different ethnic backgrounds, such as the minority of French nationals, the Muslim quarters, and the residential areas west of the city-wide canal, which was built by the Oupar river – the “Ville Noir”. As social mobility was somewhat possible by working for, or through affiliation to the French society, this created the identities of “Tamil-Pondicherrien” and “Franco-Pondicherrien”. Largely separated by the city-canal, the “Franco- and Tamil Pondicherriens” resided on different sides, but both within the town fortifications. After independence of the French areas, the Nationality Act created room for either choosing to remain a French citizen, or transferring the family nationality to India – thus

maintaining a clear distinction between the two, which can still be seen today. Through this thesis, I will examine the historical background of Pondicherry as a divided city, and how it resulted in dividing the urban area within the fortifications, before engaging a discussion on how contemporary Pondicherry maintains the clear opposition of “Franco-and Tamil Pondicherrien” identity in a way that is likely to keep Pondicherry divided in the future.

## **1.1 Introducing the research topic**

Pondicherry as a divided city needs a historic context. Though urban structure often is credited to the works of François Martin and Dupleix, the early French administrators of Pondicherry which I later will present, the segregated development of Pondicherry must be seen in the context of colonial tension, and the creation of groups of identity. As the organization of the population created the French society of Franco Pondicherriens, the juxtaposed groups of identity within the population later created segregated societies expanding further than the physical distinctions between ‘White Town’ and ‘Tamil Town’. Some of these distinctions are still seen in contemporary Pondicherry, heavily maintained on a combination of *belonging* to either group, the architectural differences in urban spaces, and the ethnic stereotypes present in everyday life. The differences in use of urban space, and expectations towards future development in Pondicherry all link closely to the participation and belonging to either identity.

By combining a close reading of secondary historical sources with fieldwork within contemporary Pondicherry, I will introduce through my thesis a discussion on the ethnic stereotypes and the usage of urban space according to social background. I will further work towards understanding how the historical dividing of Pondicherry help maintain polarization of the urban population through ethnical stereotypes juxtaposed upon each other. This will work towards better understanding how urban structure and linguistic differences create a divided population, and how maintenance of the divided population results in different expectations to further development and preservation of urban spaces.

## 1.2 Terminology and Chapter Outline

Due to the nature of this thesis, several concepts will be introduced through the chapters. This project will include discussion on ‘identity’, ‘boundaries’, as well as local jargon of “Franco- and Tamil Pondicherrien”. As these terms and concepts have ranged use, understanding and depth, it is important to clarify how this thesis will employ them.

While the official name of Puducherry was announced in 2006, which is thought to be closer to the historical name of the area - most of the urban population still use the name “Pondicherry”, or “Pondy” in short. The name “Puducherry” is not very common in verbal form, and is predominantly used in official documents and records. As my informants use the name “Pondicherry” as well, I will continue this thorough the thesis. “Franco- and Tamil Pondicherrien” are both fluid terms of the urban population. What defines a “Franco or a Tamil Pondicherrien” is fleeting, as I will show later, but it originates from the colonial-French society’s distinction between originating from a French family, or a Tamil family. During the later ages of colonial Pondicherry, “Franco-Pondicherrien” was also used for people who either converted to Catholicism, or worked for the French government. Tamil, or Native was also used to describe someone living in the Tamil part of Pondicherry. These terminologies are seldom used outside the urban centre, nor always used by the Tamil population. Most of my informants were of the urban population, and often used the terms “Franco Pondicherrien”, “French-people”, “Tamil-Pondicherriens” or “Tamils”. To clarify my informants, I will for the sake of this thesis use the terms “Franco Pondicherrien” and “Tamil Pondicherrien” to avoid confusion. ‘White town’, Native town and Tamil Town are contemporary descriptions of urban areas. What was Ville Blanc, or ‘white town’, is usually also named as such in modern maps or urban descriptions of Pondicherry. The area of Ville Noir or Tamil Town is no longer named as such officially, but it’s still used verbally by the urban population in addressing the area across the canal from White Town. Central areas, including the first several streets across the canal of ‘White Town’ is often referred to as “Heritage Town”, sometimes also including the peripheral parts, like the Pondicherry Botanical Garden.

For this thesis, I will use the terms “social identification” and “ethnicity” in accordance to prof. Thomas Hylland Eriksen in order to explain the conception of “belonging”. Social identification and groups, as Thomas Hylland Eriksen explains in *We and Us: Two Modes of*

*Group Identification* (1995), are by default in relation to, and strengthened by the enactment of contrast to with others, though not entirely static, as the creation of “we-hood”, the internal sense of solidarity, may change both situationally and historically (Hylland Eriksen, 1995, p. 10). As he further explains in the book *Us and Them in Modern Societies* (1992), Eriksen argues that ethnicity is “the collective enaction of socially differentiating signs” in context to the specific society itself (Hylland Eriksen, 1992, p. 45). Another way of understanding the creation of identities, according to prof. Richard Jenkins, is to look at how identities are shaped in the communication between *internal* identification, both individually and group-based and the *external* reaction to these (Jenkins, 2012, p. 3). Along these lines, the discussion of ethnicity and identity in Pondicherry are therefore only to be found in the context of Pondicherry itself.

In the first and second chapter, I will provide a historic overview of both the development of Pondicherry as a region, and its colonial history, as well as the creation of a segregated urban structure. This will serve as a backdrop to better understand the identities of Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens in a historical context. I will work on with the overview of the history, introducing the pre-colonial area of Poduké, as well as the introduction to European settlers, before introducing the first era of colonial Power. Further, I will present the regional challenges, and the structural development of Pondicherry according to Dutch plans created under times of siege. As periods of tension between neighbouring colonial powers shifted the development of Pondicherry, I will present how economic and political challenges further formed Pondicherry, until focusing on the societal debates of late colonial Pondicherry in the dividing of its population. In chapter 3, I will present my early research and preparations before entering the field. As the research focus changed early in my fieldwork, I will point towards my research design and the methodology of this thesis, before discussing the data collection and ethical considerations of my fieldwork.

In chapter 4, I will provide a descriptive account of contemporary Pondicherry, and its urban spheres. I will use observations and descriptions in order to create a spatial concept in which this thesis takes place, which will work towards a better understanding of the concepts used in chapter 5. Here, this thesis presents the empirical data of my Tamil and Franco-Pondicherrien informants, regarding their childhood and upbringing, as well as contemporary use of urban spaces Pondicherry. I will debate how juxtaposition of ethnic stereotypes and *belonging*

to identity groups further divide the contemporary population of Pondicherry. This sense of belonging to either society also creates different expectations towards further urban development and in regard to architectural preservation, which I will focus on in chapter 6.

Finally, in chapter 7, I will present my concluding remarks on Pondicherry as a divided city, and how future research might expand upon the spatial concepts found in this thesis. But first, I will now continue to introduce the regional area of Pondicherry, before entering the urban case of Pondicherry.

## 2 Historical Introduction to Pondicherry

Pondicherry, Puducherry or Puducheira - as with many of the other smaller towns around the Coromandel coast, Pondicherry had its history written and rewritten by the European travellers as they arrived and settled down in the area surrounding Kalapettai. Although its origin is discussed, the early Arab geographer Sulaiman al-Mahri introduces the area of Bandikari in the early fifteenth century (More, 2014, p. 65). The official historian of Portugal, Joao de Barros, wrote 'detailed accounts of Portuguese adventures in India', though he had never himself visited the country. Taking into the accounts of Sulaiman al-Mahri and Joao de Barros we can confirm that the small town of Puducheira was established with a trading port in 1553 (More 2014 p.68). As the area was conquered and rebuilt several times during the colonial era, understanding the creation a divided Pondicherry requires a historical overview, which I will present in the time brackets below. Later, I will go from a regional angle into an urban focus in order to understand the urban development of Pondicherry in accordance to the historical timeline.

Though to some extent simplified, I will use certain brackets of time, to better create a supporting structure in order to understand the progress of urban segregation in Pondicherry. I will look at the precolonial area, and the early adaptation of geographic space for the creation of a trading port. Then, I will look at the early colonial era, the flourishing economy of initial French trade – before pointing out the key characters in the areas tense political and economic mid-colonial past, before exploring the late years of colonial Pondicherry, and the merger between the Union Territory of Pondicherry with the Republic of India. This will serve as a historic backbone to understanding the development of urban spaces in Pondicherry, and the several structural progressions I will present later.

## 2.1 Precolonial Poduké and the Introduction of European Colonial Power

The area surrounding modern Pondicherry has been inhabited in some ways dating back to early trading posts in second century BC. As portrayed by the Greek geographer Ptolemy, the port of Poduké on the Coromandel coast was the area of modern Arikamedu, in Veerampattinam, the southern area of the Puducherry coast (Malangin, 2015, p. 8). The region known as Pondicherry had not been an independent political entity until the French first established their trading posts, and bought the surrounding areas in 1673 (More, 2014 p.IX). Though the region has been habited by a smaller population dating back to pre-Christian era, the discoveries of funeral urns in South India, and surrounding - but *not inside* the modern Pondicherry area suggest that Pondicherry town-area was inhabited until later (More 2014 p.7). The French archaeologist Casal found prehistoric burial sites in Suttukeni and Muthirapalayam. This suggests that these areas just outside current borders of Tamil Nadu towards the town of Pondicherry are the oldest settlements in the area (More, 2014, pp. 8-10). Though briefly populated by the Dutch and traders of Portugal, the only pre-French settlement that actually built upon the ground which later became the foundation of Pondicherry, was Danish traders. The Danes had its main trade of cloth in the area surrounding Tranquebar, and thus never built any larger constructions to expand their trade in Pondicherry (More 2014 p.74). The area was not seen as important, and thus the earliest records of the area rarely include a proper timeline. However, as travel-letters and descriptions often included details of the surroundings, an overview of progress in the area can be obtained.

It is believed that the ruler of Senji, Muthu Krishnappa Nayakar was indeed open to the European use of the port for commerce, also involving early slave trading. As mentioned in *From Arikamedu to the foundation of modern Pondicherry* (More 2014), more than 400 slaves were brought to the west from Aoteaora (now New Zealand), through Pondicherry in the early 1600s (More 2014 p.74). Tarangapadi, or Tranquebar was further developed into both a fortress town and a larger trading post for the Danish settlement, thus rendering the port of Pondicherry excessive. Interestingly, the English did in fact consider locating to Pondicherry prior the French arrival. Documents dating back to early 1600s from the Pullai, the subordinate of Kayaker of



Senji, describes how he met the English ship “Hart”, and gave their invitation to the English traders to settle down in town. Hesitant by the history of the local Danish traders, the deal did not go through (More 2014 p.75). The coastal area of Pondicherry was by early seventeenth century occupied by Hindu-Tamil Fishermen and Tamil Muslims, and early descriptions includes a seaside area with a brightly white-coloured pagoda. This portrayal links the white colour to Vedapureswan temple as newly built, as the early buildings of the local Tamil population often were in wood and *chunam*, a lime-mortar exterior made from shell-lime which turned white (Malleison, 1868 loc. 870). Taking these observations into account place the Danish building in an already occupied, though not densely populated area (More 2014 p.76). Iconographer and historian Jouveau Dubreuil later located the site of the Danish house to where the French later built “Chambre de Commerce”, which can be found in Pondicherry to the present day.



Fig: 1 The French built 'Chambre de Commerce', placed where the Danish building once stood. Photo by Author

Though the French already had set their goals of opening up a more active trade with India due to the vast profits of cotton goods, it was King Louis XIV who first established the French East India Company in 1664 as a reaction to the rise in trading from smaller European nations. This was also backed by the French Finance Minister Colbert who also wanted to spread the Christian word amongst non-Christians (More 2014 p.87). As the operating expenses and start-up cost was largely accounted for by Louis XIV himself, the French East India Company was from the beginning a state company, and thus obtained royal permission to send

ambassadors as well as the guarantee of provided protection. As the area known as Pondicherry had developed since the times of Muthu Krishnappa Nayakar and the Danes, it was seen profitable to set up a trade in this area not only because of its ascribed features as a port, but also as a way to compete with the Dutch traders of Porto Novo (More 2014 p. 88). France was the fourth European power to pursue commercial communication with India, and it was Francois Martin, with his background in the Dutch East India Company whom in contact with Sher Khán Lodi, the Governor of the possessions of the King of Bijápur in Tanjur and Karnátik purchased a small area in Senji (now Gingee), not far from Pondicherry (G.B. Malleson 1868 loc. 346). Following unrest in Senji, Francois Martin was made to flee the area, and the French in India was low on provisions. By November 1672, Belanger de Lespinay met Sher Khan Lodi after an earlier application for provisions was filed. This meeting resulted in an invitation to settle down in Pondicherry, and to establish a loge at the site of the old Danish building. A lease was finalized, which opened up for French settlement of boats and men necessary to conduct trade of cloth - as well as additions upon further payment. An effective 2.5 percent transit duty, and the stipulation that the French was expected not to assault any other ship that docked the port, was traded towards further protection of the French property (More 2014 p.92). Francois Martin himself did not reach the area until January 1674. With Martin in place, Belanger left for France in September the same year. By 1676, and with permission from Lodi, a small bastion was built on the north side to protect the village - and with this, the building ground of the first fortification of Pondicherry was created (More 2014 p.96).

## **2.2 The French East India Company, and Pondicherry's New Structure**

Early Pondicherry as a French town and region was not conquered or taken by force, but bought. The area itself belonged to the French East India Company - and thus a part of the sovereign of France, as this was a royal company. As the prior land surrounding the town had no private ownership other than the areas King, the French purchase of land meant that the area would be further regulated by the new owners - and controlled by the French Company, as a

property of the French king far away. In 1673, when the town of Pondicherry was but a trading port with no fortification surrounding the area, the richer farmers and potters had small houses inside the village itself (S. Jeyaseela, 2008, p. 28). Setting up a small lease with the local *bavildar*,<sup>1</sup> Francois Martin established a small trading workshop in the area. In between 1674 and 1688, the main focus of the French Company was textile trading, and Martin invited the weavers and dyers from the surrounding areas to settle down in Pondicherry. By 1677 there were forty weaver houses in central Pondicherry, and Martin struck up a further deal with Sher Khan Lodi, purchasing Pakkamudaiyanpattu, a village just 4 km north of Pondicherry (S. Jeyaseela, 2008, p. 29). The expensive constructions required a further expenditure of Pondicherry, and Martin was interested in developing the area to a trading hub- thus further strengthening the economy. Inviting traders of coral, gems and pearls to Pondicherry, further housing development was allotted to the west of central Pondicherry. Further trade by sea - as well as the roads towards Madras in the north, and Villayanor to the west - the impractical redoubts would no longer provide necessary security. Approaching the ruler of Valikandapuram, the Company gained permission to build further fortifications of Pondicherry (S. Jeyaseela, 2008 p. 29). As the Dutch East India Company tried to make Sher Khan Lodi push the French out of the area - the rushed fortification seemed necessary (More, 2014, p. 94). By 1675, the Marathas had gained the throne of Thanjavur and Senti, and the Maratha ruler Sambhaji sent a letter to the Company questioning why they had not been advised in the building of the fortress. Consulting the local Brahmins in the area, the French saw how they needed to strike a new deal with the Marathas, and the agent sent to Sambhaji came back with a request for 50 000 francs, a price impossible to pay by the Company (S. Jeyaseela, 2008, p. 30). Agreeing on 1 000 pagodas<sup>2</sup>, the Brahmins promised to protect the French interests before the Marathas.

With the passing of Sher Khan Lodi in 1681, the surrounding area was kept under influence by the Marathas for almost a decade, in which the Company struck up a deal with the now-in-power Shivaji of the Senji area. The firman allowed the French to open godowns<sup>3</sup> in all areas formerly controlled by Sher Khan Lodi. The agreement stated a true monopoly of trading

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<sup>1</sup> An actor of commerce, often maintaining revenue accounts and acting as communication between the area's ruler and traders

<sup>2</sup> Coin made of gold, minted by the Indian dynasties

<sup>3</sup> 'Godowns' – referring to warehouses, often used in Asia, especially in India.

from the posts in Pondicherry, with the French Company as a final decider of trading consent. This further strengthened the area's importance in not only Asia-Pacific trade, but also the seaway towards Europe (More, 2014, pp. 97-98). New tax rules were also in effect, collecting 1.5 percent of import, and 3.5 percent of export on non-French affiliated traders and merchants in the area. Lastly, new governing regulations made the Company's servants, both French and Indian, only to be tried in the Company's own court - making the static population out of control from Maratha political and judicial power (More, 2014, p. 98). Problems arose when Shivaji passed away, leaving his son-in-law in control of the area. Francois Martin was sent to Surat to defend himself against the stagnating economy of Pondicherry, in which Captain Pierre Deltor assumed charge of the Company's loge. Harji Mahadik, and Raja Ram, the son and son-in-law of Shivaji, were under financial pressure, leaving them vulnerable to Captain Deltor, who struck a finalizing deal of the village areas, making them sell off the land to the French Company (More, 2014, pp. 99-101). After giving Captain Deltor the permission to return to France, Martin was sent back to Pondicherry as Director of the French Company, constructing two new godowns in the area. After the passing of Harji Raja in 1689, Raja Ram assumed control of the Senji province. Arriving in 1689, the Jesuits further bought up the central area surrounding what now is Rue de Missions, to develop a mission society serving the religious needs of the expatriates, while also expanding the process of converting local natives. By 1691 construction of the Notre Dame de la Immaculate Conception had started - centralizing the Christian population (S. Jeyaseela, 2008, p. 33). In the early 1690s, the native population of Pondicherry was already settled into areas according to their occupation by the French company. To the south of the fort were the houses of trading merchants, as well as the Muslim population - including two mosques and a smaller graveyard. The *kammalars*<sup>4</sup> as well as goldsmiths were located to the north, while the small group of Brahmins and textile painters resided close to the seaside. The outcastes lived in the northern and southern extremities of the settlement (S. Jeyaseela, 2008, p. 34).

When the Mughal army sieged the area of Senji, Raja Ram was in further economic problems, and decided to sell the area of Pondicherry to the Dutch, and inviting them, and their English allies to take control of the area with force. The Dutch, with the English as allies, laid

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<sup>4</sup> Artisans of the five castes

siege on Pondicherry in 1690, and for some time, the only goods that came through the ports of Pondicherry came from French pirates in the Indian Ocean (More 2014 p.105), further distressing the local economy. As the town of Pondicherry was bombarded by the Dutch and English armies, the trade of Pondicherry came to a stand-still (More, 2014, pp. 104-105). After only a two-week period, in which the family of Martin fled the area, the French capitulated, giving the Dutch total control of the area until a peace-treaty was signed four years later. This made the French able to buy back the area for a hefty sum of 16000 pagodas.

The early fort was not deemed strong enough, and by 1701 a new Fort St. Louis was constructed – where Francois Martin passed away upon completion (More, 2014, p. 109). Enclosing the northern parts of Pondicherry, the French made the settlers and workers of the area share the expenses for the fortification (S. Jeyaseela, 2008, p. 32). After which, the surrounding houses of the inner fortification was pulled down. Later, the central seaside houses of local fishermen and traders were pulled down, and restructured to fit the early French plans of having a segregated area for themselves, as visible by the “Plan de Pondichéry” which I present below.

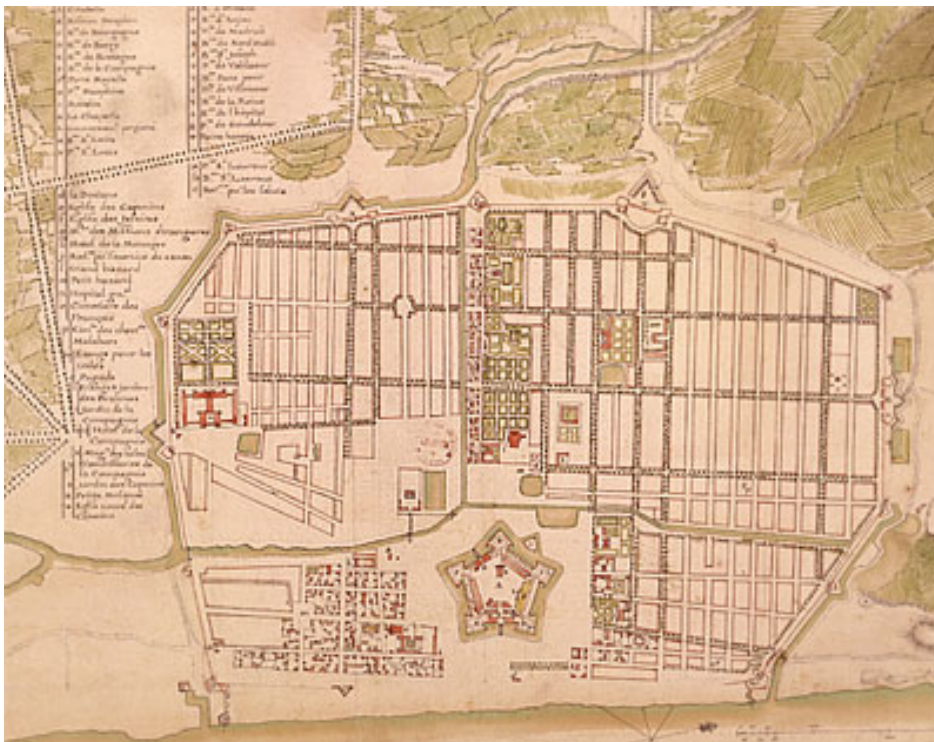


Fig: 2 Plan de Pondichéry - 1739, a later plan to show further development – Uploaded media, Institute Française de Pondichéry (IFP, 2007)

Although the previous understanding of the history placed François Martin as the developer of *Ville Blanc and Ville Noir* in Pondicherry after the Dutch siege, this is not entirely correct. As previously presented; the first accounts of dividing the population in accordance to occupation dates back to his first period in Pondicherry, but the dividing of the population was not as strict as seen in the later colonial era. While *under* Dutch siege, a more structured segregation of the population was drawn. The Dutch drew plans of Pondicherry, where the central areas had for the first time been divided into squares according to the residents' background and occupation, which François Martin later expanded upon after regaining control of Pondicherry (More 2014 p.122). As the Dutch siege of Pondicherry only lasted a few years, only the north-eastern part of the town reached the grid-system before the French regained control of the area, but comparing the French *Plan General a les dépendances de Pondichéry* by the French engineer De Nyon to the Dutch urban planning shows that the only major differences between the two are the proposed new French Fort, and the further development of a *Ville Blanc* on the shore-side of the river Uppar (S. Jeyaseela, 2008, p. 38). Although the French had earlier tried to create a 'white town' by destroying the fishermen villages on the coastal line, it was first by implementing the Dutch urban design that the idea of *Ville Noir and Ville Blanc* was created. Thus, one can give the credit of early management to François Martin, and further development and economic rise to Joseph F. Dupleix, as the plans of urban zoning already was in place by the Dutch. By the mid 1700s, the nearby canals were rerouted through the town of Pondicherry, and served as both a water supply, as well as dividing the area into the native residents 'black town' and the colonial 'white town' (G.B. Malleson, 1878 loc. 870). This was due to the earlier southern town limits of the Oupar river, and the two distinct centres; one by the European fort and one towards the west. As the population of the early eighteenth century Pondicherry rose, the need for a larger fort protecting the area was grave, and star-shaped fortress surrounding what now is Bharati Square was built. This contributed to the further expansion of new quarters for the inhabitants (Malangin 2015 p.29).

Pondicherry was not only supposed to be the commercial trading central, but also the paramount of French Indian political power, and thus the rate of investments in the area was high. The population of Pondicherry was changing by the mid eighteenth century, and although the Company employees, as well as their families were the core of *Ville Blanc* - other European

mixed intermarried families settled down in the “white society” (Malangin 2015 p.43). Caused by the slow, but constant growth of the French economy in Pondicherry, the French middle-class also rose during this period. What prior had consisted of the white powerful, and the Indian subordinate was now evolving into a more complex social hierarchy. Although contact amongst the social groups were seen in contexts of work, the groups did not seek interaction on everyday basis - and few engaged to learn each other’s language. This resulted in the emergence of *Dubash*<sup>5</sup>, the Indian middlemen who not only moved freely between the groups of society, but also mastered both the local and French language. As previously stated, the new urban layout of Pondicherry was built upon the early grid-system of the Dutch, but as the population rose, the segregation of occupation, and racial background continued to be favoured by the French rulers. Based on the structure of the society itself, the Catholic Church became an important institution to further develop and control the area. The Portuguese had already developed larger Catholic missions in the south, and the French viewed the societal contributions of the missionaries not only catering to the religious needs of the Europeans and Indian-French creoles, but an important way to strengthen the inter-religious connections in the society. Already by 1699, the early Dutch church in *Ville Noir* was restored and used, as well as the erection of Eglise de Notre Dame des Anges by the year 1707, but finding new converts in the area seemed difficult (Malangin 2015 p.39). Though the missionaries report of 1703 claimed 2000 converts in Pondicherry, these numbers do seem to be inflated. Many of the converts were either starving poor, and gained rations by the missionary society. Others, like the *Dubash*, often officially converting to Catholicism due to political interests, but were likely to continue their ancestral religious practices in private. Thus, the early Catholic Church could only claim 10 - 15 percent of the town’s population even in 1800 (Malangin 2015 p.41).

### **2.3 Pondicherry’s Golden Age - and British Tension**

Joseph Francois Dupleix came to India in 1722, and through extensive trading in Kolkata gained a reputation of being a strong economic force. Dupleix, whose father according to travel letters, had bought and given him the title of First Councillor in the Supreme Council of

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<sup>5</sup> From the Hindi/Urdu word “du bhasha”; two languages – but also used by the French Company (Malangin, 2015, p. 44)

Pondicherry, became involved with the French political system through the Company. By the time of 1742, he was appointed Governor of Pondicherry. By the marrying one of his councillor's widows and bringing his vast fortune from the earlier trade, he quickly took part in the political games of South India (Malleon 1878 loc.1300). His wife, Madame Vincens, was of western ancestry, but born and educated in India. This strengthened Dupleix' communication with the surrounding princes, and a large progress of the towns fortification had been constructed. By this time, the British society of Madras (today Chennai) was strong, and colonial rivalry was strengthened by 1740 as the French-British agreements was never made. The British claimed that the French was planning a coup of the Coromandel coast, and accused them of trying to gain control of South India. This can be linked to the contest between France and Britain in Europe, and the up rise in economic competition of American traders. The 1746 French attack on Madras, though partially successful, further strengthened the rivalry between the nations (Malangin 2015 p.48). The internal tension in south India rose, and several violent disputes with Indian kings, as well as the decreasing income of the Company, left Pondicherry in a dire state. Dupleix was sent back to France to stand accountable for his actions, and was accused of gaining personal riches by sacrificing the population (Malangin 2015 p.51). Not only had the stronghold of Pondicherry itself been compromised, but the economy was hurting by the competition, and while Dupleix returned to France, the Seven Years' War between the British and French colonies in the region broke out in 1756. Determined to push the French out of India, the British sieged Pondicherry in 1761 and ordered 'White Town' to be razed to the ground (Malangin 2015 p. 51). A letter received by the widow of the Company Surgeon Auber stated that;

“the English chased away all the inhabitants without exception and set about a systematic destruction of all fortifications and other buildings belonging to the *Compagnie des Indes Orientales*. They reduced church and private houses to piles of rubble. Monsieur Auber's house suffered the same fate” (Quoted in Malangin 2015 p. 55).

This marked a large shift in the town of Pondicherry; as most of the architectural symbols of French power was destroyed along with monuments and the rich colonial gardens. Due to economic constraints, Pondicherry would never be rebuilt to the same extent again.



The English captured Pondicherry three times in total, lastly during the French Revolution, in which resources for assistance in the trading posts were scarce. The economic powers of the trading posts were a thing of the past, and Count Dupuy was sent to India to make peace with the British powers. Though the ‘Treaty of Paris’ was formed in 1763, which gave the area back to France, the conditions in which the French could regain power were strict. Not only did the English reserve the profits from certain trades in the area, but the French were also not allowed to build any sort of garrison, and the posts themselves were to be disarmed (Malangin 2015 p.58). Due to high taxes, and seemingly biased new borders, the French in Pondicherry had difficulties developing an economic stability, and the British powers in Madras soon saw them as a non-threatening power. Although most of the coastal Pondicherry was in rubble, a positive turn in trade during the colonization of Indo-China gave the economy to rebuild the ‘White Town’. With the return of French civil servants and Creole descendants, the central area once again saw development. Though lacking the extreme riches of Pondicherry’s golden age, ‘White Town’ saw a growth, and with the creation of a colonial school, a public library and a new hospital, the early 1850s white community was around a thousand members strong (Malangin 2015 p.63). Due to the extreme heat, the new buildings on the east side of the canal was made spacious, allowing circulation of air, with large social areas in-between the courtyards. As further built upon the idea of Dutch architecture and French structure, the ‘White Town’ was centralized for socialization, as the Tamil and French population rarely communicated outside of the servant/master association. The architecture and urban planning seen in this era sustained a divided urban centre. By 1869, which the Suez Canal was opened up for travel, Pondicherry was now only two months away from France, and the expansion of steel and the introduction of the railroad to Madras in 1879, the economic growth of Pondicherry was once again strong. Lowered property taxes and an improved relation with Great Britain was seen in a larger scale industrial production which again strengthened the international trade (Malangin 2015 p.90). By the end of the nineteenth century, Pondicherry, as the central unit for French India, were to again serve as the symbol of French colonial power. To withhold the strong sense of “taste for colonialism” and to show the “glory of the French in India” Dupleix was once again brought to attention, and widely given the role as a hero - and used as an inspiration for the drive of the French colonies (Malangin 2015 p. 104). As Pondicherry still lacked the economic power from the first period of

French power, and thus missing some of the monumental grandness, efforts were made through urban planning and development of 'White Town' to show off the powers of French India.

Though expansion and revitalization was in large focus throughout 'White Town', the French government in Pondicherry did not make any efforts at improving 'Black Town'. Though donations and charity work, as well as high-cast areas did improve the conditions in some parts on the other side of the canal, 'Black Town' hardly saw any improvements in sanitation until the 1920s (Malangin 2015 p.123). Not even the threat of serious riots in 1893 could change the support of fundamentally separate rates of development in the area. The economic powers of Pondicherry were also tied to the industrialist oligarchy of Henri Gæbelé, the Chairman of the Chambre de Commerce, who not only regained control of most political institutions of the early 1900s, but also had trading control of the Pondicherry port (Malangin 2015 p.125). Political, economical and societal power was ravaged by strong nepotism - and the strong separation between the French and Indian population, resulted in a weak control over activities in 'Black Town'. This further established 'Black Town' as a "nest for Indian Nationalism" according to the English in Madras (Malangin 2015 p.126). Although later proven to be wrong, most of the inhabitants of 'White Town' did not see this as a threat, and held a strong belief that the general citizen of French India was unlikely to be tempted by Indian independence (Malangin 2015 p.127). The power of retaining space, and the creation of physical distinction between members of the society was a key political move from the French society in Pondicherry. Though heavily influenced by Dutch architecture, the segregation of Pondicherry helped creation of Franco- and Tamil Pondicherrien societies, divided within the then fortified small urban area. This history of physical segregation, and the ideologies of Pondicherry's city-planning are, as I will later point to, crucial in understanding how the divided identities of Franco- and Tamil Pondicherriens are still seen in current Pondicherry. The historic overview so far has explained the economic and political elements in the creation, maintenance and development of Pondicherry. How did these processes and tensions contribute or interfere with urban development?

## 2.4 Late French Colonial Pondicherry

Construction of housing in the ‘white town’ area was made to ease the life in Pondicherry’s extreme heat, as well as serving as social grounds for the European inhabitants. As the European population of Pondicherry was smaller than the native, the social interaction in the French community was of utmost importance, while interaction with the native population were kept at a bare minimum. It became important to show the national and social belonging by keeping up with French architecture, personal design and social rules of the time, even though the regional conflicts had severely damaged the urban economy (Malangin, 2015, p. 68). It became central to externally show economic power, while still keeping a strict structure of urban space in order to sustain control. The minority situation of the French also created an ideology where physical distance between the colonizers and the general population created safety. The importance of segregating the population is also seen in how the population of the French society engaged in electoral privileges, as well as the French notions of civil equality. The society of Pondicherry was thus also segregated by the personal connection to citizenship. Not wanting to cause social unrest, the French maintained a policy of not interfering with religious social complexities like caste questions when the members were not under the French Civil Code. Thus, the native Indians of the area were not under the direct citizenships, but rather a group called *electeurs*, “not-quite-citizen”. This also meant that the native population would not enjoy the legal terms produced by the French Civil Code (Pairaudeau, 2016, pp. 4-6). This would later change by a civil case where many of the high class Indians demanded the right to retain religious and geographical connection, while gaining official French Citizenship. This created the foundation of the freely chosen citizenship upon the integration of Pondicherry to the free India, which I will present later. The advantages of the individuals renouncing their former citizenship is seen in documents from early 1900s, describing how Indian French citizens not only were entitled to elect a representative to the colonial council, but also were entitled to salaries ‘on a European level’, access to French hospitals and employment by the state. Their children were entitled to superior schooling reserved to the Europeans in the area, and were you linked to any legal battles or arrests, you would have the right to be treated ‘like a European’ in

prisons (Pairaudeau, 2016, p. 60). Though external sources depict the transition as rather peaceful, as Jawaharlal Nehru expressed in his 1952 Madras speech;

Three years ago, there was some kind of agreement between us and the French Government about some plebiscite or the other and preparations were made. That has not taken place as yet. Meanwhile methods of gangsterism has flourished. An atmosphere has been created there (in French India) that if a person talks of merger with India, *goondas* are likely to smash his head. (Nehru, Jawaharlal, 1952, quoted in More, 2001, p. 182)

As we see in this quote, the image of late colonial Pondicherry as truly calm is not entirely correct. Tensions had risen between the French society, the Franco Pondicherriens – and the Tamil Pondicherriens in the Union Territory. Taking sides of support in the ongoing debate towards the amalgamation of the Pondicherry Union Territory and India was becoming a tense discussion, and showing support of the nationalistic movement, or rather - showing disloyalty towards the French India further divided the population. Further provoking the polarization of the population came to, when Chief Minister at the time Edouard Goubert, a Franco-Indian from the French Indian Socialist Party, unpredictably went underground with the Mayor of Pondicherry. He released a statement for immediate merger till the Indian Union, before “Indianizing” his name to Goubert Pillai. This is often seen as the triggering action towards the revolt in Mahé, another part of the Pondicherry Union Territory. According to Jean-Baptiste Prashant More, a Pondicherrien History professor, the area of Mahé had seen severe punishment towards members of the pro-merger community in the form of torture and systematically suppression (More 2001, p.182).

When the vote to join India was taken in 1954, the power of Pondicherry was transferred to the Government of India, but the French jurisdiction was active until 1962 - giving the area a transitional time to sort out the colonial interests (Malangin, 2015, p. 144). The *de jure* merger of governmental power was made to provide the individual safety of the population. Each family was able to opt for a transition, or sustain of nationality. Retaining the French nationality would keep the family under control of the French government, and access to certain liberal concessions, but keep the individual from gaining a public position in the Indian government (Singh, 1994, p. 144). Several creole members of the society transferred their nationality to

French through this act. The opt-in transition, though causing civil unrest, should also be seen as a contrast to the 1948 British Nationality Act, in which all subjects who belonged to either the British commonwealth, or the British colonies would be regarded as ‘British Subjects’, but the citizenship itself was in relation to one of four categories labelled by ‘racial ancestry’, as Sarah Ansari discuss in her article *Subject or citizen? India, Pakistan and the 1948 British Nationality Act* (2013). Not denying the attachment to ancestral background, attaining French citizenship in Pondicherry would also be based on the sense of *belonging*, as well as what was seen as a great opportunity for social mobility. We have then seen how a tense colonial period created a divided population, and how a strong personal attachment between urban space and identity not only sustained the divided groups of Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens. This brings us up to contemporary Pondicherry, where terms like ‘White Town’, and “Franco or Tamil Pondicherrien” still are used by the population. Keeping the colonial history of Pondicherry in mind, I will explore how the current urban population regard physical space, the ethnic stereotypes which are juxtaposed between them, and how these identities interact with the city.

### 3 Entering the Field and Research Design

My interest for the role of ethnic groups in the development of urban Pondicherry, was sparked by my previous stay in the area as part of my student exchange during my BA-degree. Inspired by Alexander Henn's work in Goa were his research of multi-religious post-Portuguese colonial society often found "creolization" between the Hindu and Catholic societies, by in example combining Catholic prayer with Hindu chants (Henn, 2014, pp. 144-149). The syncretism Henn saw in Goa later drew me to the topic of religious encounters in Pondicherry. Pondicherry, as a catholic hub in colonial south India, became the building ground of my research question. As previously mentioned in the historical introduction of Pondicherry, the early Catholic society helped create the urban landscape, and the earliest main streets were built around this environment. The idea of Catholicism as a propellant of French-Indian citizenship caught my attention while researching the divided population of urban Pondicherry. Alas, during my fieldwork, I slowly realized how discussions regarding inter-religious encounters in Pondicherry was just one of the several interesting notions of ethnic stereotypes super-imposed by my informants upon other members of urban life. I realized that my informants encounter with each other's religious background, ceremonies and holidays were in fact a part of a larger understanding of ethnic boundaries. As Fredrik Barth establishes in the essay-collection *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Barth, 1969, p. 10), the identifications of ethnic groups are defined by the actors themselves, as is the Franco- and Tamil Pondicherrien groups of Pondicherry. These local boundaries, though historically set in a national-religious background, are now mainly upheld by the notion of "Us-hood", as Thomas Hylland Eriksen discusses in the article *We and Us: Two Modes of Group Identification* (1995) from the Journal of Peace Research. He suggests that the different groups of "us-hood" might complement each other in creating a different kind outer identity in which focus on comparability outweighs the creation of enemy image (Hylland Eriksen, 1995, p. 435). There are several traits of creating "us-hood" in Pondicherry. Some include family background or religious participation throughout generations - while others are fleeting, like the usage of language or "belonging" to certain societies. Though these "us-hoods" are maintained, the overlaying social category of being "Pondicherrien" in general outweighs the more local group of identity. As I will explain further; that which creates the boundaries of Franco- or Tamil Pondicherrien identity is juxtaposed by ethnic stereotypes actors superimpose

on other members in the urban area. It is then important to regard the research question by the three societal factors; the historical aspect and creation of a divided city, the contemporary use of urban space - and individuals attitude and expectations towards the future of Pondicherry's urban area.

Before departing for fieldwork, I spent the fall semester of 2015 preparing for the empirical work I was going to do. My understanding of the catholic society in Pondicherry was based on a selection of historical texts (Malleon, 1868) as well as the post-colonial religious research in Tranquebar (Schönbeck 2012) and Goa (Henn, 2014), where the merging of colonial religion such as Catholicism with the Hindu-society was propelled by the borrowing of each other's religious spaces. This is exemplified by Henn's empirical data of road-side shrines in Goa, where Catholic symbols are placed next to Hindu shrines (Henn 2014, p.159-168). These "open religious" spaces provide social and cultural mobility, often Hindu and catholic placed back-to-back in the same space. With my expectations to the field, I used the first few weeks trying to access the catholic society in Pondicherry, and was met with great interest at first, which quickly waned off. The research questions regarding the religious encounters gave little to no discussion - and the at-large opinion of my earliest informants was how "Pondy is the place where religions does not really clash". The role of religion in Tamil-Pondicherrien lifestyle is vast and deep, and as suspected, the same is said for *some* of my Franco-Pondicherrien informants, however, other than the shared experiences of religious spaces, which I will later come back to, the effect of religious encounters within my group of informants were rather limited in comparison to the Hindu-Catholic encounters seen in Henn's work in Goa. This is likely caused by my selected informants lifestyle, and would surely be different with other informants and research methods.

A short time after the field opened up, one of the first ethnographic instincts I followed was to refocus the research towards linguistic groups. Although the majority of the Pondicherry population are fluent in Tamil, and use English as the major secondary language, a large group of the citizens use the French language on an everyday basis. Language, combined with both religious and colonial history was a great first-entry to the field. Public and official language is also rather direct - the art of communication in public enables the distance between "us-hood"

and “them”. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen argues in *Us and Them in Modern Societies* (1992) from his fieldwork in Mauritius where the creole-French language is conventionally the preferred daily tongue, language is not only the verbal or written act of communication, but may also be interpreted as a “political meta statement about group membership” (Hylland Eriksen, 1992, p. 96). Prior my fieldwork, I assumed my language skills might interfere with the range of my research. Although fluent in English, my French was unpolished at best, and my Tamil was almost non-existent. Because of this, I would have to rely on English while conducting my fieldwork. Mostly, this rarely created implications with my younger informants from urban Pondicherry, as they were highly articulate in English, and understood me quite well. Had my language skills in Tamil and French been stronger, I would certainly have had a wider field to work with, as many members of the older generation inside urban Pondicherry rarely spoke English. The same could be said with the diverse population of suburban Pondicherry, where Tamil language was most common. As with one informant Malai, which I will later introduce in chapter 5, who had to act as a translator when I communicated with her mother who only spoke Tamil. This would be complicated if Malai’s English had been limited, or if the time was restricted.

The understanding of language as a group boundary seemed like the clearest form of boundary maintenance, as discussed by Fredrik Barth, in which the boundaries are maintained within a group where certain traits and common characteristics are persistent (Barth 1969 p.38). What started out as an understanding of the field built upon the notion of language, historical ethnic boundaries, architectonic background and a previous stay, was soon to be altered, as the post-colonial boundaries of ethnic identity in Pondicherry proved to be more fleeting than initially expected. The choice of location based on my interest in cross-cultural and religious encounters seemed imminent after my first stay in Pondicherry, but as Okely discusses in *Anthropological Practice*, researchers deliberate and unconscious factors in choosing my field location might also be the main reason why the focus of the research had to be altered (Okely 2012 p.45). As language or religion alone did not drive the maintenance of ethnic stereotypes of Pondicherriens, I started focusing my research towards the experience of ethnic stereotypes, and how these interact and engage in urban Pondicherry. I had previous acquaintances within both the Tamil- and Franco Pondicherrien societies, and was already aware of some of the boundaries between



the groups, making the social transition between these easier. My key informants also acted as gatekeepers, as the network that made out to be my informants often came from the ‘snowball approach’ starting from a combination of contacts met through observations and network previously opened up through my first stay. One thing to be noted on this approach is that the selection of informants often become more limited. This is also the reason why my main informants, in regards of both genders, often were in their mid-twenties to late thirties. This ‘snowball approach’, and the fact that my fieldwork was based in central Pondicherry also lead me to a mostly urban group of informants, living or working in urban Pondicherry, and thus from the upper middle-class. By this approach, I would seldom come in contact with the older generation, nor the lower-class workers in Pondicherry. With a stronger skill of language and better time, it would be highly interesting to discuss more of this thesis’ content with the older Franco or Tamil Pondicherriens who lived in the late colonial era. Although some scholars argue that participation and observation is somewhat excluding practices at the same time, without both participating and observing the interactions between the members of these somewhat contrasting groups in Pondicherry, I would not have gained access to either. Okely points out that scientific research “is not suspended when the fieldworker tried to join in activity rather than act as a spectator”, and that “observing as ‘looking’ does not include the multi-sensual act of ‘seeing’” (Okely 2012 p.79-80). The key of participation was a major force in understanding the interaction between Franco- and Tamil Pondicherriens in my fieldwork. Without this daily interaction, the delicate differences in communication and attitudes towards each other would be missed.

Earlier research on the Union Territory of Pondicherry is somewhat limited, as where the historical texts needed to expand my research beyond the readily available, but through communication with the *Institute Française de Pondicherry*, it’s society of research, library and press - pre-field holes in the historic context could be filled in along the way. This also helped me link the various spaces I performed participant observation to a historic context. The interaction with IFP also resulted in me being able to use their library and courtyard as a writing area – in which I am forever grateful.

### **3.1 Data Collection**

Drafts for an interview guide, as well as a structure for my formal interviews were submitted and approved before my entrance to the field. Since my role as a researcher changed and my main focus altered, my initial thought of needing a stricter interview guide diminished. After some of the first interviews did not go anywhere, I recalculated my role in the social groups I entered. Several of my informants felt it strange and distanced to talk with me in a formal matter, and those who did not know me before, were uninterested in engaging with the interview guide. As one of my informants told me; talking formally about ethnic stereotypes, or the characterization of the groups is difficult when put on the spot. Although harsh remarks concerning the “others” were rare, it seemed difficult to engage my informants in the topic through a formal interview, suggesting that the topic was somewhat sensitive. Leaning towards informal talks, walk alongs and participant-observation by engaging in my informants’ everyday lives tended to create better conversations surround the topics. It was easier to engage my informants while walking around in the urban area, pointing to certain hot spots, or being in a situation which was exclusively for a certain group, like joining in on after-work dinner, or spending time in their homes. The strength of ethnographic research is its unplanned character (Okely, 2012, p. 48), and as many other fieldworkers before me, I found the nature of my field by “going with the flow”, and creating an everyday practice of placing myself in the events, instead of following my pre-fieldwork plan. Because of this, only the longest interviews were taped, which were noted and stored locally. The main part of the data is through smaller conversation-notes kept in my pad, as well as field notes stored on an encrypted cloud-based service. The fieldwork was done according to NSD, The Norwegian Centre for Research Data’s guidelines according to access and consent, and during both my informal and formal conversations, the question of consent was prominent. All data recorded for my thesis was with verbal informed consent, as according to the NSD guidelines (NSD 2017). This consent also informed about the possible consequences of participation, as well as the voluntary nature of engaging in my interviews, observations and informal conversations. Due to the ethical nature of

my topic, and the majority of informal conversations, I relied on verbal rather than written consent.

During my time in the field, an instant camera, with push-out prints was used to take pictures of events, architecture and urban spaces. Due to the physical nature of this film, the pictures themselves were sometimes a starting point of a discussion towards certain topics in my informal conversations, in example where pictures of colonial architecture were shared around the table while discussing the future of urban development, 'White Town' in particular. Some of these photos are scanned and used in my thesis to provide data, while others, including pictures with informants are physically stored privately. I chose this method of visual media as my previous experiences with analogue film had shown me how "organic" this media was viewed by my peers. A physical copy can, as mentioned, be passed around – commented on by everyone around a table, and is by my experiences viewed as non-intrusive. Besides, it often catered as a great ice breaker; many informants wanted a polaroid of themselves or their friends to keep.

The non-linear aspect of my fieldwork did change the focus of my research question, as well as my main informants during my time in the field. This is not uncommon, as interests triggered by pre-existing curiosities from prior visits may correspond with the perception of the field upon entry. As Okely describes, "anthropologists respond to what awaits them", and the research and background reading is not lost upon changing focus, as the researcher is "open to others, while also drawing on his or her full resources; imaginative, theoretical and embodied" (Okely 2012 p. 49). Although my focus did change during my fieldwork, the prior research only enhanced my position in the field.

Starting to understand that the question of ethnic stereotypes amongst young adults in Pondicherry was not linked to language or religion alone, but formed by the cultural traits and skills superimposed upon each other, I drew my attention towards how these groups perceived each other, and juxtaposed significant traits on the other groups of identities.

## 3.2 Ethical Considerations

“Being Franco- or Tamil Pondicherrien”, or even “outsider” or migrant was a topic best discussed on an informal level. It seemed difficult for many to talk openly about the topic, even though there were no formal repercussions. It was during the everyday life that topics of “belonging” to either group was brought up, often starting out as a joke, or being used as a way to describe “the otherness” of a person. I speculated in the sensitivity of the topic being introduced as a mean to stop further dividing the population, as most informants often expressed that “all in all, a great thing about Pondicherry is that people get along great in times of distress in other parts of the world”. Gaining access to the Franco Pondicherrien society was somewhat difficult – at least in the beginning. As a minority of urban Pondicherry, my experiences at first was of active rejection. Opposite of what Fredrik Barth discusses in *Ethnic groups and boundaries* (1969), where the host population, or majority, actively rejects the smaller ethnic groups (Barth, 1969, pp. 30-32) – my first experiences gaining access by my Franco Pondicherrien informants were rejected until a certain level of “frequency” was seen. It was not until I was commonly hanging out in their popular urban spaces, that further contact was made. This was a feature of Franco Pondicherrien young adults often commented on by my Tamil Pondicherrien informants. They often felt excluded from taking part, as I will come back to in chapter 5. Accessing the group of Tamil-Pondicherrien young adults I socialized with was truly easier. Mind it, I already had several personal links to the first gatekeeper of my Tamil informants, and one of my earliest key informants was already a part of this group of friends. Some ethics committees discuss that prolonged acquaintances are ‘scientifically contaminating’; when the researcher and participants know each other personally, the data may be compromised. However, as Okely argues, prolonged interaction is crucial to anthropological approach (Okely 2012 p.125). Without a connection to the participants, one might not gain access, or viable data, as the foundation of trust is not established.

Due to my previous stay in Pondicherry, I had a certain understanding of how several Franco Pondicherriens would have Tamil-Pondicherrien people working for them, either at home as a domestic worker, or in their place of work, in example a restaurant or shop. Due to the interesting nature of this contact, I had several research questions aimed at discovering the nature of these relationships, and how these encounters reacted upon each other - but decided soon to leave these questions be. The nature of the urban space in Pondicherry makes the societies quite

small, and it would be quite difficult working these questions into the field without creating friction between my informants; ignoring the ever-so-important remark of “do no harm”. Besides, these questions would not work in the larger topic of “ethnic stereotypes”, and would be a research topic on its own. This is also the main reason for the change of certain names and events, or sometimes referring to unnamed informants, to further keep them anonymous. Some selected informants’ expressions are used to exemplify a common opinion, or observation from my fieldwork. Informants like Malai, Teji, Adan or Anne, which I later will introduce, all were highly articulate, and often directly expressed ideas and opinions I heard from other informants. Doing ethnographic research in smaller communities demands a certain cultural sensitivity, crossing the lines of what is appropriate and not can be easily forgotten in the everyday life - and it was important for me to keep in mind the nature of the contact at all time. As Pranee Liamputtong discusses, building trust when gaining access is more often than not intensive if the researcher is from a group that historically have been oppressors or colonizers (Liamputtong, 2008, p. 6). Though Norway has not had large colonies in the area, excluding the Danish-Norwegian history of Tranquebar, but as I experienced, my “whiteness” often resulted in some Tamil Pondicherriens associating me with the French. This might be a result of how the history of French-centric research in Pondicherry is quite vast, from the travel letters of the colonial era, to the architecture research of today. There was several topics that was off-limits due to the nature of the contact between my informants, and keeping everyone’s integrity intact - as well as how certain critiques of ‘European ideologies’ might be pointed more directly towards me, as a European researcher. Pondicherry, having a physically small urban landscape, and my informants’ social groups being quite distinct, one of my major tools was creating a ‘mental map’, which later became physical in the form of colour-overlays on Google Map data, which I present later. Being able to put physical marks on an urban landscape helped me bring my observations and walk-alongs to life. This kind of visual tool tend to over-simplify, and is hence only used to give the reader an overview, which might bring clarity into a field with several boundaries.

My encounters with the Franco-Pondicherrien informants were usually in their free time, talking while walking around in the city centre, chatting while they finished up their jobs, hanging out at lunch - or over a couple of beers in the evenings. This seemed like the most successful way to actually gain access; I had some planned interviews - which usually got

interrupted by someone, or that my informants had to leave due to work, friends or plans. In the beginning, I was concerned about my informants forgetting my role as a researcher. This was usually corrected by reminding my informants about this role, and questioning when in doubt if what was said was OK'ed for written notes. By adopting a “conversational approach”, I was able to bring up the topic of consent several times during my stay, when it felt natural. As Liamputtong argues, the call for a more flexible approach towards informed consent is great in cross-cultural research (Liamputtong, 2008 p.15). According to the NSD, written consent is preferred, but verbal consent is applicable as long as it is informed, voluntary, and explicit (NSD 2017) which greatly adds to the fluency of an informal conversation. In some instances, external factors played a role in how I had to distance myself as a researcher from the field. For instance, in events where my informants were heavily influenced by alcohol, I halted taking notes of the conversations. Such circumstance makes any informed consent null, as the researcher does not know how the influence of alcohol or similar substance warp what is being said, or if things best kept secret is given. One example of this is how one informant, though with a highly interesting background and dialogue, usually got quite drunk after only a couple of glasses with wine. This informant only had time to meet with me on her off-hours, which was usually spent at a local ‘restobar’. I never got any usable data from her.

During my fieldwork, one informant also started demanding compensation before continuing our conversation. She had thought about it at home; that my role as a researcher gave me something - while her situation as a participant in my ethnography gave her nothing - and slowly started demanding money from me. The events with this informant is not used as data as my role as a neutral researcher would be jeopardized, and would in any matter compromise the data, and I quickly declined the proposed exchange. As discussed in *Decolonised Methodologies in Cross-Cultural Research* (Vannini, 2008, p. 147) researchers juggle with the tools of being within an academic society at home base, while participating in the actors culture in the field. In field, we deep-dive into the stories from our informants, and place ourselves in their everyday lives; but in the academic writing back home, it is easy to impose our own interpretation – which could interrupt the neutrality. Being conscious about this is of utmost important in the field - but it is easier to forget while writing back home. Remembering that the cross-cultural research is a way to give a voice to someone’s story, to be for the people who you are writing about helped me in constantly double checking my writing. On a positive note, it is often the distance to field that

helped me, as a researcher, see the bigger picture. Though not optimal, due to the limited time constraint, a detailed interaction between Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens with the Aurobindo society and the Muslim quarter are left out, though this serves as interesting points for further research. With this in mind, I will now go from a historic bird-perspective, and land in the streets of Pondicherry to introduce the urban space of my thesis.

## 4 Exploring Urban Space

Though the contemporary city limits of modern Pondicherry seem quite vague, and the state of Tamil Nadu intercepts parts of the union territory surrounding the city of Pondicherry, the transition from East Coast Road (ECR) to Mahatma Gandhi Road is the gateway to the city. Historically on the same site as the intercity connection-road towards Chennai, the last intersection of ECR/M.G. Road is placed directly on top of where the northern tower from the Dutch-French fortification once stood. The old town fortification laid ground for the modern ring road - and the boulevards surrounding the city follows the same layout as the Dutch plans for a protecting city wall. The M.G. Road cuts through the city itself, with its three historic market clock towers on a straight line, starting in the suburban area just outside the city.

Arriving at the intersection, a modern part of the city's hotel landscape is built around the bustling traffic following the north and west boulevards of Anna Salai and Patel Salai - with the M. G. Road serving as a middle road, with often a cramped flow of two-wheelers and foot traffic. Entering the energetic street of M.G. Road, the sight of Sri Varadaraja Perumal Temple stands tall in the cityscape, serving as a staple of the Hindu-historic settlement in Pondicherry. One of the oldest remaining temples in the area, the Perumal temple is believed to be from the 12th century, and was partially spared by the French colonial powers. Further down the street, the gold-merchant area is seen on both sides of M.G. Road, where large jewellers and gold-sellers' newer buildings placed between the smaller historical buildings. The area around the Grand Bazaar is packed with smaller vendors, high-end boutiques and "export malls", serving the shopping needs of everyone from the richest to the poorest of the city. Both clock towers in the central area served, as previously mentioned, as a symbol of the trading markets under colonial rule. Whereas the old "natives market", now just called *Chinna Manikundu* (Small Clock tower) no longer attracts much traffic, the Grand Bazar, or Goubert Market, draws heavy crowds at almost all hours. What once was an open field of market, now encapsulates a large portion of M. G. Road - and the clock tower itself is almost not visible from the streets anymore. Almost hidden behind the blocks of street-side concrete walls are a vast area covered in tarpaulin "ceiling" shielding the narrow pathways of the market area.





*Fig: 3 The old clock tower of Grand Bazar*

Starting at early morning with fresh produce, and serving as a “everything-market”, the Grand Bazars (Goubert Market) stalls are so packed that the previous central jail of Pondicherry located nearby was converted into a parking space for two-wheelers. Although regulated as closed by night-time, the area is known as a breeding ground of shady business in the after-hours. But during the day, hundreds of Pondicherriens use the area to get the freshest meat and fish - or find the colourful flowers for their hair garlands. On Sunday mornings, the market itself expands throughout the whole street, turning the area into an ongoing mix of lavender smells and street food. These markets popularity throughout the history has later also served as a factor for the international commercial brands, and several of the larger restaurant and shopping chains has established or bought properties in M.G. Road. Due to the commercial properties of the area, M.G. Road also serves as neutral grounds for all parts of the population. As an informant once told me that M.G. Road makes you forget that you are in a small south-Indian town. “It is quite Delhi-esque”. Crossing the junction of Bussy Street, the smaller clock tower market sits quietly in the middle of the main traffic between French and Tamil Quarters, serving as a meeting point for Auto Rickshaws and travellers - and just at the end of the street, the massive Indo-Gothic-inspired Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with a capacity of 2000 visitors, greets the passers-by with a large sign next to a large patron saint wishing them a safe travel home.

## 4.1 Interaction with Contemporary Pondicherry

Though often referred to historically as “Native Town”, Ville Noir, or Black Town - the Tamil Town of Pondicherry is defined as the grid-plan streets above the Rue de Canal, including the Muslim quarters, market streets and above, all the way to Anna Salai road, which connects with the ECR on the north side of central Pondicherry. During the French rule, the structure of Tamil Town was forced by the company - but the architecture itself was based on a Tamil background, fused with French elements. The buildings were often lower than the French counterparts – and had typically a *Thinnai*<sup>6</sup>, the external public space, and a social inner courtyard distinguished the buildings from the European stylings of ‘White Town’. Built with solid pillars, and a veranda for sun protection, the Tamil buildings were often built symbolic, where the public were welcome to use the front side porch, while the central courtyard were to

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<sup>6</sup> Entrance-porch with seating area, seen as public domain

reflect the community of family. Though the prominent members of the Tamil community used resources developing the schools, religious spots and structure of 'Ville Noir', the French government did not focus on improving the sanitary or infrastructural features of the area. Only in the recent years has this part of Pondicherry caught the focus of restoration, and large parts of the Tamil-Town has lost its historic buildings. With the introduction of commercial agents interested in opening business in the area, many of the blocks have been replaced with newer department stores, health care units and apartments. Some of the remaining buildings with architectural heritage on the west side of Pondicherry has been used for public services or cheap rentals over a long period of time - and restoration is deemed difficult, if not impossible. Though INTACH, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, in Pondicherry has worked mostly with the heritage buildings in 'White Town', the historical architecture in western parts of town has seen raised interest only in the later years, which I will expand upon later in this thesis.

Due to high commercial interest, many working class families who acquired local real-estate through heritage have sold their homes and moved to the suburban areas surrounding Pondicherry. Thus, streets interchange between the ones inhabited with families of higher income, where the buildings often are restored, or kept intact - and streets where every-other building is now of newer design, with smaller old buildings crumbling in-between. The areas to the east of M.G. Road is often regarded as more heavily preserved - especially surrounding Rue de Mission and the Muslim Quarter. Walking Lal Bahadur Shastri St/Rue de Bussy towards the canal, the irregular pattern of streets belonging to the Muslim quarters expands to the right side. Though also heavily suggested by the French Company to restructure the streets, many of the Muslim traders of the early colonial era were of high power - and along with the powerful Tamils of the "Ville Noir", a deal was struck, leaving the Muslim quarter to be as originally developed. The streets of the small Muslim quarters all surround the larger 17th century Meeran Mosque, built in a gothic Islamic style.

Opposite is the area historically connected to the Tamil-Christian and missionary societies, starting with Rue de Cathedral/Rue de Missions. Built with interaction to the large "Immaculate Conception Cathedral" built by Jesuits in the 18th century, it is now serving as a "community street" for locals in central to eastern part of Pondicherry. On the street corner next to the cathedral and archdiocese house, opposite of the catholic higher secondary school for girls are central stores with international selection of goods. The catholic press, French bookstore and

a “western shopping mall” are all located in the same area. These streets have seen an interesting development as the price for properties and rent in the French quarters has risen. Many foreigners moving to Pondicherry stay in the Tamil Quarters - just above the Canal, and the streets around Rue de Mission, creating neighbourhoods mixed with local heritage buildings and newer apartments built according to the “heritage standard”. With the catholic history of the area - these streets, especially Rue de Mission is an interesting religious mix, where the visitors of street altars and the cathedral use the space also important to the Hindu temple down the road. Experiencing Pondicherry in December, Rue de Mission is also one of the few streets I saw where Christmas decorations were not only hung, but used widely.



*Fig: 4 Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Rue de Mission. Photo by Author*

Walking down Rue de Mission, one encounters the buildings of French-founded social institutions for the “Ville Noir”, as with the old local Catholic School for Tamil Boys, though many of them are caught in state of destruction. After liberation, most of the public schools were centralized, leaving the buildings and properties without proper maintenance. As INTACH has in the later years tried to reach out to the local government, it may seem like the heritage sites are left for ruins until a high-bidding commercial actor shows interest in the property. This is in contrast to the co-operation of INTACH, Sri Aurobindo Society and the local government



considering the architectural heritage of French quarters. This is also clearly seen in the last part of Rue de Mission, where several blocks are used by the community of Sri Aurobindo. Walking down Rue de Mission, and turning right by Rue de Aurobindo, one can cross over the small canal bridge, and into the northern part of French quarter - the area closely linked to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and its followers. The blocks surrounding the Aurobindo Ashram is considered to be one of the best preserved in the city - as the society started preservation of historical buildings and sight long before the liberation of Pondicherry. During the early years of Sri Aurobindo society, many of the followers bought the houses close to the ashram itself, and as the economy of the society grew, several restoration projects were started by the society. Walking down the surrounding streets, one sees the characteristic features of the northern French quarters including the usage of colonial lamp-posts and traffic signs, slow paced traffic by bicycle, and the international food shops. One interesting feature is the Manakula Vinyakar Kovil street - including its vast Lakshmi temple. This creates an interesting cross-religious space, as the public meditation of the Aurobindo ashram is located on the street next to one of the most visited temples in Pondicherry. Walking towards Rue de Marine, the celebrations of Manakula Vinyakar Kovil's temple elephant is in hard contrast to the silence of the Ashram - and as the traffic disappears, one sees the smaller streets to the left where the French Institute, the French consulate, Foyer de Soldat, and its members are located. The area surround the French consulate are prohibited to visitors, and as I personally experienced, loitering and taking pictures is frowned upon. The Foyer de Soldat is the legion hall for retired soldiers from Pondicherry, and was built after 1777, when the French entered the American War of Independence to defend against the British.

The surrounding area also includes larger mansions for the high-class population linked to either the Franco-Pondicherrien society or the Aurobindo Ashram, as well as old Franco-Pondicherrien families from the colony. Some buildings have been restructured or rebuilt, but the areas push towards a strict building code preserves the architectural heritage. Down on Goubert Avenue, the city-wide street towards the seaside, a small part of the beach is locked off for public use, hiding a large pool for the members of Sri Aurobindo society. This walled-off area is used both for sports and leisure. The rest of Goubert Avenue is open to the public at any time - and after sundown, the now pedestrian only street is turned into a large social meeting grounds, lasting all night, until the joggers turn up at around four in the morning. Walking down the



Fig: 5 Eglise de Notre Dame from the church garden Photo by Author

Goubert avenue, many of the shore side houses have either been restored or rebuilt after several severe storms the last years, destroying large parts of the historic buildings. Halfway through the avenue, the old Place de Republique, with its ten large pillars acquired by the French from northern temples, a grand statue commemorating Mahatma Gandhi is structured in the middle of the plateau that used to be the main port of French authority.

The Goubert Avenue, by the seaside acts as a neutral social hub for the large population. Either for the Sunday stroll, or for hanging out with friends and loved ones, the seaside boardwalk is central in many Pondicherriens life. Though quite packed in tourist seasons, election

periods or the holidays, the avenue is touted by

Pondicherry Tourism Office as a serene and quiet

scene. Up until 2015, the beachside next to the promenade was used as a night-time food market, with several hundred stalls preparing street food, but due to “internal issues”, the government has moved the food carts to a backstreet next to Bharati Park. Situated next to the Gandhi statue is the French port-house, now restored by INTACH as a tourist café, open 24 hours, as well as the colonial heritage governmental buildings of the port authority, the old lighthouse, and until recently, the “Mairie”, the governmental house of French India. Nearby, the historic *Eglise de Notre Dames des Anges* garden of the Greco-Roman architectural church in ‘White Town’ serves the urban population in all three major languages of Pondicherry; English, French and Tamil. At the end of the street, a colonial heritage building now situates the *Alliance Française* art gallery and café, often used as the French cinema.

The lined streets west to Goubert Avenue host the French colonial buildings still present in Pondicherry, such as the *Chambre de Commerce* near Barathi Park, and the house of

Pondicherry Public Works Department, in the French-colonial *Hôtel de Monnaie, Travaux Publics* in Rue de Bussy. The Barathi Park also hosts the well-known Aayi Mandapam monument, created in the era of Napoleon III, commemorating the courtesan Aayi who destroyed her own house to erect a water reservoir to the city.

## 4.2 Contemporary Urban Spaces

Based on the historical context of the development in urban Pondicherry, the contemporary society is built upon the existing guidelines formed by the Dutch architectural and French implementation of segregating ‘White Town’ and ‘Black Town’.



Fig: 5 Light blue shows Anna Salai, and the previous location of the fortifications. Dark blue displays the canal. Green area is the historic Muslim Quarters. White line represents M. G. Road. Copyright Google Earth Pro - Edited 2016

As I have shown earlier, the notion of having a part of town reserved for the French nationals was something the Company wanted already in the early stages of developing the town,

though the acts of segregating between a *Ville Noir* and a *Ville Blanc* was introduced first by the architectural plans of the Dutch. While keeping the Muslim Quarters intact (see green area of map), making it the only non-linear part of the town, Pondicherry was built with a grid-plan system, with the canal now serving as a breaking point between the societies.

Post-colonial Pondicherry has seen a major developing force with the economic growth of 1990, and as the *nagars* surrounding Pondicherry grew - the central areas saw a surge in commercial interest from both national and international companies. Families occupying the area above the central canal often opted to sell their homes, interesting in starting a new in the developing suburban *nagars*. Often by a lower socio-economic class than the French residents of the 'White Town', larger parts of this area kept succumbing to the gentrification and thus the destruction of Tamil architecture. According to INTACH's Map of architectural heritage in central Pondicherry<sup>7</sup>, the areas in the so-called 'Tamil Town' are threatened the most (Malangin, 2015, p. 149). The rise of Sri Aurobindos population in 'White Town' is also acknowledged to have provided a lot of the economic resources needed to preserve the area, but organizations like INTACH, the IFP and L'ecole Française d'Extreme Orient are also members of the preservation society. Situated in the local bay area is the French Consulate, which to this day deals with the governing issues of Indo-French nationals, as well as maintaining the public listings of the French population.

With the integration of the Pondicherry Union Territory into the free India, many of the European French, and Indo French nationals either moved to France, or stayed in the 'White Town' Area, and post-colonial Pondicherry has thus expended the divide of the town. By promising the maintenance of practices and rights engaged by the French Civil Code, most of the public institution is located around the same physical space. Schools like the Lycée Française, libraries and social functions like the French theatre, or religious societies like the Eglise de Notre Dame des Anges cater to the Franco-Pondicherrien society, and their visitors. This has also heavily propelled the concentration of non-French European nationals moving to Pondicherry staying in 'White Town'. The high demand in commercial space has pushed a large portion of

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<sup>7</sup> INTACH Heritage Categories. Cat.1 - 3 Grading historical importance of heritage buildings



the Tamil families out to the suburban areas, making the central Tamil-Town a commercial area. Connecting the historical features in development of Pondicherry, one sees that the dividing factor of the canal no longer serves as a direct cut-off between the 'White Town' and 'Tamil Town', but that the spaces of these areas still are prevalent. As I will discuss further, the connection between geographical space and identity are a major force in creating a sense of 'belonging' to such areas. These historical traits, and the continued centralization of certain public domains, as seen with the French schools or institutes of art and leisure in Pondicherry continue to maintain a polarization between Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens. As I will show, the factors of family history, the individual upbringing and connection tend to align Franco or Tamil Pondicherriens towards using Pondicherry in a divided manner, as well as the continued superimposition of ethnic traits on each other.

# 5 Interaction between Identity and Urban Space

Previously in this thesis, I have looked at the history of urban development, as well as events leading up to a divided urban population. We have seen that the colonial history of Pondicherry has created the distinction of “Franco and Tamil-Pondicherriens”, and while largely unbalanced in population numbers, these categories are not bound by socio-ethnic background, nor ancestry alone - but also in regards of creole population, the more open policy of citizenship, and the creation of “Us-hood”, on the lines discussed by Hylland Eriksen. With regards to the creation of Franco- and Tamil Pondicherrien communities without only separating ethnic backgrounds, the aspect of belonging is also expressed in several every-day situations, as I will discuss in this chapter. By looking at the contemporary social spaces of my informants, I will explore the spatial dimensions of the division between “Franco- and Tamil Pondicherriens”, in order to understand how these identities are constituted, and what role urban space plays in this regard.

In order to better understand what defines *belonging* to the Franco- or Tamil Pondicherrien parts of the society, it could be difficult to view this process by drawing similarities to the post-colonial British areas of India, although geographically close. I argue that not only was the post-colonial citizenship terms vastly different, but as Pondicherry’s status as a smaller enclave in colonial India posed a development of post-colonial identities contrasting what was seen in the majority of India. More on the lines of the merger between previously British colonial Hong Kong and mainland China, the population growing up in post-colonial Pondicherry was brought up according to the differences in French and Tamil public schools, often regarding history and social science corresponding to each educational platform. As the negotiation- and forming of collective identities in colonial and post-colonial Hong Kong, language became the «symbol of the educated as well as the elites», and the post-colonial school system of Hong Kong has seen a larger focus on *Chineeseness* of certain members of the population (Pearce, 2010). I encountered the same stories of educational practice from my informants. Keeping in mind that the identities of Franco- or Tamil Pondicherrien are non-administrative categories, it still kept many individuals connected to these groups of identity

enrolling their young ones in schools accordingly. Pondicherriens seeking a French language based platform of education often enrolled their kids in the Lycée Française, while the majority of the population opted for the public Tamil platform. I will later show how my informants reacted to their environment of their French or public schooling. The French schools also were popular with other international families settling in Pondicherry - not only of French origin. It is also important to remember that the schools affiliated with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, although French language based, is not directly linked to the French population. The juxtaposed traits of 'otherness' remains a clear boundary of identity, on par - or sometimes larger than linguistic or socioeconomic differences.

Before entering the empirical section of this chapter, I need to stress the reasons for selection of informants. Though centred on three main informants, these interviews are fairly representative for my network of informants, though these three perhaps were a trifle more articulate than the average. Due to the nature of questions, several other informants were hesitant in answering directly, as the topic of "the other" was often regarded as impolite. Even though all informants are anonymized, the selected informants in this chapter are also chosen ethically, as they will less likely be recognized within the smaller urban communities. Also, the topic is based upon a larger understanding by participating observation, and quotes from these informants are used as a representative for comments and small-talk made with other informants throughout my fieldwork.

## **5.1 Developing a Connection**

As Fredrik Barth argues in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Barth 1969), ethnicity and its boundaries rely on the ascriptive nature of an exclusive group, reliant on self-identification by the actors themselves (Barth, 1969, p. 10). As he states, the identification of another person as a fellow member of an ethnic group implies a sharing of criteria for evaluation and judgement (Barth 1969, p. 15). A. L. Epstein argues further in *Ethos and Identity* (2006) that this process of self-identification of group membership might be expressed by a sense of 'classification'; "the separating out and pulling together of the population into a series of categories defined in terms of "we" and "they" (Epstein 2006 p. 100). By this, Epstein sees ethnicity in some degree as a product of the interaction between inner perception and outer response (Epstein, 2006, p. 102). Consequently, the contemporary identity of «Franco- and Tamil Pondicherrien» is not, as seen

with my informants, only groups of identity caused by either historical ethnicity, contemporary behaviour in the urban space, nor static between the members itself; but reliant on the communication between the inner perception and the external response to the identity boundaries. This is prevalent in talks with both my Tamil and Franco-Pondicherrien informants, as self-identification of belonging to either group was often expressed directly, while establishing the boundaries of what creates ‘the others’ always fluctuated. One might, as expressed by some of my informants, be keen on observing the divided social spaces of Pondicherry as a result in economic and class differences, but through this subchapter, I will argue that the combination of historic identity traits, propelled by contemporary ethnic stereotypes of ‘the other’ results in the further divided population, and how these societal products help maintain a socially segregated urban space as much as economic background.

## 5.2 Suburbanization of Tamil-Pondicherrien families

As central costs-of-living rose and the population grew, many families moved to gentrified *kuppam*<sup>8</sup> surrounding the city, often settling according to religious and social background. Though several quarters in the city centre often have a historical link to religion, the middle to upper-middle class Hindu-Tamil population with families built modern suburban areas and relocated *en masse*. While central Muslim and Christian residential areas mostly kept their religious identity, most Hindu-majority streets inside the ring-road are seldom organized nor viewed as «Hindu streets», and are often spread throughout the city. Living in greater-Pondicherry area not only reduces expenses to a desired level, but also opens up the opportunity to build your own home, created gated areas for the family, and is seen as a way to provide safety for the children. Available houses or flats in the city centre are scarce, and the majority of the urban population in this area either rent, have a quite high income or have had the properties for several generations. Besides, as I will present later while discussing the census of heritage building owners, a large complaint was the high maintenance and upkeep necessary in keeping the heritage buildings. (INTACH 2003) Thus, the urban lower-middle class sometime keep their housing until a commercial developer comes along with a greater offer than the public. One of the perceivable results of this are how certain areas of the city have a high heritage-restoration

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<sup>8</sup> Suburbanized rural area, often in smaller villages surrounding the town

rate, while others are crowded with contemporary high-story buildings as far as the eye can see. The remaining minority of Franco-Pondicherrien families often live in the lower east-side of 'White Town', and often in houses kept within the family for generations, in the same areas where both the Sri Aurobindo society, as well as Institute Française de Pondichéry and Alliance Française-housing are. The other rentable flats in this area is often occupied by seasonal habitants from France, and tourists staying for the winter.

To further expand upon the experiences of Tamil-Pondicherriens, I will draw attention to one key informant who had been working with young students from all social classes in and around Pondicherry. Malai was born and raised in the Tamil upper-middle class, and her family had been in the city for generations. Malai's family had their own property in a semi-central district, but often stayed in their uncle's house while he was away for business in France. She had called me up earlier that week, asking me to join for a chat with her friend Teji one afternoon we both had time. Sitting in the cool air of an open Auto, I was rolling down the stone roads leading to the suburban housing area where Malai's uncle had built his town house. Assuming a quiet, low-key talk with Malai and Teji, I was to my surprise greeted by the whole family - including the soft smile of her mother, who quietly stated that she didn't speak any English. I was proudly shown around the large house, with its huge murals and built in colour-lights, before entering the office-con-bedroom where we could sit down for our talk. "You have to excuse my mother. She's happy to meet you, and so happy you came, but her English is not as fluent as ours, and she feels embarrassed by it". She told me how the whole family found my topic to be quite interesting - in fact, it was something they had talked about a lot while Malai worked with the student outreach right after college. Malai straightened her sari as she re-introduced her friend Teji, whom I'd only had the chance to meet once before. "You know Teji, right? You guys talked about the feminist movement in India last time, no?". She had raised her hand for a handshake, while still sitting on the edge of the chair in her western-style jeans and shirt. We small-talked for a little while, before I asked them for permission to record our conversation and introduced my topic of interest. As I started talking about childhood and friendship, Malai's younger brother also joined the room, and quietly sat down on the bed behind the chairs of Malai and Teji. An interesting notion on the encounter with Malai's family could be seen regarding to Epstein's dialogue on *Grandparents and Ethnic Identity* (2006). He argues that the family

structure of *kinship* heavily influences the process of self-identification. As figures of authority help identity assimilation, and thus propel finding traits of self-identification in the search for ethnic identity (Epstein, 2006, pp. 139-156). Though he largely links this feature with the more-distant grandparents, as he claims the ‘alliance of alternate generations’ is boosted by how parent-child relationships often are too focused on restraints, a fascinating feature of this conversation was how Malai and Teji both were heavily focused on their Tamil-Pondicherrien upbringing in contrast to what they regarded as a typical Franco-Pondicherrien lifestyle of children and young adults, also in accordance to what previous generations had encountered.

“You know kids, right? They don’t really care - but the parents decide who the kids play with. It’s always up to the parents - and often, they would like their kids to socialize with other kids in the same social group as the parents, right? So, I had only Tamil friends growing up”, Teji told me while sipping on the straw to her Pepsi. “The French kids in the neighbourhood where I grew up were not allowed to play in the streets, and used most of their time playing indoors on the computer or something”, she continued with a small laugh. Malai agreed while telling me that speaking French was a huge deal, especially in the early 90s when she grew up, but it never bothered her that she knew little French herself. A calm, quiet voice came from the back of the room, as Malai’s brother stated that the teasing from kids speaking French made it uninteresting to get to know them anyways. Teji nodded in agreement. “We used to get teased”, she told me. “Some of the children would make a huge deal out of only speaking French when we walked by, just to rub it in that we did not understand it. And (...) they all knew English, and most of them also spoke Tamil - but it was a way to show off”. Malai’s friend laughed it all off, and said that it was so annoying how the ‘everything French’ was associated with Pondicherry. “I even had friends from Chennai asking me if everyone here (in Pondicherry) spoke French and were western. I mean, come on... Tamil is our language and culture - so many are faking this. “ I had heard the statement of Pondicherry being mostly French by several of the weekend-stayers I had encountered. Though this misconception itself is interesting, it was maybe more so how my informants saw the generalization of ‘White Town’ as ordinary and somewhat valid, but were negative towards the external conceptions of Pondicherry as a whole.

She talked about how the families that actually lived in central-Pondicherry often had a higher income, and that there was no vacancy anyways. “You cannot build or buy something that

has been swapped within the family for centuries. It might not be fair, but that's the way it is". Malai stated that some of the few central properties were so expensive that the only families that could afford them were living and working seasonally in France - but claiming that if they *did in fact* someday have the economy to move to central Pondicherry, they would rather live around Nehru-street, a shopping area just outside 'White Town'. Besides, as they saw it, many of the hang-out places popular amongst the Franco-Pondicherrien were expensive, and they felt like outsiders there. Also, their families would not like it if they went out late to these places – they had the reputation of being of bad moral. When I asked how come the name 'White Town' stuck for the area on the other side of the canal – they both claimed "it just did...It's just one of the many names for it people use. Some Indians (weekend tourists or seasonal workers) say French Town, or Heritage Town. But it's actually still 'White Town'". One interpretation of this statement is the upheld notion of certain urban space, in this case the part of 'White Town' east of Nehru Street is still felt distanced to the everyday life they had, or wanted. It was inaccessible, or even felt remote – and often contrasting what was deemed appropriate.

As previously discussed, the Citizenship Act after the merger of French India with the Republic of India caused a minority of the population establishing French national citizenship, and thus were free to travel and work in Europe. Though most frequent in previously Franco-Pondicherrien population, this also served as an opportunity for social mobility, and according to Malai it was not uncommon to see advertisement of young bachelors with French citizenship inherited by their parents seeking families of brides who wanted their daughter to get the opportunity to work in France. Further blurring the lines in the identity of Franco-Pondicherrien, Malai expressed how 'they' (referring to individuals who had French-Indian citizenship, and worked in France, while coming back to Pondicherry seasonally) rarely saw themselves as Franco-Pondicherrien, further strengthening the proposition of urban Pondicherry identity as a matter of personal choice alongside the inner resources and acceptance of said group more than the nationality status itself. Although members of a society constantly change their roles in communication with others and thus hold simultaneously a number of identities, these identities often 'nest', as Epstein argues, within a hierarchy where identities often are expressed and 'stressed' by the social context (Epstein, 2006, pp. 100-112). This would further explain how one can be of French citizenship, though still not identify as Franco-Pondicherrien. Also, this

‘hierarchy’ of identity could create a different role of members in the Tamil-Pondicherrien community, as the boundaries of this identity are on the other hand largely based on heritage. The French citizen Tamil-Pondicherrien population, in other words, Tamil population who moved to France in order to gain social mobility often become in-between groups, as established by Malai in the talk about her family members living abroad. “They are not really Tamil-kids anymore. Even *I* have cousins in Paris, and they are so disconnected from their heritage”, Malai told me while laughing. “It spreads throughout the society. Tamil-kids, who were not even really French, move to Paris for a couple of years and stops eating their *Thali*<sup>9</sup>, starts dressing in a very western way, and always want their *crêpe*”. She claimed you could tell the difference between the ‘real’ Franco-Pondicherrien families, and the Tamil families who just happened to live some years in Paris. “Just give me two minutes listening to them, and I will tell you where they really are from”, Teji announced, “it all seems so fake”. Asking what features she meant was prominently seen in regard to this, she replied that language was often first key factor, the pronunciation and vocabulary – but also “the way they act in a way they think is posher, or European”. I jokingly asked if she were interested in having her future kids in the French school, which was met with a rumbling laughter before expressing a loud “never!”. She told me how she wished that people would be prouder of their past and heritage. “Tamil kids should feel just as proud of their background as the French did”. She felt it made no sense that a part of the society, especially a minority like this, felt superior to an equally important part of what makes Pondicherry its distinct self. They both proclaimed that the biggest problem was how Franco-Pondicherriens deemed themselves more ‘modern’, or how they had heard the society was set on being progressive and international.

### **5.3 “Ville Blanc and Ville Noir” revisited**

Talking about upbringing in Pondicherry, both Teji and Malai stated that they did see differences between their childhood and the kids they saw growing up in the Franco-Pondicherrien society. “Growing up, many French kids (Franco-Pondicherrien) thought they had a higher quality of education than us in Tamil schools. Of course, this is not true at all... They

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<sup>9</sup> A common lunch meal served on a platter by the same name, with six different flavoured sides on one plate, served with rice in the middle.



just have an easier access to the Alliance Française later on. And although the Sri Aurobindo school is really international and all, it's not really all that better either", Teji explained. She claimed it all came down to economy. Not only is the 'strong' (present) Aurobindo society quite rich, but so is the general Franco-Pondicherrien society in Pondicherry, at least those who actively portrayed themselves as belonging in this community. Now that Auroville, the experimental township just outside of Pondicherry based on the French Sri Aurobindo spiritual collaborator Mirra Alfassa, also known as The Mother, was buying up lands, starting schools and building housing areas, some Tamil-Pondicherriens feel that they are left out of the booming economy. The governmental schools are often not in the same restored shape as the French equivalent, and is sometimes lacking the same funding as private schools.

Established earlier, identifying as Franco- or Tamil Pondicherrien is a result between the self-identification and the external response, but resulting in these identity boundaries in the historically divided city of Pondicherry is the contemporary contrasting uses of urban space. Though no legal nor physical attributes contribute to this, it often comes back to the sense of "belonging" to a certain city area. Through the eyes of my informants, the interesting feature in contemporary usage of urban Pondicherry were how an image was created in seeing 'White Town' and the rest of the city as two different places entirely. Sure, most of my informants used parts of each of the city areas - but not uncommonly, they felt more "at home" on either side of the canal. Going back to the study of post-colonial education in Hong Kong, the feeling of belonging in the context of mainland China, as in contrast to the previous education's focus on Hong Kong's colonial roots, the contemporary curriculum was created to boost 'national identity' (Pierce, Fong 2010). Naturally, the differences in size and historical context differ, but looking at educational background between my Franco- and Tamil Pondicherrien informants showed that Pondicherry's historical context in colonial and post-colonial India could help maintain both the frames of identity, but also the sense of 'belonging' in the city's urban spaces. Belonging to, and engaging the different 'places' within the same city might be linked towards growing up. As suggested by Margaret Kernan, children can identify themselves with larger social groups that are 'in reach' of children in their environment (Kernan, 2010). This could explain how the geographic space while growing up also effect the lifestyle of young adults. 'Belonging', being the key-word, creates the situations seen in Pondicherry; while Franco-

Pondicherrien young adults regularly use the spaces of ‘White Town’, it is also so far in their life been the major *place* connected to their feeling of belonging. This, propelled by the historical connection of heritage, further maintain this part of the city as ‘home base’, the common ground of identity. Belonging, in the words of Gary B. Melton are terms of “immersion in a sea of relationships within and across generations” (Melton, 2005), as we can see in both Franco- and Tamil Pondicherrien informants statements regarding the physical spaces in Pondicherry.

Malai and Teji talked about the contrast between the public lower-secondary school in Rue de Bussy, and how it was situated across the road from the restored and maintained Lycée Française annex auditorium. The kids often stared at each other from each side of the street, while waiting for public transport of the ‘school-auto’. Interested in their thoughts on how people use the public space and streets in Pondicherry, and how upbringing was linked towards the ‘membership’ of physical space, as discussed by Margaret Kernan in her article on the role of early childhood and the importance of ‘belonging’ (Kernan, 2010), I asked my informants if they could recall any lessons on local history while attending public school. As I will point towards later, the French schools in Pondicherry included more local colonial history and architectural heritage, which claimed by my informants helped grow a closer connection to the ‘White Town’ area.

During the school-years, the history of colonial Pondicherry was largely skipped in my Tamil-Pondicherrien informants’ public education, only the basic history of the settlement was brought to their attention. In history classes, Malai remember how ancient India was largely in focus - same with the history of the freedom movement and liberation of India from the British. The creation of ‘White town’ and the history of a segregated city centre was rarely discussed in school. Neither spent much time in ‘White Town’ while growing up, nor did they go there that often now. They both claimed that they could not really think of any differences in how their Tamil friends socialized in the town, compared to the French friends they had at the university - though they both felt the Goubert Avenue as a popular spot. “Walking down the seaside, eating ice cream and just relaxing is the best about Pondicherry”, Teji claimed. “I remember it was my favourite thing about weekends while growing up”. Both agreed what makes Pondicherry so special for them was the “streets” (architecture and grid-style), and how quiet it was compared to larger cities. “Oh, and all the great food. It really is a ‘foodies’ paradise. French and European

food everywhere - it's not that common in Tamil Nadu", though neither claimed any difference between "French" or international, often blurring these lines. On the discussion between educational background, contemporary usage and *belonging*, these categories lie closely to the correlation of 'neighbourhoods'. Growing up and accessing the public schools in the periphery of 'White Town', as well as socializing with kids from their own *background*, all relate to how urban Pondicherry now was used; they had their friends, businesses, entertainment and leisure outside of 'White Town', with little to no daily activity needed there. This follows Appudurai's discussion on locality as a phenomenological property of social life; production of 'neighbourhoods' is always historically grounded and inherently defined by their opposition of something else - as all transformation of space to place requires "a conscious moment, which may subsequently be remembered as relatively routine" (Appudurai 1996 p.183). This also shows how both perceived the urban space as neutral, neither strayed far from the Goubert Avenue, or main streets during their spare-time in the 'White Town' area, they felt more connected to the general urban space, while viewing 'White Town' as the opposition of their 'neighbourhood'.

This argues for the hierarchy of identity, created as opposing features of identification in contrast to the other. One similar way to see these groups of identities, are through the works of Richard Jenkins in Denmark. He described the 'hierarchy' of identities as differencing through several geographic layers. As the local identities contrast, they might still stand united in having a common identity with their city and region, the same way as national groups of identities mostly contrast to other on the same layer (Jenkins, 2012, p. 80). Thus, he argues, such taxonomies of ethnicity need the range of idioms of identity. One way to regard the Franco- or – Tamil Pondicherrien communities would be in the level of hierarchy itself – being Pondicherrien contrasts the surrounding Tamil Nadu, as Franco-Pondicherrien contrasts Tamil Pondicherrien and so on, all the way down to a local level, where, as Malai explains, being Tamil, and growing up in Pondicherry contrasts being Tamil and being brought up abroad, without entering a debate towards the taxonomy of Franco-Pondicherriens.

## 5.4 A Childhood Amongst Giants

My Tamil-Pondicherrien informants lump the Franco-Pondicherriens into one category, even though there is an understanding of the differences between a born-and-raised Franco-Pondicherrien, a French citizen who moved to Pondicherry, and the students of the French schools whom might have moved here from other French communities. The ethnic stereotypes superimposed upon the inhabitants of ‘White Town’ are attributed certain linguistic, socioeconomic and social traits - they are all seen as “the other”, belonging to the contrasting “neighbourhood”. Because of these stereotypes, I will move the focus over to a key Franco-Pondicherrien informant to further develop an understanding of how the identity boundaries and stereotypes are superimposed on “the others”. Adan, a mid-thirties scholar, had spent most of his adult life working in ‘White Town’ alongside the French educational system, and was personally interested in the maintenance of ‘White Town’ heritage buildings and culture.

Although his family was one of Pondicherry’s oldest connected to the “Franco-Pondicherrien” society, his parents moved to France in his earliest years due to work. Spending only his summers in Pondicherry, he had felt “different” than the other children he used to play with in his holidays, though he felt the constant moving of his parents could be a contributing factor. While traveling between Europe and South Asia became the normal in his early years, his family settled down again in Pondicherry when Adan reached school age. He told me how different everything felt for a boy who had spent most of his childhood in western societies. Though he felt lucky to enrol in the Lycée Française, Adan never felt like the rest of the kids growing up in Pondicherry. They did speak French, and many dressed and acted like the kids he was used to, but as he spoke of his childhood, he put strong emphasis on the loneliness of being one of the few students in his school who had lived abroad. What he saw as the conservative lifestyle of many Franco-Pondicherriens kept Adan from extending his circle of friends outside from what he saw as his own group of “real French-kids”. Adan’s group of friends was seen as quite the trouble-stirrers. He told me they had been scolded for trying cigarettes, gotten their hands on “dirty pictures” and were always doing some small mischiefs, in stark contrast to what he claimed the other kids in the neighbourhood dared try.

Adan told me an important topic in history classes during his school years was the French colonial rise and fall, and how he felt like growing up in the history of giants, as all the street names surrounding him bore the names of the important people whom was discussed in class. There was a sense of belonging, and a shared history, but that within the contemporary society, the likeness ended there. “Most Franco-Pondicherriens now are not the real Franco-Pondicherrien, nor do people know what the definition actually implies. Their language (vocabulary and mode of speaking) is often weird and dated, many never learn proper French, and many old families are now poor. It’s almost a myth”. He told me that the proper Franco-Pondicherriens was almost nowhere to be found, except in the high-society surrounding the northern parts of ‘White Town’. It was with sadness he told me that he felt Pondicherry was being transformed into “yet another city”, and how society had changed. The “Frenchness” of the city had become a market attribute more than its cultural past, and he felt that the “town pride” was just a cloak for the masses, while fewer people actually cared about the colonial past. Adan expressed how certain members of the older generation he knew felt closely connected to the city’s colonial past;

“If you ask some of the old people here in White Town, they might even tell you that they miss the French past. You see, after the union territory was given back to India, it took quite some time before the society changed at all. French customs and rules were implied for a long time, keeping the streets beautiful”

He also expressed grief in how the architecture would be destroyed if left for the government to deal with. “The Tamil-Pondicherriens don’t care about the streets history like we do, they do not share that pride”. At the same time, Adan expressed that he had no interest in using his spare time outside of ‘White Town’. For him, even though the “realness”, or “Frenchness” was up for discussion, he still felt the urban space of ‘White Town’ was more like home. As I will discuss later in this thesis, Adan’s statement regarding the Tamil-Pondicherrien society’s lack of historic and colonial heritage pride was somewhat common amongst several Franco-Pondicherrien interest groups.

Adan’s idea of real and unreal French citizens, and how claiming the identity of being Franco-Pondicherrien is interesting in this case. According to him, “being Franco-Pondicherrien” now was indeed something linked to family descent, but also formed in school and society -

while being of French-family origin, or from the older Franco-Pondicherrien families was something quite different. Arguably, this could be the act of *imagined* landscapes - or, as Srilata Ravi discuss in *Border Zones in Colonial Spaces* (2010), where the idea of a “lost India” is commonly portrayed in post-colonial French writing. As the late 19<sup>th</sup> century French India was reduced to a small inconsequential area, the imagined perception of ‘*what could have been*’ often overlaps the reality (Ravi, 2010). It encapsulates a perception of the past that is unattainable, thus desired. This could then be translated into the wish of retaining the features of ‘White Town’ desired by its participating members. Other informants who lived in ‘White Town’ often expressed the same; they only went outside of this area if they needed something to be done, bought or while visiting friends who lived in the Auroville area - central ‘White Town’ also represented the lifestyle they wanted; it was seen as “modern”, international and progressive in comparison to the rest of South India. As Appudarai claims in *Modernity at Large* (1996), the notion ‘modernity’ for several societies are seen as ‘elsewhere’ (Appudarai 1996 p.9), describing the enclave feature of ‘White Town’ as not a part of the surrounding.

These examples serve as a perfect window into the dynamic view of “the others”. It would suggest that the fear of being a minority whose heritage might be lost or losing control over what is seen as a part of what defines you is one of the most important negative terms in describing the contrasting identity group. Not only do both seem to view the «others» as a more stable force of change, but the view of one’s own ‘groups’ fragile nature almost creates a stronger distance in order to protect its “heritage”. What’s interesting though, is how my Franco-Pondicherrien informants mostly positive view of Sri Aurobindo, and its religious society creates yet another layer of identity. Adan explained that Sri Aurobindos connection to Aurovilles “Mother” and the fact that their schools are taught in French almost created an alliance between the two, and as years had gone by, they often were mistaken for each other, even though Auroville still was seen as an insensitive force in the towns development. As people in the Franco-Pondicherrien and Sri-Aurobindo communities in Pondicherry share the urban space of “White Town” while growing up, their contemporary life’s as young adults often centre around the same geographic space. I suggest that through this process, other members moving to Pondicherry, who share the same upbringing (often European or western), are drawn towards the urban space which inhabit the ‘features’ from their own upbringing. Drawing from the talks with Malai, Teji and Adan; certain communities’ features create a belonging to physical space, in

some cases whole neighbourhoods. But, as I will expand upon further, Pondicherry also features several ‘neutral spaces’, which acts as an urban buffer in a city with contrasting communities. As previously discussed, the commercial feature of M. G. Road creates a neutral space for everyday business, but is rarely seen as a place to “just hang out”, socialize and do “people watching”. Other, calmer arenas are deemed more suitable.

## 5.5 Communication in ‘Neutral Territories’

Between my Franco- and Tamil Pondicherrien informants, several key elements of urban space are seen; belonging as an individual in the urban areas of Pondicherry is somewhat linked to the identity of themselves; just as Malai and her friends felt connected and at ease in the central Tamil areas of Pondicherry, Adan and his social peers engaged mostly in ‘White Town’. Elijah Anderson, a US based urban ethnographer sees how divided cities often develop neutral spaces, or as he calls them, “cosmopolitan canopies”, that serves as urban areas where the diverse population can come together (Anderson, 2012, p. xiv). He argues that people often move about in public urban spaces while creating distance towards the anonymous strangers one meet while creating a private space in which interaction with different ethnicities are not needed. He states that this often propels the stereotypical images of ethnic groups, as guarding these ‘private zones’ often require limited interaction with the ‘others’, as seen in his case from Philadelphia. Anderson argues that though this is seen on a street level, most multi-ethnic urban areas have heterogeneous spaces, where the diverse population can put down their guard, and interact across ethnic background. Although the racial stereotypes described from Anderson’s work in Philadelphia is not seen in Pondicherry – public display of discontent towards ethnic background are rare, but the formation of “neutral spaces” in which the diverse population engage and interact are to be found. I have previously showed that spaces of social interaction outside of work differ quite vastly; the geographic areas used often connected to where my informants felt they *belonged*, I would argue that spaces such as the Goubert Avenue reflect the ones from Andersons work; open areas where “people of different racial and cultural types not only share space but seek out each other’s presence” (Anderson, 2012 p. 30), where the public interact and “perform folk ethnography” (Anderson, 2012 p. 11). As Anderson argue, though under these

canopies people simply coexist, the interaction may lead to a better understanding of the diverse population – a practice that can extend outside the canopy (Anderson, 2012, pp. 31-71).

As with Andersons “cosmopolitan canopies”, as the ‘Reading Terminal Market’ in Philadelphia, the Goubert Avenue is a large urban space, were “Franco- and Tamil Pondicherriens”, national and international tourists, auto-drivers, students and businessmen all interact. As previously mentioned by my informant Malai, it is a social scene where one can interact with others, get to know new people – or just share a meal with friends. Though heavily touted by the Pondicherry Tourist Department in order to boost traffic, it is still not seen as *mainly* a tourist area – it’s for everyone. Though open for traffic during the day, most hours it’s a bustling avenue with several food-stands, cafés and bars. Stretched by the seaside of Pondicherry, the diverse population engage through official events, like music festivals or public campaigns, or just for the Sunday stroll with family or friends. Serving as an overlaying area itself, the Goubert Avenue boasts several smaller neutral spaces for interaction. One of these, the Ajantha Hotel rooftop serves as a smaller neutral space in which people engage in folk-ethnography. As Andersons “cosmopolitan canopies” are public, wider spaces, private venues like the Ajantha Hotel rooftop does not directly comply, but could rather be seen as some sort of “cosmopolitan tribune” to Goubert Avenue.

The Ajantha Seaview Hotel, situated on the southern part of Goubert Avenue is mostly known by the local population for its rooftop terrace view. Though acting as a full-fledged hotel for tourists and visitors, the hotel’s rooftop serves as a meeting point for after-work socializing. As certain other cafés and resto-bars served a strong socioeconomic group, the Ajantha acted as a middle ground; the prices were quite low, there was no dress-code nor notion of “invitation only” entrance, and one of the few ‘White Town’ resto-bars without image focused on “colonial heritage” foods and drinks, often touted by other places nearby. By being economically neutral and diverse, many used the place as a low-key hangout that still remained ‘fashionable’. Anne, a Tamil informant in her twenties introduced me to the place, claiming it was the perfect place to go “people-watching”. She often came to the rooftop – it was a great spot for her to hang out with her diverse group of friends she had met through work. She saw herself as progressive and open-minded, but knew several of her acquaintances would not feel comfortable at one of the



“French establishments” – as she called it. She claimed some of her Tamil friends of her often felt excluded if they were to meet in a “French restaurant”. They were also often too pricey. Thus, this was a perfect middle-ground to hang out.

As with Andersons “Cosmopolitan Canopies”, these neutral spaces encourage people to practice ‘acting cosmopolitan’, confronting their ethnocentric values (Anderson, 2012, p. 271). As can be said with the Ajantha terrace; the diverse population use the same space, and while socializing with their friends or co-workers, they can still experience and draw notes on the others. As many other public areas seem divided into places of ‘belonging’, the terrace acts as a melting pot –a place to see and be seen. People from more conservative Tamil families who often feel like ‘tourists within their own town’ in many of ‘White Towns’ establishments can use the terrace to hang out together, while still experiencing what is seen as progressive lifestyles as the terrace caters to members from all parts of urban Pondicherry; the Franco- and Tamil Pondicherriens, the international tourists, the college students from Chennai or ‘road trippers’ from the north. While being able to interact, watch and engage with “jeans wearing, and smoking girls”, as one informant put it, one still feels free to wear traditional clothes and to share a coke. Thus, Ajantha and similar neutral spaces help tear down prejudice and stereotypes of the others.

Even though mainly peaceful in such spaces, due to the nature of resto-bars, certain happenings could break the coexisting atmosphere. One example of this happened while meeting Anne on a late Thursday evening. She had already been at the terrace for some time with her colleagues, and after a while, other friends of her had joined in. One Franco-Pondicherrien at the table who tried ordering a bottle of red wine which was currently out of stock, got quickly teased by one of the others; “Ah, so typical of you. You want to be French so bad, soon, you’ll not even be able to speak properly”, referring to his English accent. The teasing escalated from friendly to hurtful as others joined in. Though ending calmly, this exemplifies how the coexistence in the neutral space suddenly reaches a hard stop when certain insulting remarks or comments are made – essentially redrawing the line between “us and them”. As Anderson argues, these situational happenings challenge the cosmopolitanization of the neutral spaces, and as the lines is drawn between the ethnicities, issues that previously in that space mattered little now dominates the whole situation (Anderson, 2012, p. 154). This heavy emphasized connection between physical space, belonging

and interaction between Franco- and Tamil Pondicherriens is a main feature of contemporary Pondicherry. But considering the ever-changing city landscape, the connection between identity and space might be changing. As I will show, attitudes towards historical heritage sites and its maintenance, and how new development are being implemented are often seen as an extension of what creates the division between Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens. While the discussion on heritage preservation has been a large part of the public dialogue in many years, a recent occurrence has engaged the urban population in a contemporary debate on belonging and supporting the colonial heritage. I will use the debate surrounding the iconic “Mairie”, the French Town Hall, as a prism in explaining the different attitudes regarding urban space.

## 6 Creating a new Pondicherry

In the last days of November 2014, Pondicherry's *L'Hôtel de Ville de Pondichéry*, the "Mairie" crumbled to the ground due to heavy rains and lack of restoration. The 19th century town hall, or "Mairie", was situated facing Goubert Avenue, a white lime mortar building constructed as a symbol of French India. Previously serving as a centre of office, the "Mairie" had seen heavy negligence the last several years due to disagreements in public governance, and a dispute between the historic preservation society and the local government. A 7,5-crore rupee (1 crore equals 131 156.698 Euros) restoration budget was made available by the efforts of the World Bank, and in junction with the INTACH Pondicherry division, who had previously worked on preservation of historic buildings largely in White Town, the project came to a screaming halt as the *L'Hôtel de Ville de Pondichéry*, or Pondicherry's Town Halls roof caved in during a rainy night. The following days, the remaining structure was demolished as a security measure, while a heated debate on restoration followed in social media and the news. Some people even vented their conspiracy theories directed at the local government for actively removing the old building, being able to rebuild with new materials as "reinforced cement concrete" (RCC), as this was easier and cheaper. Although dormant in the Pondicherrien society, the collapse of the "Mairie" kick-started a heated debate on the topics of restoration, rebuilding, urban structure and architectural heritage. In the time between my departure from Pondicherry in December of 2014, to my arrival in the field of January 2016, the debate had turned sour. While some of the members of "The People for Pondicherry's Heritage" (PPH) felt that the time passed only had jeopardized the hope for a historical reconstruction of the building, the Government of Puducherry's Public Works Department (PWD), later publicly stated that the site would be rebuilt, although with RCC materials. Thus, three larger opinions surrounded the "Mairie", on the preservation side stood the interest groups, the Franco-Pondicherriens who felt historically connected to the 'White Town', and saw the rebuilding of the "Mairie" as a symbolic gesture towards retaining the identity of Pondicherry. Heavily pulling towards renewal and re-planning of the area were the city's members who felt the time was ready for modern commodities. Some discussed how the private sector also was on this side - they had seen in before happening in Pondicherry; private companies buying heavily deteriorated buildings, tearing them down, before building on these historic plots - introducing contemporary design, architecture and spaces for

recreation. So far, this had mostly happened outside of “White Town”, further east in the busy streets surrounding M.G. Road. The local government was often trapped in the middle - eager to preserve the “identity” of Pondicherry, while open for negotiation. What was dwelling underneath this particular discussion on plot rejuvenation, and how did this building help divide the populations opinion on Pondicherry’s future?



*Fig: 6«Hotel de Ville - The ‘Mairie’ seen the morning after the collapse caused by the winter rain. Photo by Author*

The polarized opinions, or triad of outcomes, saw a surge of society members expressing their support on either side. In my fieldwork, the different backgrounds often prompted different approaches and expressed opinions regarding restoration, rebuilding and future development of Pondicherry; at large it seemed that the Franco-Pondicherrien society supported a total preservation and rebuilding according to original materials and blueprints. It was an important symbol of what made ‘White Town’ unique, and construction without original materials or blueprints would only create a “fake historical building”. As a vast majority, the Tamil-Pondicherrien society would be difficult to generalize as a whole, but my informants mostly expressed larger confidence towards the public government, as well as expressing desire for more contemporary commodities, not heavily focused on materials or floor-plans. Some

informants also claimed the focus on “historical heritage” as elitist, and in the way of developing Pondicherry according to the growing population and economy.

To further clarify the debates regarding urban development in Pondicherry, I will point out key differences in approach towards restoration and future-proofing of the town. Though being a generalization, it will help in clearing up the debate on the different voices in rebuilding of the Mairie, as well as showing how the building itself, its plot and location and the key values of the different approaches all are closely connected to what divides the population in contemporary Pondicherry. While the historic and contemporary discussion on traits superimposed between the Franco- and Tamil Pondicherriens often rely on perception of “the other”, I will point out how the different views regarding the future of Pondicherry, albeit under different circumstances, also serves as a dividing factor of the same groups.

### **6.1.1 The motion for restructuring and rebuilding with modern commodities**

During my fieldwork, getting comments from the private sector on lot rejuvenation was difficult. No-one wanted to publicly state any plans on plot purchases in the central Pondicherry area. This might be linked with the public perception towards companies building on historic sites, often discussed in hindsight of the building process. The last decades had seen several structures once praised for its architectural background tumble to the ground due to mishandling - and soon after; glass, metal and concrete structures being built for housing banks, international chains or offices. Especially in the western parts of Pondicherry, brands like Kentucky Fried Chicken and Himalaya-store popped up in the popular shopping and main thoroughfare of M.G. Road. People connected to the eastern parts of Pondicherry, the ‘White Town’ area were concerned of being the same being happening there, slowly taking over the heritage town. The future of the “Mairie” site to be completely reworked, and rebuilt with none of the architectural features present in the heritage area is unlikely, but as both several of my Tamil-Pondicherrien informants, and resource groups as the Urban Design Collective (UDC), they hope to move the debate away from just “preservation” and “heritage history” towards “contemporary usage” and “future proofing”. The UDC facilitated a workshop in 2015, in which the discussion was heavily focused on finding the key features towards preservation of the “Mairie”, while still building with features and usage aimed for present needs. With a complete rebuilding of the “Mairie”

with modern techniques and RCC materials, the external features could be kept, while still providing modern internal design (Ramakrishnan, 2017). This aligns with the debate by Mary Bente Bringslid in *Bygdeutviklingas Paradoks* (2012). She points towards the development trend of rural areas in Norway, where the “commoditization” of the towns are used as a mean of creating economic growth, but sometimes end up destroying the “uniqueness” that the town itself tries to brand. By creating an “otherness” that attracts the external, Bringslid argues that an image, often “from the past” has to be created, and thus, contemporary progress has to be hidden. This could hurt the “native population” of the area, in which use the spaces for their everyday livelihood. (Bringslid, 2012, pp. 7-36). The same argument is seen in Pondicherry; by largely focusing on external impressions through tourism, or heavily focusing on the historical aspect of the heritage buildings, some members of the Pondicherry societies express the fear of losing the practical use of the area - and thus wants further development in according to everyday needs.

### **6.1.2 The society for preservation and heritage restoration**

With the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritages in front, several local interest groups have formed in Pondicherry under the mission of preserving heritage sites, buildings and historical architectural symbols. INTACH, a UNESCO special consultative status society, relies heavily on participation from members of the local chapter, and is amongst other supported through donations, crowdfunding and participation with public departments. The Pondicherry chapters was encouraged by a *Ecole Française d'Extreme Orient* (EFEO) workshop in 1988, and have since worked closely with the French society of Pondicherry, as well as the Pondicherry Planning Authority, Pondicherry Public Works Department and *Institute Française de Pondichéry*. IFP itself was established after the ‘Treaty of Cession of French Territories in India’ in 1955 for research in the study of Indian civilization and religion. Contemporary IFP boasts a large multidisciplinary library, and supports research in the fields of Indology, social sciences and ecology - making the IFP entries towards historical preservation of key value. Other interest groups, like the Pondicherry Citizens Action Network (PondyCAN) and People for Pondicherry Heritage have worked closely with the INTACH, EFEO and IFP actors in promoting further development of Pondicherry in accordance to the historical heritage of the town. Members of the interest groups have shared their concern in a centralized politic towards heritage preservation. While both the PondyCAN and the Chief Minister of Pondicherry

submitted a proposal to the Prime Minister of India in 2010 for funding of a comprehensive restoration in Pondicherry - the project was only partially funded, leaving its members in frustration.

Joining in on the debate of UDC's workshop on "future-proofing" the "Mairie", the PPH and INTACH first insisted on using original materials and that the building should be constructing according to the original floor-planning. This was favourable by many habitants of the Franco-Pondicherrien society, and amongst my informants seen as a key symbol on the process of keeping future work first and foremost focused on preservation. Several petitions, both online and through awareness campaigns, resulted in communication with the Government of Pondicherry (GOP), where the first response was positive. As stated through the Change.org online petition (Banarjee, 2015), PPH met with the Chief Minister and Lt. Governor of Pondicherry which ensured them the GOP was heavily vested in preserving the heritage sites. The idea of building a "fake heritage site", a plastic look-alike shell instead of something "as near original as possible" became a heated topic in the following meetings between INTACH, the GOP and the State Level Heritage Advisory Committee. Alas, as PPH stated, 9 out of the 14 attendees of the meeting was from the government, 2 professors and only 3 members of the society - resulting in a minority of the members in favour of using old blueprints and materials. PPH also showed concern in how the meeting was held without consensus, nor the minutes written (Banarjee, 2015). The "Mairie" is seen as a symbol for future heritage preservation - as well as an omen of what can go wrong when heritage sites are left in the hands of slow bureaucracy. The public interest groups, as well as INTACH are carefully aware of the state in which several other historic buildings are currently preserved in Pondicherry, and often feel that the "Mairie" will be a statement on how other buildings like it will be handled in the future.

### **6.1.3 The Government of Pondicherry, the Public Works Department and Pondicherry Planning Authority**

Official statements regarding the view on restoration versus restructuring and rebuilding from the governmental side of Pondicherry is somewhat lacking. The different departments, especially the Public Works Department and the Pondicherry Tourism Department are publicly supporting the preservation society, and often in collaboration through events like the annual "Heritage Festival", the weekly "Heritage Tourism Walk" and by offering several grants towards

preservation projects. The preservations act of the public authorities are often seen as lost between by the high-level bureaucracies' cross-department communication. Several of my Franco-Pondicherrien informants stated that they felt the government, though focused on heritage tourism, often missed an understanding in which heritage sites needed preservation - or in some cases claimed to work on projects that would be forever halted by internal affairs. By proxy, popular opinion was that the GOP was more focused on revenue, and would likely chose the economic alternative over historic correctness. By the end of the GOP and State Level Heritage Advisory Committee meeting, the government publicly stated their wish to rebuild the "Mairie" with RCC materials, with a new floor planning, even though they stated their support in historic preservation to the PPH. Though states through the frustration from some of my informants, it is difficult to base the public governments role in favour of any side without over generalization or relying on hear-say - but a main concern expressed by some of my Franco-Pondicherrien informants were aimed at the poor implementation of public awareness by the local government; several historical building owners did not know the status of their building - nor had information on preservation schemes or plans. By looking at the numbers published by INTACH's survey of owners of classified historic buildings, one might see a pattern between the preservation societies knowledge not reaching the building owners - and thus further creating tension between "those who are concerned about the state of preservation, and those who do not care", as stated by an informant.

## **6.2 The state of heritage buildings, and the public tug of war**

The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritages department in Pondicherry is a part of India's largest historical preservation group, INTACH, established to create understanding of historical and architectural heritage in the country's older cities. With chapters in over 140 areas of India, the organization has worked with the local government in order to better preserve local history. In Pondicherry, the INTACH chapter collaborated with the *Institute Française de Pondichéry* (IFP) and *Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient* (EFEO) on the earlier projects - while now mainly working with the PWD in maintaining and restoring the historical sites in the city (INTACH, 2017). INTACH's work, alongside the preservation of the Danish



Tranquebar fort, includes the “Historic City Signage System”, with restoration of the iconic blue city street signs, developing the Heritage fund to restore historic buildings - as well as the work with the «historic preservation survey» conducted in 2002, targeting Heritage-building owners (INTACH 2017). On street-level, INTACH’s proposed preservation also has ‘adaptive reuse’, where heritage buildings were repurposed for hotel use, restaurants, or museums. In some instances, this also includes additional re-structuring of the sites, in order to include contemporary commodities - which has been seen as an overstep by some of my Franco-Pondicherrien informants.

While working with INTACH, the Pondicherry Public Works Department has set in motion several preservation projects, as with the proposed restoration of the Goubert Avenue lighthouse, and the development of the tourism circuit, with a heavy emphasis on promoting the area as a calm, clean and historic tourist spot. The idea of Pondicherry as a tourist spot has quite divided opinions. While the public departments look towards Goa for economical inspiration, many business owners in ‘White Town’ feel anxious of brining tourist-problems into the small city. The tug of war between private owners and the government is often reflected in expressed opinions. Several years ago, INTACH and PWD joint ventures in restoring the colonial era seaside port, and repurposing it as a café under the Tourism Department. While the lime mortar finish of the white exterior was kept untainted for some time, the colourful banners and advertisements came back a little by little. Some of my informants expressed the irritation of what was seen as a symbolic act; the colonial heritage houses left in government care often saw deterioration quite fast - and they felt the “preservation” done by the public departments was done only to boost tourism and economic performance. The expressed opinions also come with the knowledge that the larger projects often need governmental interference to be funded, creating a catch-22.

Earlier work has seen several delays, as with the tardy work on the Goubert Avenue lighthouse, one of Pondicherry’s most important buildings. It’s 187-year-old exterior has fallen in decay, and INTACH’s latest report reveal several major damages to the interior wood-work, as well as exposed bricks through the run-down lime plaster. While both INTACH and the National Centre for Safety of Heritage Structures (NCSH) has proposed preservation since 2009 - the PWD proposed a restoration through Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), while the

central Puducherry government wants the current owner, the Department of Customs and Central Excise to hand it over to them. By the end of my fieldwork, several meetings on the topic of restoration of the “Mairie” had been held, without any proper agreement between the two sides.

Heritage preservation is seen as more rapid outside the public interference, especially in buildings not currently under public ownership. INTACH’s previous works with smaller historical sites have been in collaboration of heritage building owners, local interest groups and neighbourhood outreach - and heavily depend on public awareness and communication. All this might be for naught, as public reports from INTACH surveys that 78% of the colonial heritage building owners knows of no, or limited help in restoring and maintaining the structures - while at the same time citing the proudness of owning a colonial era structure, and stating the buildings and street as a major asset in creating Pondicherry’s unique personality. Over half of the surveys participants showed interest in restoring the heritage sites through ‘adaptive reuse’, where former private spaces now repurposed as public domains, like hotels or restaurants. While several of my «Franco-Pondicherrien» expressed a negative attitude towards the governmental interference in heritage preservation - often focusing on the result-less outcome in buildings currently owned by the government, a key expression often regarded the PWD’s lacklustre attitude towards importance of historical architecture and urban ambiance. This was often linked towards the attitude of seeing the opposing group as uninformed about the historic nature of the sites, and not understanding the symbolic value of «real, untainted historic architecture». 28% of the respondents of INTACH’s survey say the Government should be responsible for heritage preservation (INTACH, 2003).



Fig: 7 An example of a decaying heritage building. Photo by Author

### **6.3 Urban restoration through the eyes of the “Mairie”**

As previously mentioned, a large majority of heritage building owners were not aware of any public or semi-private interests groups able to help in preservation of the historical sights. Interestingly, 53% of the private heritage house-owners did not know the status of their building either. Through the field, many of my Franco-Pondicherrien informants were largely aware of this. While the larger previously public houses, as the “Mairie” were listed as heritage sites, and the public perception of a smaller sample of Tamil and French colonial buildings were seen as important for the city-scape, a common thought amongst my Franco-Pondicherrien informants were directed on how Tamil-Pondicherrien families often had little grasp on what was heritage, what was of historical importance, or how to care for such buildings. As my informant Adan pointed out in a discussion towards preservation and development; throughout his childhood he had been told the importance of the “French-town”, or how proud his family felt of living within the area. He felt as if the public awareness of the historical value was lost on the Tamil-Pondicherrien counterparts, as they had not been told the history of Pondicherry as he had. Public awareness of ‘historical value’ did prove to be stronger amongst the Franco-Pondicherrien society. Several of my Tamil informants did indeed feel connected and proud of what was seen almost as ‘the spirit of Pondicherry’, they felt connected to the architecture, the streets and the ambience. But mostly, they felt that the space could also easily be “modernized”. Some Tamil-Pondicherrien informants, who worked in a local architecture firm told me; the importance of buildings where people could live, or markets that was up to “modern standards” was just as important. This follows the public reports from INTACH rather closely, which states that even though 59% of the participants view the heritage sights as a commodity which will boost the tourism economy, 60% show little to no willingness to actively pursue preservation in their own time. And as the same report shows how the largest issue seen with owning a heritage building was maintenance, this points to one essence of the debate; one side wants the original, historic - not just a town filled with look-alikes for tourism. The streets are a part of their identity, and a part of individual heritage. On the other hand, some building owners themselves, several from the middle lower class, saw the everyday difficulties in maintenance and lack of commodities. They felt proud of the connection to the architectural heritage, but preservation was not the highest focus. This is in the lines of the data from my fieldwork, were the vast majority of my

informants expressed pride in affiliation with Pondicherry and the town's identity - though heavily polarized in what actually defines it.

During my time in the field, a common dialogue with my informants was regarding the “feeling of Pondicherry”, often triggered by a talk about what defines Pondicherry for them. It was always a great ice-breaker, or conversation piece while talking about architecture, city-scape or the everyday life of my informants. Several of my “Tamil-Pondicherrien” informants talked greatly about the Mahatma Gandhi statue on Goubert avenue. It was usually what popped up in their heads while describing the city - it was seen as an important hub; the grid-system of the streets mostly ended up by the seaside, and the “kulfi”-ice cream and soda stands nearby attracted them to spend time with their friends. They usually loved the physical streets, and the ambience of Pondicherry being less noisy than the neighbouring cities - at the same time as being progressive and liberal. Many also stated that they felt pride in belonging to a very “international” town, which drew a lot of influence from Europe in terms of food, design and “way of life”, thus stating Pondicherry to be quite “modern”. And although they often were proud of the street architecture, they seldom expressed any thoughts regarding the differences between what was of historic heritage value and what was created according to the same architectural guidelines “to look the part”.

On the flip side, my Franco-Pondicherrien informants mostly talked about the heritage culture and architecture. The feeling of belonging within the streets of Pondicherry was expressed as a major convenience of living there. The architecture was of high importance, and they often were quite keen on commenting on the differences in living or working in White-Town, opposed to the other urban areas. Many expressed outrage in how poorly the work in preservation was carried out, and felt anxious of a future where Pondicherry’s uniqueness was lost to the bulldozers, making “Pondicherry the same as every city in India”. One key interesting discussion, triggered by the “Mairie” was with a Tamil-Pondicherrien architect by the name Aaby, who had worked with several smaller projects in heritage preservation in Pondicherry. I was introduced to Aaby through a couple of architect students who stayed in Pondicherry during their internships under her. She felt the Franco-Pondicherrien obsession with historical preservation, propelled by INTACH and the interest groups was blinded by nostalgia, claiming

that the ‘white town’ they really wanted, was a plastic “Disneyland”, a tourist attraction lacking practical usage, only built as a wasteland for the rich few. She felt the lagging development hurt the people who actually needed the space - and that the focus should be in developing housing and office complexes. She proposed building streets that shared the same «look and feel», but looking towards the future - not «just developing according to a stubborn connection to what once was». Not unlike a common form of restoration seen in Spain, where the exterior structure is kept as a shell, while the whole interior was repurposed and rebuilt from grounds up. This had been done to some structures in ‘White Town’ in the recent years, causing irritation amongst some of my Franco-Pondicherrien informants. Going back to Bringslid’s discussion on commoditization of small towns, one argument is how creating development according to one historic factor might result in liquidation; as one realizes one’s own authentic distinctiveness to accommodate the external, the foundation for what actually makes the distinction unique and authentic might be destroyed (Bringslid, 2012, p. 31). Taking Pondicherry into account, one of the key features for both weekend and seasonal tourist economy, as well as economic cooperation with the French society is built upon the heritage structure. Removing its key features in order to increase development in accordance to the external, in example make physical room for a guest house inside a heritage house, also eliminates some of the areas authenticity and distinction.

The discussion on preservation versus modernization towards the public majority reflects, according to Joseph M. Cheer and Keir J. Reeves, a general contemporary debate and approach in post-colonial areas of former French and British ownership. They argue in *Colonial Heritage and Tourism: Ethnic Landscape Perspectives* (2015) that the revival of colonial architecture symbols of power redevelop the idea of a “comfort zone” for a vast minority of the population, creating “safe spaces” for hierarchy-creating differences between the ideas of the west, and the local population. By using the Grand Pacific Hotel in Fiji as an example, Joseph and Keir show how a building seen as the “hallmark of colonial rule” in Fiji, now through the rejuvenation process stand as a symbol by the local population of what is out of their reach. Preservation process based upon the tourist consumption of “colonial heritage nostalgia” now result in a risk of aggravating tentative sociocultural fragilities through reinforcing a distinct class between those who have access, and those who are not able to interact within the sociocultural “elite” (Cheer, 2015).

Going back to the debate in Pondicherry, this might reflect the differences in perception of historical preservation versus contemporary urban rejuvenation; the population of nostalgic, sociocultural or familiar heritage linked to “White Town” might also be its vastest advocate in preserving and rebuilding in according to historic context - albeit colonial. While Pondicherry pre-colonial era had limited urban development, and thus rendering the argument of pre-colonial and colonial differences invalid, this also reflects the wish of further development according to the need of the majority, with a focus on housing and public projects with contemporary commodities on top of the wish-list for my Tamil-Pondicherrien informants. This also explains the anxiousness of building a “Disneyland”, as Aaby called it, plastic area for the wealthy few - it is inaccessible to the majority population. An example of this is the case of a colonial villa rebuilt to a contemporary bank; my Franco-Pondicherrien informants were furious of the destruction of a colonial building - while the feedback from my Tamil-Pondicherrien informants were rather positive; the new branch was “modern”. Going back to the rebuilding of the “Mairie”, this also reflects the opposing views on how and if it should be rebuilt; the lime mortar method, and building from the original blueprints would preserve the heritage nature of the building, but will at the same time be limiting to the future users of the building; the local government. In some ways, the discussion on building materials and blueprints is also a discussion on building repurposing. The same could be said for the proposed rejuvenation of the old lighthouse; the department of customs, which house the building now, would also probably find their offices repurposed into the private sector.

As we have seen in this discussion, though sometimes superficially focused on building materials and floor planning – the underlining debate of colonial heritage preservation, future urban development, and interaction with public governance are heavily linked to a feeling of belonging. It is seen for some as an extension of ethnic roots, and a distrust in a changing Pondicherry. Though arguably for the elite few, maintaining and restoring heritage sites becomes a hot topic, engaging the population connected to “White Town”, as this is seen as a physical representation of their history. On the other hand, a large part of the urban population stresses the need for functionality, and modernization in order to keep up with the changing society. This can be seen in the historic context of identity in Pondicherry. How historical and contemporary definitions of identity in Pondicherry interact with expectations for future development might help us understand how Pondicherry is maintained as a divided city.

## 7 Concluding Remarks

This thesis has presented the historic and contemporary context of the divided city Pondicherry. I have worked with historic texts, travel letters and descriptions in order to create a backdrop of Pondicherry's landscape, in order to understand the contemporary urban spaces of a divided population. Through the chapter of historical introduction, we have seen how the context of cross-colonial tension, and the idealization of a French India divided the population into categories of Franco and Tamil Pondicherrien. Although created through urban zoning of occupational and religious groups, this thesis presents how the French built upon Dutch plans for urban development, in order to create a "White Town" for its colonial population. Due to economic constraint after long periods of conflict with British and Dutch powers in South India, the monumental grandeur of "White Town" never reached its heights of early French colonial architecture, and thus a more symbolic value of "White Town" was pursued in order to maintain the external image of French India. This also resulted in a heavily bias of material investment, in favour of colonial areas. Due to the French administrations lack of involvement with the Tamil population, Ville Noir saw a rise of nationalistic groups wanting to merge the union territory of Pondicherry with India. Native Indians in the late colonial era suffered from exclusion from the French Civil Code. As we have seen, the late colonial era saw a polarization of the population with tense encounters between the supporters of the French colonial rule and the nationalist groups. Further amalgamation of the population occurred after the Union Territory merged with the Republic of India. Though the Nationality Act opened up for retaining and transfer between French and Indian nationalities, the process prolonged the civic unrest between the population heavily divided in belonging to the French or Tamil societies and prior urban spaces of Franco or Tamil Pondicherriens. This demonstrates how a divided population is maintained through a historical context of *belonging* to either groups of identity.

This thesis has presented a contemporary description of urban Pondicherry. The geographical overview of Pondicherry explains how the earlier divisions between "White Town" and "Tamil Town" are maintained through both architectural differences and in terms of urban development. This serves as a physical distinction between the spaces of Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens. I



have explored the urban spaces in Pondicherry, and introduced the architectural and societal differences through observation. This thesis has also presented the distinctions in historical preservation between the maintained neighbourhoods surrounding ‘White Town’, the Sri Aurobindo society and eastern parts of Pondicherry in contrast to the commercial surge of development in central western Pondicherry. Combined with the economic differences, Tamil heritage structures has not seen the same state of preservation as central ‘White Town’, thus losing a larger part of its architectural uniqueness. The descriptions of contemporary Pondicherry guide this thesis to the discussion towards Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens relation with urban space – and how my informants regard each other. Continuing the discussion of belonging, I have presented how my Tamil Pondicherrien informants regard ‘White Town’, and its population as different than themselves.

The discussion of childhood, socialization and current use of urban space presented by my informants have shown us how my Tamil Pondicherrien informants not only regarded the Franco Pondicherriens as physically distanced, as the urban space of ‘White Town’ was not heavily regarded as equally accessible as the rest of the city, but also superimposed the certain ethnic stereotypes upon them. Differences in educational background and regarded lifestyles helped maintain a distance between the population. Presented by my Franco Pondicherrien informants, this stereotyping of the ‘others’ went both ways, though often represented through a juxtaposition of how Tamil Pondicherriens lacked historic perception of urban Pondicherry. The discussion regarding “Frenchness” or “real Tamil” has shown us how the ethnic groups of Franco or Tamil Pondicherrien, and belonging to these are not static. Ancestry plays a minor part in the contemporary society of Pondicherry, as the lines are heavily blurred between what is externally seen as Franco or Tamil Pondicherrien. Belonging, in the sense of personal distinction creates certain expectations to other members of the group, many which often are fleeting. How my informants sometimes regard other members of their own group as “not French or Tamil” enough helps us understand how members of these groups often hold several groups of identity, which then are ‘stressed’ by the social context which the member is present. This distinction between Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens are not economic, nor linguistic alone, but heavily rely on individual sense of belonging to geographic areas, and a sense of pride in history. As physical space represents identity in such a grave way, several ‘neutral territories’ are then found

in the urban landscape. I have presented the cosmopolitan canopy of Goubert Avenue, and the case of “Ajantha Rooftop” as the tribune to this, showing how a divided city can interact between groups of identity. As people go ‘people watching’ and engage with other members, letting its participants engage between “us and them”. This communication between space and identity is also present in the debates of further urban development in Pondicherry. Discussions regarding preservation of heritage sites, and focus on economic growth is extended by the division between Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens.

This is further presented in the debate of the “Mairie”. The debate of ‘plot rejuvenation’ or colonial historic preservation became the centre of debate regarding further development of Pondicherry. The discussion regarding “Mairie” further propelled a series of ethnic stereotypes of Franco and Tamil Pondicherriens – as the society for preservation and restoration feared a loss of architectural heritage. The minority ‘White Town’ population saw the “Mairie” as a symbol of urban decay which might destroy the unique architecture of Pondicherry. Other parts of the population wanted to opt for progressive restructuring and rebuilding in order to keep up with the rise in population and demand for contemporary functionality. Though the debate focused on materials and architectural differences, the symbolic values of the contrasting sides can be seen as a prolonged part of belonging. As I have shown, my Franco Pondicherrien informants heavily regarded ‘White Town’ and colonial heritage as a physical symbol of their place in urban Pondicherry. This reminds us of the statement by Adan; the Tamil Pondicherrien population does not understand the importance of history in the urban landscape.

I have shown that a historically segregated city structure and language has created a divided population which now is maintained through self-defined belonging to groups of identity. This also creates certain ethnic stereotypes and expectations towards defining the roles within these groups. This also helps us understand how a segregated population has different anticipations towards further development of the urban space. Through this thesis, I have developed a material and spatial perspective on divided cities, in contrast to what is commonly seen in a statistical representation of developmental differences according to city districts. This might serve as a different approach to better understand divided cities in India.





## 8 Footnotes

- 1: Bavildar; An actor of commerce, often maintaining revenue accounts and acting as communication between the area's ruler and traders.
- 2: Pagodas: A coin made of gold, minted by the Indian dynasties.
- 3: 'Godowns': Referring to warehouses, often used in Asia, especially India.
- 4: Kammalars: Artisans of the five castes.
- 5: Dubash: From the Hindi/Urdu word "du bhasha"; two languages – but also used by the French Company (Malangin, 2015, p. 44).
- 6: Thinnai: Entrance-porch with seating area, seen as public domain.
- 7: INTACH Heritage Categories. Cat. 1 – 3, Grading historical importance of heritage buildings.
- 8: Kuppam: Suburbanized rural area, often in smaller villages surrounding the town.
- 9: Thali, or Thali Meal: A common lunch meal served on a platter by the same name, with six different flavoured sides on one plate, served with rice in the middle.

## 9 References

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