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National Places, Cosmopolitan Spaces: Tamil Diaspora in Paris, France

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NATIONAL PLACES, COSMOPOLITAN SPACES: TAMIL DIASPORA IN PARIS,
FRANCE

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how transnational, national, and local-urban identities are performativity enacted by members of the Tamil diaspora within the urban space of Paris, France. More broadly, the dissertation deals with tensions between cosmopolitanism and nationalism(s) in contemporary urban spaces irrevocably shaped by large-scale transnational migration. Through ethnographic analysis of Parisian Tamil economic activity, cultural and religious festivals, language instruction, arts, and more, the dissertation examines the diverse ways in which Tamil identity is produced and expressed in Paris, with a particular emphasis on how ethnic identity is inscribed in the urban space of La Chapelle, Paris's Tamil business district. It situates Parisian enactments of Tamil identity within the larger context of Tamil politics rooted in India and Sri Lanka, and spanning a globalized Tamil diaspora. I argue that the politics of Tamil identity-making must be analyzed on several simultaneous levels: 1) in terms of local urban space and the connections it engenders (or forestalls), 2) in terms of nationalist and transnational Tamil political movements, and 3) as not only influenced by, but also influencing, ongoing debates about French national identity. The project of framing a collective Tamil identity in Paris takes place in a context in which French national discourse explicitly rejects a multicultural social model in favor of assimilation. At the same time, this poses a mismatch with on-the-ground realities of a contemporary Paris shaped by international migration and which has, in both official city planning and Parisian daily activity, ambivalently embraced the presence of multiple cultural traditions by claiming cosmopolitanism as a moral value. I also identify how a Tamil-inflected cosmopolitanism emerges in an effort to unify diverse, and sometimes divided, Tamil communities, as well as to enact full belonging in the French national community without ceding a sense of Tamil identity.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE—Paris, The Reluctant Cosmopolis.....	1
CHAPTER TWO—Mapping Tamil Paris: Locating Tamil-ness in La Chapelle.....	29
CHAPTER THREE—Longing and Belonging in La Chapelle: Urban Identity in Paris’s Little Jaffna.....	63
CHAPTER FOUR—Ritual Without Religion, Culture Without Ethnicity: Tamil Public Festivals in Paris.....	100
CHAPTER FIVE—“Our Language Must Remain”: Tamil Mother Tongue and Mobility in Paris.....	153
CHAPTER SIX—Can Paris be Tamil? Tamil Diasporic Cultural Production in Paris.....	224
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	267

CHAPTER ONE—Paris, The Reluctant Cosmopolis

“
...
Can anyone teach me
how to make a homeland?
Heartfelt thanks if you can...”

Lament for Syria, by Amineh Abou Kerech

“France doesn’t recognize communities, but treats us as such”
“*La France ne reconnaît pas les communautés mais nous traite comme telles*”

Entourage, by Youssouphou

“
...
Why this doubt?
I am one who comes from the north
Says my memory

You come from the south
Says my host in this cold region

Where do I come from
What direction am I headed?
...”

...
ஏன் இந்த சந்தேகம்?
வடக்கிருந்து புறப்பட்டவன் நான்
என் நினைவு சொல்கிறது.

தெற்கிருந்து வருகிறாய் நீ
குளிர் வலையத்தில்
எதிர்கொள்பவர் சொல்கின்றனர்.

எங்கிருந்து வந்தேன்
எத் திசையில் செல்கிறேன்?
...

Directions, by Ki Pi Aravinthan

“Is It Not France?”

In the fall of 2018, as I was nearing the end of drafting this manuscript, a political flyer arrived in my mailbox in the 18th arrondissement of Paris from Pierre-Yves Bournazel, the elected member of France’s National Assembly from my district, and a member of France’s mainstream conservative party, who was improbably elected to represent a diverse and traditionally Socialist-voting district following the spectacular collapse of France’s Socialist Party in 2016. Glancing at the flyer, which began, “An open letter to the [French] State and to the City of Paris: the Urgent Need for a General Mobilization for the North-East of Paris,” I quickly noticed that it presented a rather neat summation of many of the themes explored in this dissertation, namely the sense of La Chapelle, the Tamil business district at the center of this dissertation, and the greater area of North-East Paris in which it is located—positioned within the letter as a pathological urban space—as needing to be brought into line with a uniform Parisian urban model ostensibly based on the French national value of equality.

In Paris, certain neighborhoods have suffered, over many years, from a veritable rupture of equality in relation to the rest of the capital...At La Chapelle, Pajol Street, Philippe de Girard Street, Marx [sic] Dormoy street, at Château-Rouge, at the Goutte-d’Or, at Porte de Montmartre, at Porte des Poissonniers, at Porte d’Aubervilliers, at Porte de La Chapelle, at Porte de Saint-Ouen, at Porte de Clignancourt, at Barbès, at Stalingrad, at Gare du Nord, the residents (and business owners) have the feeling of being abandoned by the public powers. The traffic in counterfeits, the street-hawking, the smuggling, the pimping, the drugs, the gang fights, the illegal occupation of public space, the littering and the dirtiness of the streets...[ellipses in original] all these very different problems are concentrated in the northeast of our capital, with a kind of resignation...Would such dysfunctions be imaginable elsewhere in our capital?

The letter traces both the geographic parameters of my fieldwork in the Tamil business district of La Chapelle, as well as the paths of my own personal peregrinations throughout North-East Paris, where I first moved to begin my doctoral fieldwork in 2014,

and have lived over the past four years since: Max Dormoy Street, as well as Pajol Street, and Philippe de Girard Street, lie within the neighborhood of La Chapelle, which is adjacent to (indeed, contiguous with) Gare du Nord, and together form an urban conglomeration in which Tamil cultural, religious, economic, and educational activities are most concentrated within Paris—and arguably within all of Europe. The urban identity of this place is caught at a crossroads between a symbol of cultural decay—of an urban space over which the government has either lost or willingly abdicated control—and a symbol of cultural renewal, of the successful implantation of a (for the most part fairly recent) diasporic community in Paris, and even as an example of Paris’s cosmopolitan cultural richness.

Bournazel’s open letter is indicative of a wider discursive model which expresses the negative side of this ambivalence: it reveals the way that certain stigmas adhere to the urban space itself, and presents these “dysfunctions” as a rupture from normative expectations of Parisian urbanism. This departure is in turn framed as an abdication of the state’s egalitarian social compact, which, Bournazel’s letter implies, should be expressed through urban homogeneity within the capital. On the positive side, La Chapelle is bestowed with the proud superlative of The Biggest Tamil Neighborhood in Europe, and the affectionate appellations of Little India or Little Jaffna. Attitudes about La Chapelle’s distinctiveness—which was, throughout my two years of ethnographic fieldwork, described by different individuals and in different contexts as both enriching and alienating—often contained both sides of this ambivalence.

Attitudes about urban space also adhere to the users and inhabitants of that space. In the case of La Chapelle, both the space and its users are ethnically marked as Tamil,

creating a link between a particular ethnic minority community and an urban neighborhood which is variously stigmatized and valorized—or sometimes both at once, as in the following anecdote about a Tamil restaurant in La Chapelle. This interaction took place on an online group I followed during my fieldwork, the primary membership of which was young students and professionals from India (many, though by no means all, of whom were Tamil). Many of the group’s members used this online forum as a way to look for advice on navigating administrative, professional, and personal obstacles to life in Paris (from getting signed up for the national health care plan, to applying for jobs, to finding an apartment to rent, for example). One woman often answered such queries. A white French woman who lived near Paris, and had married into an Indian family, she was both interested in and knowledgeable about Indian cultural practices, and overall positioned herself as a friendly giver of advice, straddling both Indian and French cultural spheres. She posted a story of a negative experience she had at an “Indian”¹ restaurant in the La Chapelle/Gard du Nord area to which she had gone with a French friend and where the server had apparently not spoken French, and had had to be asked to bring utensils to the table. Eating with one’s right hand, rather than cutlery, is very common throughout South Asia, and many restaurants in La Chapelle have incorporated the ubiquitous “hand wash stations” of South Asian eateries into their dining rooms so that diners can wash their hands before and after eating. However, for this online poster,

¹ There is an overlap in the usage of the term “Indian” for restaurants operated by both Sri Lankan Tamils and Indians—who are themselves overwhelming Tamil—in this area, a point described further in the third chapter. The use of the term Indian in her post therefore doesn’t necessarily indicate the actual nationality of its owners, or necessarily the kinds of foods served (which varies among restaurants in this area from Sri Lankan cuisine to dishes common to both South India and Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, to—though less commonly—North Indian food).

the waiter should have anticipated their need for utensils, and his inability to understand the request in French created, as the post stated, a “bad impression” of the Tamil community of which he was a member. Here, a single restaurant within a neighborhood identified by its Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil character became an embarrassment for the entire ethnic community it came to index. What I wish to highlight in presenting this anecdote is not only the common predicament of racialized subjects being held responsible not only or simply for themselves but for negative judgments on an entire community they supposedly represent, or the respectability politics that forms in the face of such pressures (the poster’s status as somewhat of outside-insider, or inside-outsider, to the French Indian community could position her critique as either of these), but especially the way in which the link between ethnic community and urban space is formed in the interaction in the restaurant, and in its narration in this online space. The complaint went (paraphrased): I took my friend here to show her (our) Indian culture, and she got a bad impression of it due to the server’s inability to speak French and follow the norms of French dining etiquette. The implication: an improperly assimilated Tamil community. A young Indian professional responded to her post that such an experience was to be expected in the La Chapelle/Gard du Nord area, to which the original poster replied, “Why should we treat Gard du Nord differently, is it not France?”

Bournazel’s letter seeks to bring the urban spaces of La Chapelle (and Northeast Paris more broadly) into line with a normative model of the capital in which the districts of Paris will achieve a uniformity of character. While the poster who wrote about her negative restaurant experience initially used the incident as an opportunity to chastise Paris’s South Asian community for failure to adequately assimilate, ultimately this came

back to a spatialized link to ethnic identity in the rhetorical question about the neighborhood of La Chapelle, “Is it not France?” Together, the two stories reveal the way in which stigmatization of urban space is linked to stigmatization of its users and inhabitants, and the sense that distinctiveness—whether of urban space or its users—has its limits. Indeed, the rhetorical question, “Is it not France?” of course leads to further, anthropological questions, what does it mean to be French today? How can spaces that are geographically part of France come to be imagined as socially, culturally, or economically, outside it? Such anxieties about spaces that are improperly French, or have been lost to the French government are a common form of political complaint in France. And such spatialized anxieties are very closely tied to the identities of the inhabitants and users of those spaces.

This dissertation presents a prolonged ethnographic study of Tamil residents of Ile-de-France, with a particular emphasis on the use of space in the northeastern Paris neighborhood of La Chapelle. It argues that Tamil residents are engaged in cosmopolitan projects of self-making and place-making in Paris which assert their membership in Parisian and French communities while affirming membership in a Tamil community which is defined not only in relation to homeland territories, but simultaneously, as part of a transnational global diaspora. Though firmly positioned within the context of France—responding to the ongoing themes of French national identity, immigration, and assimilation, which continue to shape French public and political discourse—the dissertation foregrounds the performative² processes of Tamil cultural, political, and

² I insist on the performative aspect of such activities in order to emphasize that diasporic Tamil cultural production is not simply a *reproduction*, which might be viewed as more or less faithful, of an originary Tamil identity (which would be positioned as both spatially and temporally

economic activities not only within the local context of Paris, or the national context of France, but as part of a globalized Tamil community.

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in particular has been of central interest to scholars of nation and diaspora, even taken as a paradigmatic example of long-distance nationalism (see Hobsbawm 1990), given the documented support the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, a guerilla military force which fought for a separate Tamil ethnic homeland state in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka from the mid-1980s until their defeat in 2009) from diasporic populations (Fuglerud 1999; McDowell 1996; Wayland 2004; Amarasingam 2015). While ongoing debates over Tamil nationalism are still relevant, now almost a decade after the definitive defeat of an LTTE-led Eelam, in this dissertation I have aimed to document some new perspectives, in which Tamil diasporic political activities are not situated as exclusively “long-distance,” that is, oriented towards an absent homeland, but also reveal entanglements with diasporic settings. Such perspectives are relevant not only to the specific contexts of French and Tamil studies, but also contribute to greater anthropological understanding of our contemporary spaces shaped by both the co-presence of people from around the world in a single location, and the co-connectedness of people in locations around the world. The case of Tamil diaspora in and around Paris gives an ethnographic look at the lived realities of “global cities” beyond elite actors (Sassen 1991), and makes the case for a non-elite cosmopolitan discourse.

distant), but is rather—in all sites of Tamil cultural activity (thus global in scope) continuously produced through “the differentiating relations by which speaking subjects come into being” (Butler 1993, 7). See Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion of performativity.

Ethnic Cities and Ethnic Cités

In this section, I explore models of the ethnic city and the ethnic cité. By illustrating the way in which traditional models of Parisian urbanism privilege uniformity of territory—and population—in opposition to the so-called “ethnic city”, I critique the extent to which depictions of ethnic and racial minorities in France remain linked with the spaces of the cité (socioeconomically marginalized suburban municipalities), and absent from the space of the capital city. The ethnography of La Chapelle, a neighborhood in Paris which has come to index a (Tamil) minority identity, reveals how traditional models of homogeneous Parisian urbanism fall short of capturing the city as it actually is: an urban space shaped by significant international migration, and, while rife with symbolic monuments to the French nation, not merely a national capital, but an international one.

In January of 2015 the French prime minister at the time, Manuel Valls decried a “territorial, social, and ethnic apartheid” in France (Le Monde 2015). The use of the word “apartheid” and the added emphasis of the adjective “ethnic” reveals the extent to which forms of spatialized marginalization intersect with ethnic and racialized identities within France, and creates a binary between supposedly ethnically unmarked urban space, and the ethnically marked (sub)urban peripheries, particularly those with high proportions of public housing organized in large-scale housing blocks called “cités.” Valls’s statement was unusually blunt in its explicit reference to the ethnicization of these sub-urban spaces, as Mustafa Dikeç has shown, French urban policy, in its adherence to French republicanism’s rejection of the notion of ethnic communities as social polities, operates within the idiom of *space*, rather than ethnic community (Dikeç 2007). Yet the

result is that the stigmatization of ethnically-marked communities is reciprocally coupled with stigmatized (sub)urban spaces. Indeed, urban space and identity (and opportunity) are intimately linked, with different districts within Paris, and different suburban towns and cities ringing it popularly indexing raced and classed identities for their inhabitants. A major study in 2013 showed discrimination in hiring based on the addresses given by applicants, particularly from certain banlieues—euphemistically termed “difficult,” “hot,” or “zone” (the last of these is a slang term linked to the official designation “zone d’éducation prioritaire,” or ZEP, indicating a priority educational area, that is, an area in which student outcomes are consistently below the national average) (Le Parisien 2014). In line with the findings of this study, and others like it, social scientists have shown how racial and ethnic identity in France structures urban experiences (Silverstein 2004), including the disproportionate police harassment of minority youth (Fassin 2013). Yet overwhelming, where racial and ethnic identity is discussed in relation to French urbanism, it is in regards to the banlieues (Rinaudo 2000). This reproduces a racialized split between the banlieues/cités and “Paris intra muros,” that is, Paris within what were historically its fortifying walls, and today, lies within the boundary line of the ring-shaped network of highways which encircles Paris and creates a geographic, administrative, and highly symbolic boundary between Paris, and the cities which surround it. While it is important to recognize the intersecting forms of marginalization faced by residents of the cités, depictions of Paris which exclusively push its diversity outside of the city limits risk ignoring the experiences (and the contributions) of

racialized inhabitants and city-users³ in Paris itself. It does so by creating a vision of Paris as an ethnically unmarked space.

In Paul Rabinow's study of modern French urbanism, what he terms "techno-cosmopolitanism," a limited incorporation of differences (in history, terrain, or, in the colonial context, local forms of architecture and urbanism) within a synthesizing urban form, later gives way to a total, homogenizing urbanism, in which there is simply no room for difference (Rabinow 1989). Rabinow's analysis of Parisian urbanism traces the ways in which French modernism took shape not only in the metropole, but in the urban centers of France's colonies. As such, his history of totalizing urbanism begins with prior forms of plurality which are progressively quashed out, and ends with an urban model which *produces* urban spaces which are understood to be ethnically-unmarked (i.e. Republican).

On the other hand, in Richard Sennett's classic comparative study of the rise and fall of public life in Paris and London (first published in 1977), he presents Paris as, from its very beginnings, the antithesis of the so-called "ethnic city." In service of his main argument that the encounter with the stranger is at the heart of urban sociability, Sennett argues that essential to this encounter is a sense of *uncertainty* about the stranger, that is, ambiguity concerning the stranger's social status, and one's own in relation to them (Sennett 2003). And yet for Sennett there are in fact two kinds of strangers:

A city is a milieu in which strangers are likely to meet. However, "the stranger" can be a figure of two very different sorts. Italians may regard Chinese who move into their neighborhood as strangers, but they know how to think about these

³ I use the term "city-users" to refer to those who do not reside in Paris but are significantly invested the urban space of Paris through their frequent presence in the city. As I argue in Chapter Two, this form of investment should challenge us to think beyond residency alone as the basis of memberships in urban spaces.

intruders; by skin color, the eyes, language, food habits, an Italian can recognize and place a Chinese as unlike himself. In this case, the stranger is synonymous with the outsider, and appears in a landscape where people have enough sense of their own identities to form rules of who belongs and who does not. There is another sense of stranger in which these rules do not apply: the stranger as an unknown, rather than an alien (Sennett 2003, 48).

These two forms of strangers, are, in turn, likely to be encountered in two different urban forms:

The city as a collection of strangers of the first sort is best typed by the ethnic city, like modern New York outside Manhattan, or Cape Town, race or language providing distinctions. A city of the second sort, in which strangers are unknown quantities, arises when a new, as yet amorphous social class is forming...Such was the case with Paris and London in the 18th Century. (ibid)

Through this dichotomy of strangers and cities, Sennett's model not only excludes "ethnic" city-dwellers from the history of Paris, but also creates a vision of public life in which the ethnic stranger is automatically ineligible to participate because of their very *legibility* in racialized and/or ethnicized terms. While the presence of ethnically-marked residents of Paris today is incontrovertible, too often, Sennett's model of Paris as an ethnically-unmarked (which is to say, a non-immigrant, non-minority *French* ethnically-marked) city persists.

Yet La Chapelle as a Tamil area does not exist as an isolated exception to Parisian urbanism, nor is it an isolated territory unto itself within Paris. Rather, it forms part a multiethnic counter-geography of Paris, in which Château-Rouge is known for its West African presence, Goutte d'Or for its Arab influence, Belleville as having a high density of Chinese businesses and restaurants (this itself a shift from its formerly Vietnamese character), and Place d'Italie as a center of Vietnamese commerce and culture in Paris. Yet La Chapelle, and the other neighborhoods mentioned are far from ethnically homogenous in their business profiles, even if each respective ethnic identification is

made obvious through the concentration of visible signifiers of ethnic identity in the urban space (like bilingual—or even mono-lingual non-French in some cases-- storefronts), and still less are they homogenous in their residential demographics, as in the classic formulation of Chinatowns, “Little Italies” and so on. La Chapelle, in particular, has become too expensive for most members of Paris’s Tamil diaspora to live in, and these individuals and families are instead, for the most part, residing in suburban cities surrounding Paris (though also in public housing within Paris, which is concentrated in the adjacent neighborhoods of the northeast of the capital) and making use of the dense network of public transportation infrastructure leading to La Chapelle in order to seek out and sustain the neighborhood’s Tamil character.

Yet the substantial Tamil investment in La Chapelle—sufficient to inscribe Tamil ethnic identity within this urban space at once reveals the inadequacy of classical models of normative French urbanism in which there is no (longer) space for cosmopolitanism. While from the logic of assimilationist Republicanism, specifically Tamil space within Paris is inherently problematic, such identifications are positive for members of the Tamil diaspora, who take pride in their community’s investment in this urban space, and are also positively evaluated as offering enjoyable and novel experiences to non-Tamil residents of and tourists to Paris. In such positive evaluations, non-majority ethnic identity inscription in urban space is not pathologized as a departure from the desired state of national(ist) homogeneity (indexing the purported failure of minority communities to “assimilate,” or properly integrate), but rather as an indicator of the distinctively urban attribute of cosmopolitanism (something which minority communities actively contribute to).

Away from Assimilation, Towards Cosmopolitanism

French national discourse explicitly rejects a multicultural social model in favor of assimilation. Yet this poses a mismatch with on-the-ground realities of a contemporary Paris shaped by international migration and which has, in both official city planning and Parisian daily activity, ambivalently embraced the presence of multiple cultural traditions by claiming cosmopolitanism as a moral value. Through more than two years of ethnographic research in Paris, I explored how members of the Tamil diaspora from both Sri Lanka and India represent themselves as cosmopolitan stakeholders in a cosmopolitan Parisian landscape. In so doing, they defy the normative model of assimilation, and instead, claim full membership in both Parisian local/urban territories and the French national community, without ceding a distinctive Tamil identity sustained through transnational Tamil ties.

This dissertation seeks to put forward an analytic model which escapes the predominant framing of assimilation, to take a direct translation of the French term, or integration--which I argue is not a fundamentally different concept, but rather a linguistic shift in line with capitalist-oriented models of multiculturalism in which surface-level “difference” is celebrated so long as it does not challenge fundamental norms and structures of “host” societies. Multiculturalism is often presented as a counter-model to assimilationism which allows for greater continuation of cultural practices in the context of migration. From a homogenizing standpoint, this is viewed as threat to the indivisibility of the state and its national body, from a standpoint privileging heterogeneity, multiculturalism is a decolonizing practice in which non-European cultural traditions can enter into the space of public legitimacy. This later point, entry into the

space of public legitimacy, is one with which many of the Tamil individuals and community organizations with whom I spoke were very much concerned. Yet critics of multiculturalism from the left have contended that such representational strategies have failed to go beyond the level of representational inclusion in order to fundamentally alter power relations (Ahmed 2012). In France, I would argue, multiculturalist strategies have not yet obtained a sufficient degree of representational inclusion to be subject to the same kind of critique of the cooption of such (surface-level) representation. In fact, I avoid the language of multiculturalism since discourses of multiculturalism (be they critical or supportive of its goals) presume the existence of identifiable and persistent culturally defined communities; in France, the very concept of the (non-French) cultural community is treated with skepticism. I use the term cosmopolitanism to refer to the co-presence of people, things, and practices from all over the world existing in proximity to each other within a shared urban space without signaling their embeddedness in the liberal value system that is implied by multiculturalism.

Displays of Tamil identity in public space, indeed the very investment of a Tamil identity within urban space, take place in a context of general suspicion towards these kinds of cultural displays, as indicative of “communitarianism” (*communautarisme*). This term is intimately tied to the notion of assimilation, and according to it, where minority and/or migrant communities are unequally positioned in relation to the majority, is because of their tendency to “keep to themselves,” that is, their failure to assimilate comes from within. I argue that the discourse of assimilation abdicates formal or structural responsibilities for the marginalization experienced by minority communities by portraying them as fundamentally “unassimilatable”—that is, communitarian—rather

than exploring what structural or social factors impede full political, educational, economic, and cultural participation of minority communities: factors which range from housing and hiring discrimination, police profiling, unequal educational resources (all of which have been well-documented in France) to, as Rokhaya Diallo has described, the underlying belief that France is a white Catholic country (Diallo 2017). I argue that it is a fundamental error to mistake personal orientations (like one's willingness to assimilate) as an antidote to structural impediments, it is thus important to reject the common problematic of many studies of immigrant/minority/diaspora communities in Western contexts, which take as either implicit or explicit framing the question of how "integrated" (if not assimilated, outside of the French context) such subjects are.

Instead, I take seriously transnational Tamil cultural and political projects while contesting the notion that the continuation of such projects within a diasporic setting indicates a lack of implication or investment in local and national Paris and French politics. I do this by documenting how such Tamil political projects are also, and quite explicitly in many cases, interpellating French communities and the French state. In so doing, I explore the interface between local-urban, national and transnational communities, not as scalar terms but as co-constructed and contemporaneously present within urban space and the interactions and activities that take place within it.

This is in contrast to dominant political anxieties about French minority communities—particularly French-born youth of immigrant parents—as rejecting the state. Instead, Tamil individuals I spoke with by and large expressed their desire to succeed within French society, and to interact with local and national communities, though in many cases these goals were generationally deferred, as parents were willing to

endure hardship and lack of social status in the hopes of establishing better lives for their children. Yet for the majority of those I spoke to, their vision for success within French society challenged the assumption that uniformity is a desirable social goal by using cosmopolitanism as a legitimizing frame for publically enacting Tamil culture, and inscribing ethnic identity in urban space. Critically, such efforts at enacting Tamil identity are themselves performative, and seek to unify diverse, quite often divided, Tamil communities within Paris. Furthermore, the goal of reproduction of Tamil cultural practices in diaspora is strengthened by the sense that Tamil culture in its traditional “homelands” is under threat. Importantly though, homeland-oriented or transnational political engagement along ethnic, linguistic, or (homeland) national identities does not necessarily entail disengagement from local contexts of resettlement. Claiming cosmopolitanism is not only about reproducing cultural practices, but also about rooting them in local urban contexts in La Chapelle, and claiming an identity as stakeholders in a cosmopolitan urban space. That is, to use Lefebvre’s influential formulation, to claim rights to the city (Lefebvre 2009).

While I have thus far contrasted cosmopolitanism with nationalist assimilation, I must be careful here to express that I am not putting forth the two terms as opposing sides of a binary division which would mirror the divisions between monolithic “French” and “Tamil” communities. Instead, in rejecting the analytic framing of assimilationism I am arguing that heterogeneous urban space is not a departure from an originary, homogenous capital city or nation, but rather that the presence of diverse cultures and peoples is itself characteristic of Paris, and global cities of its standing more generally (Sassen 1991). That is, the actual empirical existence of a homogenous urban space formed through

assimilation breaks down in the face of ethnographic examination of a persistently cosmopolitan Paris. Andrew Newman's recent ethnography of "urban green politics and neighborhood activism" in Northeast Paris gives an ethnographic account of what he calls "actually existing republicanism," in opposition to the normative sense of French republicanism as necessarily assimilationist:

...a quiet but significant cultural pluralism is alive and well in northeast Paris. In the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, in which northeast Paris itself is frequently cast as a menace to the Republic, it is important to emphasize that the multiethnic politics that thrives in these neighborhoods is neither sectarian nor an imported version of American or British multiculturalism... (Newman 2015, 195)

Newman's work draws attention to the mismatch between normative models of Paris and the lived realities of the inhabitants of the capital's ethnically diverse, working class neighborhoods (recall that La Chapelle, too, is located in northeastern Paris). Prompted by Elizabeth Povinelli's call for anthropology to explore "the noncorrespondence between what is claimed and what is" in our societies, this dissertation explores the disjuncture between normative and actually-existing modes of urban life in Paris through the lens of the Tamil diaspora (Povinelli 2011, 191). Yet while Newman focuses on "actually existing republicanism," I focus on the cosmopolitan elements of cultural pluralism within the city in a move to emphasize the way in which urban space is simultaneously constructed through local activities, national policies, and transnational connections of many kinds. As such, I focused my ethnographic lens beyond the level of "la République" to consider not only the French nation as the defining context of such "cultural plurality," but also to ethnographically examine the transnational connections of the Tamil diaspora in Paris.

At the same time, one of the central ambitions of this dissertation is to make clear that the very notion of a single “Tamil” community in Paris is not a given, but rather the product of contentious and multiple political, cultural, religious, and economic activities, which at time converge into a single Tamil identity, and at times diverge around points of national origin (Indian or Sri Lankan), political orientation (pro- or anti-LTTE being the most salient distinction, though there are indeed others), religion, caste, gender, and age (to form a non-exhaustive list). Such convergences and divergences are themselves dynamic and situational, rather than static. And while I do posit assimilationism as a dominant national ideology, I also wish to make very clear that cosmopolitanism is *also* a value claimed as part of the French national tradition (Derrida 2001). Indeed, normative understandings of the term anchor it within a European intellectual (and moral) genealogy to the extent that a further theoretical intervention of this dissertation is to argue against understanding cosmopolitanism as an exclusively “Western” value (a move which follows Anthony Kwame Appiah’s use of the term, as well as much anthropological scholarship on cosmopolitanism [Appiah 2006]). Tamil invocations of cosmopolitanism are not simply derivative versions of a Western meta-concept⁴, but rather function as the grounds for mutual co-construction of Franco-Tamil communities and their surrounding urban spaces and neighbors, particularly surrounding Tamil public celebrations within La Chapelle and elsewhere in and around Paris. While the notion of

⁴ Using South Asian intellectual histories to contest the idea of South Asia (and postcolonial nations more broadly) as following belatedly in the evolutionary footsteps of the West follows Chatterjee, in regards to nationalism, and Ramaswamy, in regards to specifically linguistic nationalism (Chatterjee 1986; Ramaswamy 1997). Yet it need not entail a refusal to acknowledge the interplay between world regions in the *mutual* construction of the history of thought, and the history of the world, for that matter, as long as it is acknowledged that the flow of ideas was not simply downstream from the West to the Rest.

civilizational incommensurability which undergirds what Mbembe and Balibar have described as “neo racism” (which, I would argue, does not replace but rather accrues to older forms of racism) in Europe, posits that there is a fundamental mismatch with the values of the (legitimate) citizenry of the global North and the (illegitimate) migrant from the global South (Balibar 1991; Mbembe 2013). Instead, Tamil communities trace their own histories of cosmopolitanism, rooted in Tamil intellectual histories, rather than (at least exclusively) European ones.

Yet, though I argue that cosmopolitanism does not belong exclusively to a single location, in a time of mounting ethno-nationalism, it is fair to wonder whether the term properly belongs to another era, a point I explore more at length in the final chapter of this dissertation. In particular, we might ask whether cosmopolitanism is an outmoded theoretical model better suited to a more optimistic political era when walls were meant to be demolished rather than erected. Yet I would argue that it would be a mistake to accept the totalizing nature of nationalist ideologies as an ethnographic reality, when in fact they are merely an ideological ambition. That is, we must not let the political fusion of *ethnos* and *topos* in the contemporary moment undo the important work of several generations of anthropologists in uncoupling these terms. Cosmopolitanism has its limitations as an analytic frame, in part because it has trouble shaking off a certain elitist genealogy and, perhaps relatedly, because in actual fact cosmopolitan encounters often reproduce hierarchical distinctions between those who labor and those who leisure, and those who are exoticized and those who are deemed to be simply, normatively *human*. This is the case because, in many ways, cosmopolitanism is expressed through consumption, in the widest sense of the term: the consumption of cultural products

(including the literal consumption of food), and the many ways in which capitalist consumerism has structured our cities and societies. Purchasing Tamil goods becomes a way to enact a Tamil (self) identity, as well as a way for non-Tamils to encounter Tamilness within Paris through shopping and tourism. These consumer activities structure the urban space to the extent that the neighborhood itself becomes a kind of consumer good, with Tamilness as its brand. Yet in spite of these limitations (which I discuss throughout the dissertation and return to in the conclusion) the language of cosmopolitanism has one major advantage, it emerges not only from theoretical texts of diaspora and the city, but from my ethnography itself: it was the language used by Parisians to describe their everyday settings and interactions within the city.

Biographies and Trajectories

In this section, I will briefly give an outline of this dissertation's beginning, that is, a condensed biography of how I came to the project. I entered this project from a background interest, at once scholarly and personal, in both Tamil and French spaces, and aim throughout this dissertation to make clear that ways in which this project relates to both these area studies, as well as to theoretical debates around urbanism, nationalism, transnationalism, and identity. My own biography shaped these interests. I am a dual French and American citizen, raised in the US, with my own transnational familial ties to France from my maternal family, and, later, new family attachments to France as my own as my two children were born in Paris in 2015 and 2017. This project is based on two years of intensive fieldwork conducted between 2014-2016, though the end date remains unfixed, as my own life became, year by year, rooted more deeply in Paris.

The beginning of the multi-year engagement of conceiving of, researching, and then writing a dissertation is not a single movement in which the stopwatch of intellectual engagement is pressed and things begin ticking. But in the process of offering a brief biographical sketch, the following episodes seem to me, at least from where I sit now, to have been formative. My introduction to Tamil spaces began in my junior year of college, when at the age of 19, I took my first trip to India for a semester abroad in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. I was thrilled to return the year after graduating college for an academic year (2006-2007) as a program facilitator for two more semesters of American college students studying abroad in Madurai. As I began contemplating graduate school in anthropology, I was strongly animated by a desire to engage again and more fully in Tamil cultural spaces. At the same time, the pull towards France has always been strong for me. Despite not being raised speaking French, I managed to stubbornly attain fluency in my “mother tongue,” and pursued another semester abroad in Paris as an undergraduate—following a fall in Madurai with a spring semester in Paris (though, it being winter, in fact, when I arrived in Paris, made the contrast between the two spaces all the more clear). It was stumbling upon a Tamil neighborhood in Paris—quite unexpectedly, and quite by accident—that planted the seeds of this project.

A side project on the political messages of British Tamil musician and artist M.I.A. (Maya Arulpragasam), while enrolled in the masters in anthropology program at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa (before beginning my PhD at Princeton), brought questions of Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora to the forefront for me, and the historical moment of the beginning of my graduate studies in anthropology in 2009 coincided with the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War in a cataclysmic final assault by Government Forces in

which massive numbers of (mainly Tamil) civilians were caught in the crossfire, and diasporic Tamil communities worldwide took to the streets in protest.

I knew that I wanted to come to this project, from the beginning, with a strong background in Tamil language and as full an understanding as I could get of Tamil life worlds in pre-migratory spaces, following Abdelmalak Sayad's contention that studies of immigration should regard both aspects of the emigration/immigration dyad since understanding the places from which migrants originate, as well as the connections that they maintain with those spaces, is critical to understanding the migrant within the context of resettlement (Sayad 1977 and 1999). To this end, I returned with great pleasure to Madurai in the summer of 2012, and again in the academic year 2013-2014 to pursue intensive Tamil language training. Following each of those stays, I visited Sri Lanka for two month-long visits (limited by the 30 day restriction of my visas), spending the most time in Batticaloa and Jaffna. Finally, I began my fieldwork in Paris in August 2014. Someday, I imagine, I will leave Paris again, but I can only offer my past here, not my future trajectory. Instead, I'll turn to what macro-scale trajectories made this project comprehensible to begin with. That is, a look at both the demographics and migration trajectories that have created a Tamil Paris.

The internal diversity of the Tamil diaspora in France, concentrated in the Ile-de-France region that includes Paris and the cities that encircle it, is worth returning to at some greater length here. For if I referenced it in relation to a to a duality of Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil "communities," it's important to note that such differentiations are based not only on national origin, but extend to the kinds of migrational journeys associated with those origins: Indian postcolonial immigration and Sri Lankan refugee

resettlement. Though immigration (presumed to be voluntary) and international refugee resettlement (presumed to be involuntary) are in many respects socially and legally distinctive migratory patterns, increasingly the two have fused in discussions of national membership, border policies, and national identity in France and internationally (Fassin 2011). Postcolonial (Indian) Tamil immigration to France stems from both so-called “repatriation” of former colonial subjects who either already had French citizenship, or opted to claim it at the time of independence, within the former French “comptoirs”—France’s enclaved colonial territories in India: Pondichérry (now Puducheri), Chandernagor (now Chandannagar), Karikal, Yanaon and Mahé—as well as continued immigration from those areas, often facilitated through family ties, and through educational exchange enabled by a continuing Francophone school system in Puducheri. Sri Lankan Tamil migration to France, on the other hand, is a result of a relatively high rate of acceptance of (overwhelmingly Tamil) Sri Lankan refugees as compared to acceptance rates in other potential destinations for asylum in the 80s and 90s. As a result, Paris’s Little Jaffna is said to be the largest Tamil neighborhood in continental Europe (Radio Télévision Suisse, 2015).

The result of these dual streams of Tamil migration to France is a Tamil diaspora diverse in its geographic and national origins and with diverse positioning in relation to the French state⁵. The presence of Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil diasporas in a given area

⁵ The overseas territories and departments of France are also sites of Tamil diaspora, with migration histories dating back to colonial era labor migration. These diasporic French Tamils are also present in the metropole, but in much smaller numbers than Indian or Sri Lankan Tamils. Though I encountered some French Tamils from French overseas territory during my fieldwork, these communities and their unique histories do not form a significant focus of my work. These communities have a different identity than Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils in Paris due to many

is not unique to France (and in particular the Paris region in which the majority of Tamils in France reside). For example, Sonia Neela Das studied the way in which Sri Lankan and Indian Tamil communities in Montreal privileged forms of Tamil language heritage transmission indexed as classical and spoken, respectively, which mirrored broader political and social differences between them (Das 2016). But the co-presence of Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils is a particularly distinctive feature of the Parisian Tamil diaspora (“diaspora” as a noun which I ambivalently maintain in its singular form) in which Sri Lankan Tamils, estimated to number at least 100,000 are demographically superior and more visibly embedded in urban spaces of La Chapelle and the surrounding Gare du Nord area, and Parisian suburbs like Sarcelles, La Courneuve, and Bobigny—areas Sri Lankan Tamil author Shobasakthi jokingly referred to as “Tamil villages” when we met in Paris in August 2014 (a short rain ride away from his home in once such “village”). At the same time, the 50,000⁶ or so Tamils with roots in Pondicherry have a longer historical relationship with France, and it is this Tamil space which, through France’s small-scale but tenacious colonial occupation of India, first brought Tamil language, culture, and of course, people, into the metropole. But these national distinctions should not be treated too neatly—for one, because to do so threatens to create an artificial homogeneity according to national origin, when, in spite of shared places of origin, diasporic subjects can and do adopt a variety of positions in regards to self-identification, and relationships with homeland and current location, and also because there are competing notions of

factors such as the time-frame of their migration, lack of Tamil-linguistic-based identity, and lack of geographic concentration in La Chapelle.

⁶ I take this figure from Dassaranayadou (2007).

what we might call a pan-Tamil identity in which shared Tamil heritage (at least discursively) transcends other differences.

Much historical and ethnographic scholarship has critically examined the particular historical and material circumstances influencing the production of Tamil identity within Sri Lanka, before, after and during the decades of civil war (Cheran 2007; Daniel 1996; Jeganathan and Ismail 1995; Kapferer 2012; Pffafenberger and Manogaran 1994; McGilvrey 2008; Spencer 1990; Tambiah 1986; Thiranagama 2011; Trawick 2007; Winslow and Woost 2004). While in India, “Tamil” ethnic identity is dominantly conceived of through the fact of speaking Tamil as a mother tongue (Ramaswamy 1997), in Sri Lanka and its diaspora it is cross-cut by divisions of religion, and colonial migration such that there is no single “Tamil” identity for all Tamil-speaking groups, but rather several separately defined groups speak Tamil including Muslims, and Upcountry Tamils (the descendants of Indian Tamil tea plantation laborers), who have been excluded from the construction of the Sri Lankan nationalist “Tamil” subject (Jegathesan 2019; Thiranagama 2011). In the Paris diaspora, these distinctions, as well as distinctions of national origin, at once persist, and are erased within an umbrella category of “Tamil”—or, in French, “Tamoul”—that incorporates both Indian Tamils and Francophone Tamil diaspora populations from French overseas departments and territories as well as Sri Lankan Tamils. As a result, French citizens from the ex-colonial spaces of India, and recent refugees from Sri Lanka, in spite of divergent historical and contemporary identities, are occupying the same category as “Tamoul” in the wider French public space, as well as the same urban space of La Chapelle.

This dissertation will not present a singular “voice” of consensus emerging from the Tamil community. For years that voice belonged to pro-LTTE organizations in Paris (though the degree to which it ever actually represented a consensus is highly debatable, with a few notable exceptions, it certainly successfully stifled alternative voices from the public sphere). This is still a clear and present voice within La Chapelle, but I was interested in exploring what other voices have emerged in the context of post-2009 diaspora, as well as in this diverse Tamil setting, which includes Indian Tamils with different stances towards Tamil nationalist politics. What I hope to have captured is something like a constellation of diverse enactments of Tamil identity, one can perhaps join each point into a single picture, but the process takes some imagination, and the final image may appear different to different viewers, depending on where you are positioned as you look up at it.

In the following chapters, I show that while immigrants and low-income residents of the Paris region are pushed to suburban peripheries through urban planning models which explicitly discourage the creation recognizably “ethnic” urban space and the ongoing gentrification of Paris, Tamil communities are resisting this spatialized marginalization through investment in a neighborhood of Northeast Paris called La Chapelle. Chapter two identifies strategies of everyday mobility that make use of the city’s well-developed public transit infrastructure enable Tamil investment in La Chapelle, thus facilitating the formation of a Tamil “home” space, albeit at a remove from the location of most Tamil homes in the Paris region. In contrast, two urban planning initiatives taking place in La Chapelle at the time of my fieldwork map La Chapelle as closed off, rather than connected, and privilege residents—rather than Tamil

commuters—as “rightful” inhabitants of La Chapelle. In the third chapter, through ethnography of Tamil food in Paris—in both restaurants and grocery stores, I identify how appeals to “cosmopolitanism” function as both an ambivalent counter-narrative to anti-immigrant sentiment in France and as a strategy of self-representation from some members of the Tamil community, who, importantly, identify cosmopolitanism not as an exclusively Western value, but rather as emerging from specifically Tamil cultural heritage. Next, in chapter four, I analyze several public celebrations of both Hindu and secular Tamil holidays, demonstrating how French anti-multiculturalist secularism (*laïcité*) structures these events, ultimately stigmatizing Tamil appeals to secularism which foreground Tamil ethnic unity in an attempt to performatively enact a unified, cosmopolitan Tamil community. In chapter five, I examine efforts by Tamil parents to both promote their children’s French fluency and transmit the Tamil language inter-generationally as a strategy for reconciling both French and Tamil linguistic nationalism. While dominant French linguistic nationalism which stigmatizes non-fluent speakers of French as improperly assimilated immigrants, I argue that the ideology of Tamil linguistic nationalism which began in the 19th century, has undergone further development in the diaspora, leading diasporic Tamils to see political developments in Tamil linguistic “homelands” themselves—and not simply the fact of migration—as a threat to their mother tongue, and thus to position themselves as guardians of their linguistic heritage. Chapter six positions Paris as a site of Tamil cultural production, challenging territorial notions of “authenticity” which place diaspora at a perpetual remove, as well as underscoring the inherently transnational nature of contemporary urban spaces. Finally, the concluding chapter considers the limitations and potential of

cosmopolitanism as a theoretical lens for anthropology and in contemporary political interventions.

CHAPTER TWO—Mapping Tamil Paris: Locating Tamil-ness in La Chapelle

The metro station was located on the bridge that went over La Chappelle [sic]. As I glanced outside in annoyance, I could see the heads of Tamils moving along like the crowds at the Nallur⁷ temple festival. The Tamil shopping bazaar is spread out over two kilometres around the La Chappelle metro station. Mangai Groceries, Saravanabhavan Restaurant, Maama Fishstall, Padaiyappa Hair Salon, Mohan Jewellers, Parasakthi Cinema Hall, Semparuthi Florists, Vijay Cool Drinks Bar, Velum Mayilum Store, Arivaalayam Bookstore, Asin Beauty Parlour, Guruji Astrology Centre, Tamilaruvi and Kalaiaruvi—the market street was bustling. In front of a video store, there was a poster stuck of Prabhakaran⁸, with a flower in his hand. There were young men seated on the concrete road-blocks. In one of my earlier stories about La Chappelle, I had written, ‘If a first-time visitor to Paris is landed here straight off, he would think that the agency fellow had cheated him and instead brought him over and abandoned him in Vanni or Mannar⁹.’ (Shobasakthi, “Friday,” from *The MGR Murder Trial*, translation from Tamil by Anushiya Ramaswamy, 2015)

This chapter seeks to map out the urban space of La Chapelle, considering mapping in both in the literal cartographic sense, and in the conceptual sense. Urban planning initiatives make use of cartographic maps as technology for both representing the territory as it is, and conceptual maps for reimagining it as they (or as they imagine their constituents or clients) would like it to be. The cartography of La Chapelle is also highly influenced by the density of transportation infrastructure in the area, and indeed the schematic maps of Paris’s public transportation network are perhaps the most widespread maps of the city as a whole. A map of La Chapelle is produced through the density of Tamil businesses and cultural organizations which bisects the district-

⁷ A major Hindu temple in Jaffna, an area which famously claims the title of the Tamil cultural capital of Sri Lanka.

⁸ Images of Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, who was killed in 2009 when Government of Sri Lanka Forces defeated the LTTE, are frequently on display in La Chapelle, even today.

⁹ Vanni and Mannar are Tamil-majority cities in northern Sri Lanka, both are between 100-150 km from Jaffna town.

boundaries of administrative cartography, creating a conceptual map of Tamil space which is itself then cartographically formalized through the ritual procession of the Ganesh Festival in La Chapelle (see Chapter Four). In highlighting the dual constructions of the map as both the cartographic and conceptual, both formally produced by city planners and informally produced by city-users, I wish to highlight that urban space is not simply a static setting for ethnographic observation, but rather a cultural product itself, constantly being worked and reworked by those who do not simply interact within, but interact *with*, the space of the city itself. In the case of La Chapelle, Tamil communities have mobilized to produce a Tamil neighborhood in a political and economic context which is largely hostile to such efforts. Focusing in particular on two urban planning initiatives which were implemented by the city during my fieldwork, I show that in urban planning narratives (non-Tamil) local residents of La Chapelle are posited as the primary stakeholders, with moneyed tourists and business travelers as secondary stakeholders, and Tamil city-users largely excluded. Yet ethnographic examination of the urban use of La Chapelle shows that Tamils, despite oftentimes living in less expensive suburban spaces, or in less expensive neighborhoods within other areas of the 18th arrondissement of Paris, have substantially invested in the urban territory of La Chapelle.

In light of the famous question posed by Henri Lefebvre--who has a right to the city?—I consider, who constitutes the *rightful* subject in regards to La Chapelle (LeFebvre 2009). I introduce the term “rightful” here with the double valence of both *rights-bearing* and as *morally deserving*. I argue that this should lead us to think beyond rights to the city as exclusively residential rights, and to consider more seriously the role

of mobility in contemporary urban settings, and by extension, of migrant city-users as *rightful subjects* of urban spaces. This chapter positions La Chapelle within Parisian urbanism and argues that through a focus on mobility rather than static administrative boundaries, the Tamil investment of the space becomes clear. By illustrating the extent to which urban planning initiatives in Paris are actively opposed to the formation of specifically “ethnic” neighborhoods, I highlight the agency of the Tamil community in investing in this urban space.

Through ethnographic examination of La Chapelle, specifically, I also suggest a broader intervention into scholarship of “ethnic neighborhoods” (that is, urban spaces where non-majority ethnic identity is signified in identifiable ways). Rather than simply assuming that homogenous cultural communities inevitably or automatically assemble in urban space¹⁰, an ethnographic approach encourages us to examine the particular context in which such neighborhoods arise and are maintained. This will, of course, vary depending on the cultural, economic, and political climate of the location, the histories of migration of individuals and communities, and any number of other factors. In Paris, urban planning seeks to dilute distinctively (minority) ethnic identification in urban space, even while a counter-discourse of cosmopolitanism (explored at greater length in the following chapter) encourages it. The success of creating an identifiably Tamil neighborhood is therefore a hard-won success of Tamil efforts to create a Little Jaffna¹¹ in Paris, an effort which is animated both by desire to create local Tamil community

¹⁰ Recall from the previous chapter Sennett’s portrayal of the city” in which ethnicity is treated as an “automatic mode” of social distinction (Sennett 2003, 59-60)

¹¹ Besides its widely used nickname of Little Jaffna, La Chapelle is also, to a lesser extent, a Little India, with both Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils sharing the same urban space, a point explored throughout the following chapters.

within the diasporic location of Paris, and by continuing transnational links between global “Little Jaffnas” worldwide. Claiming Tamil urban space is also a strategy for asserting a Tamil community as rightful subjects in cosmopolitan Paris, without acquiescing to the pressure for assimilation (and thus, invisibility in urban space)—a point explored more at length in chapter four on Tamil public celebrations. Tamils subversively make use of the urban infrastructure of public transportation, which is designed essentially to provide labor to the capital, by investing more than their silent labor power, but rather their own forms of urban expression. Yet it should be noted that these activities do not form a Tamil foil to a homogenous French model either—even if, as I argue in this chapter, normative French urban planning models do retain the homogenizing impulses of earlier urban planning regimes under Haussmann (Harvey 2003), and in the modern period (Rabinow 1989). For discourses of cosmopolitanism are employed even within the frame of urban planning, as well as by non-Tamil Parisians more widely. I argue that to understand how members of the Tamil diaspora are claiming rights to the city in Paris, we must map La Chapelle through several simultaneous and interconnected frames: in relation to French urban planning, in relation of other sites of the global Tamil diaspora, and within the local urban space of La Chapelle, where the complexity of Tamil identity itself becomes apparent.

This chapter positions La Chapelle’s emergence as a distinctively Tamil urban space within historical and contemporary urban planning models of Paris. This is explored through ethnographic analyses of two urban planning meetings that aimed to reshape and redefine the identity of La Chapelle. I seek to make clear the underlying visions for urban space animating these two initiatives within both the contemporary

political and economic context of Northeast Paris—rapidly gentrifying and disproportionately a destination for recent migrants to Paris—and within the historical context of the treatment of difference in Parisian urban planning (that is, bluntly, a desire for the sublimation of visible difference). I argue that understanding Tamil strategies of investment in La Chapelle necessitates going beyond the cartographically-drawn boundaries of La Chapelle to include mobility as a way to claim rights to the city-under-gentrification. Mobility resists French urban planning's privileging of property-owners as "rightful" subjects through a subversive repurposing of transportation infrastructure (itself, of course, a product of urban planning) which was designed to invite immigrant laborers into the heart of the city while relegating immigrant communities to the city's peripheries.

This chapter explores La Chapelle's status as a distinctively Tamil space in Paris, and in turn considers the broader question of the production of spaces of ethnic identification in contemporary cities, seeking to link the concept of the production of ethnic urban space with an understanding of ethnic identity itself as performatively produced, a point which will be explored more at length in the following chapters which focus in more detail on the various kinds of Tamil investment in French urban space, and performative enactments of Tamil identity in France. In this chapter, my discussion of the production of Tamil-identified urban space is informed by Lefebvre's concept of the production of space as composed of a "conceptual triad," the three elements of which "contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period" (Lefebvre 1991, 46). The first of the three terms is spatial practice,

"which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation" and thus "ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion" (ibid); the second is the representation of space which is "conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers," in which "dominant" political and economic ideologies are expressed (Lefebvre 1991, 38); and the third is representational space which is "directly *lived*...and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" that "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (Lefebvre 1991, 39). Within each of these three triadic elements of urban space: spatial practice, representation of space, and representational space, I argue that we should consider how the production of space in diasporic contexts is structured through national models of urban planning, and through Tamil models of community formation.

Arriving in La Chapelle

Most people arrive in La Chapelle by means of one or two metro stations. The first, from which the neighborhood takes its name, is on the 2 line, which, for the most part, cuts horizontally across the Right Bank (everything north of the Seine river) of Paris running from east to west and west to east. Much of this metro line is an "aerian"—above ground—line, which runs along an elegant metal raised track built between 1900 and 1903. From the west the trains rise up from the subterranean station of Anvers, and make one stop on the raised platform of Barbes-Rochechouart before arriving at La Chapelle. A journey from the east is proceeded by a longer stretch of above-ground tracks, during which the train passes picturesquely over a northern offshoot of the Seine at Jaures; as it winds into the next station, Stalingrad, the Sacré Coeur cathedral, sitting

high atop the Butte de Montmartre—the most famous landmark of the 18th arrondissement (district) of Paris—comes into view; one station later, you arrive at La Chapelle. The La Chapelle station presently has only one open exit, a set of metal turnstiles that deposits you onto a narrow sidewalk under the raised tracks of the metro. Straight ahead is a bridge which passes the wide expanse of train tracks leading into Paris's international train station, the nearby Gare du Nord. To the left of you, on the other side of the street, a park with plants, benches, and a children's playground. After serving for a few months in early 2015 as an informal refugee settlement, the park was evacuated by the city of Paris, and for the remainder of my fieldwork through 2016, remained empty, locked, and under police surveillance. Adjoining the park is a stone-paved pavilion. Crossing this pavilion, you can walk a short distance up the street on rue Pajol to access one major landmark of La Chapelle, the Sri Manicka Vinayagar Temple, as it is formally named, or, as its overhanging fabric awning—so typical of Parisian shops—reads, “Temple de Ganesh” (there are no other external markers that it is a place of worship—except for a shoe rack that is kept at the entry during the hours in which it is open). Heading north from here you will encounter a few Tamil restaurants, shops, and organizations, but to get to the heart of the Tamil commercial neighborhood, you must exit La Chapelle in the other direction, turning right. Here you will see immediately across the street from the metro exit the grocery store Gopal and Co., overflowing onto the streetcorner in front of it with bins of fresh produce. The streets just south of the La Chapelle metro are shaped like a box with an x inside it; here you find the highest concentration of Tamil businesses, restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, translation offices, many phone services, stores with Tamil and French language newspapers and magazines,

flower shops advertising jasmine garlands, and more. These streets are bordered to the East by a second set of train tracks, those which run into another major railroad station, the Gare de l'Est.

When exiting La Chapelle and turning left (toward the south), you will walk along the Faubourg St. Denis, one of the “grands boulevards” of Paris—those broad, iconic thoroughfares typical of Haussmann’s mid-19th century reforms. This street is the most well-known, and the largest, in the Tamil district, and holds a high concentration of Tamil businesses, particularly clothing and jewelry stores, but also grocery stores, a fish market, beauty salons, and restaurants, including three Paris-based eateries of Tamil Nadu, India-based international food chains.

The Faubourg St-Denis is also easily accessed via an exit on the Eastern side of the massive Gare du Nord, where on most days, you will find at least one person distributing Tamil-medium flyers to those exiting commuters who they judge likely to understand them. Indeed, though it is most often identified as La Chapelle, this Tamil district is also quite commonly referred to as the Gare du Nord neighborhood, or La Chapelle-Gare du Nord. It contains multiple transportation networks in various ranges of distance. The closest range is served by subway lines 4 and 5. Line 4 runs vertically through central Paris, all the way up and down to the northern and southern limits of the city, and connects with the major transit hub of Châtelet in central Paris. It receives heavy traffic, and the trains run frequently, and late into the night. Line 5 is also primarily North South, but it lies further east, and, in the northern portion of its line, connects Paris with the north-eastern suburb of Bobigny, itself a city characterized by its considerable Tamil population, at its terminus.

The Gare du Nord is also a hub for the regional RER trains. These complement the metro system, and connect Paris with a wider ring of suburban cities in the Ile-de-France region. Connecting to a still further network in the outer Ile-de-France are the regional trains which arrive and leave from Gare du Nord. Finally, there are long-distance trains to other cities in France, and international trains to Belgium, and London. The neighborhood, therefore, finds itself in a nexus of connections that facilitate the movement of people into and out of this space, from elsewhere in Paris, to the suburban cities that ring it, to other major cities in France and throughout Europe. This hub-like quality was a condition for the establishment of a Tamil neighborhood in this space, and it continues to sustain it today.

As Julie Kleinman has noted in her ethnography of Gare du Nord, “The salient context for the station is thus not the spatially fixed ‘Paris intra-muros’, but rather a networked ‘grand Paris’ that is temporal, mobile, and defined by space-making social processes.” (Kleinman 2012, 569). Through ethnography of young African men who socialize in the Gare du Nord, Kleinman argues that, “Mobility...enables ‘peripheral’ suburban sociality to arrive and disrupt ‘central’ Parisian spaces,” ultimately forcing one “to reconsider the seemingly self-evident distinction between periphery and center, a distinction reinforced by the design of the Parisian transportation network” (ibid). As Kleinman notes, periphery/center distinctions are maintained through the infrastructural divisions of public transportation (i.e. metro versus RER, with their differing tariffs and frequency of service), yet the mobility enabled through that very infrastructure brings center and periphery into contact. For the young African men Kleinman writes of, Gare

du Nord “becomes an African hub: not an enclave of ‘Little Africa’ but rather a node of communication and exchange” (Kleinman 2014).

While the case of Tamil use of La Chapelle highlights some of the same uses of the public transit infrastructure, ultimately the Tamil investment in the space is of a different nature to that described by Kleinman. Not restricted to the space of Gare du Nord alone, but making use of the station to enable a significant territorialized investment in the urban space of La Chapelle. La Chapelle has become a destination to Tamils throughout ‘grand Paris,’ but also to non-Tamils looking for a glimpse—and quite often a taste—of South Asia in Paris. While suburban towns with relatively high concentrations of Tamil residents often offer some stores with South Asian products, nowhere else contains the concentration of Tamil-oriented businesses found in La Chapelle. Similarly, though only two of the dozen or so Hindu temples in the Ile-de-France region are located in La Chapelle, La Chapelle houses the first of these temples, and the one with the largest public celebrations (see Chapter 4) and therefore continues to fulfill a central role in the religious practices of many Hindu Tamils in and around Paris. In this way going to La Chapelle marks both a connection with countries of origin (namely Sri Lanka, but also India), and also provides a density of Tamil commerce which fosters a unique space of Tamil sociality in Paris. While La Chapelle is not a majority-Tamil area in residency, established patterns of commerce, religion, and sociality have given the area an unmistakable and unparalleled (in France, and, it is said, in all of continental Europe) Tamil presence. This lends it therefore a sense of homeliness—defined in the South Asian manner as a home-like—to this area, even if it is found at the end of a commute from one’s actual home. The dynamics of homeliness and the unhomely are explored

further in the following chapter. Here, I argue that to properly understand La Chapelle as the location of Tamilness in Paris, the basis of membership in urban communities must be expanded beyond the notion of a single anchoring location of residence—particularly one which is normatively associated with home ownership—and instead considers all forms of investment (of time, emotion, labor, and sociality) within urban space.

The distinction Michel de Certeau draws between space and place is a useful point in understanding how, although urban planning fails, for the most part, to define Tamils as rightful subjects of La Chapelle, their investment in the urban space has defined its identity. According to de Certeau, while place "implies an indication of stability," in which everything is in its right place, space on the other hand suggests mobility, "intersections," an "ensemble of movements deployed within it," a "polyvalent unity" always in the making and always up for remaking (de Certeau 1984, 117). Of the relationship between the two terms, de Certeau writes: "In short, *space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers" (ibid). If urban planning constructs a map of the neighborhood as a tool for administrative control, creative expression, and even utopian dreaming, de Certeau reminds us that city dwellers—the walkers—create their own maps of the city as well. Walkers, through the constantly proliferating and transforming networks traced by their steps, ultimately reveal the illusory nature of the of an undifferentiated, synchronic, holistic "'city' founded by utopian and urbanistic discourse" (de Certeau 1984, 94). I would extend this beyond the physical act of walking, to include the voyages facilitated by public transportation. Since public-transportation facilitated mobility is essential to conceptually mapping La Chapelle as Tamil space within the cosmopolitan capital. Still,

this is not a binary between Tamil city-users' and French urban planners' visions of the urban space, since there is also, in the latter, a discourse of cosmopolitanism in which Tamil presence is valued—though ultimately, also subject to containment. Instead, analyzing the maps of Tamil Paris produced in these two urban planning meetings highlights the extent to which the same cartographic territory—and the same urban infrastructure it contains (particularly that of public transportation) can be conceptually mapped in differing ways.

Railroad Tracks: Connective and Divisive Urban Infrastructure

“So that makes it a habit now, coming here [to La Chapelle] at least once in a week, has become a habit to every Tamil.”

One Sri Lankan Tamil man I spoke with told me that Sri Lankan Tamils in France are willing to travel further to find these Tamil spaces, rather than settling for goods and services locally available to their homes in the suburbs. A man in his forties, who recently emigrated from India, told me that his family travels at least once a week to La Chapelle—mainly to buy food items, but also on special occasions, like weddings, to buy clothing and jewelry imported from India, and said that “coming here at least once in a week, has become a habit to every Tamil.” He said that from his home in a suburban city, it is “a little long distance to here. But we are used to travel, in India even for school people travel for one hour, two hours; college they travel for one hour, two hours, so we don't find it difficult.” A young woman whose family “repatriated” to France from Pondicherry when she was in early elementary school (her family gained French citizen through descent from her maternal grandfather, who became eligible for French

citizenship during the colonial period) told me that her mother's strategy was to make the regional rail journey into La Chapelle every couple weeks to buy bulk spices and long-lasting ingredients to supplement more frequent grocery shopping at local markets in their suburban city (with less South Asian products available).

Likewise, the importance of regional public transportation, and travel into La Chapelle, was highlighted in my lengthy conversation with Soumya, who arrived in France in 1992 as a refugee from Northern Sri Lanka. As we spoke, based on her unaccented French, I was surprised to hear that she was already 16 when she arrived, and didn't speak a word of French. Today, Soumya works full time in a medical clinic, is the mother of a young child, and dedicates much of her free time to the functioning of the temple, which was founded by her recently deceased uncle. Soumya emphasized the importance of the temple as a space where Sri Lankan refugees could come together and immerse themselves a sensory environment evocative of home, indeed, an environment that facilitated connections with home in spiritual and psychological terms, particularly in the early years of its development. Soumya highlighted that 1985 was before the internet, or easy telephone connections, and that in the absence of these connective technologies, "the temple allowed for community bonds." According to Soumya, at that time the Sri Lankan Tamils in France were political refugees, 80-90% of whom were young men between 25-40, an age, she noted, where it is difficult to learn a new language (French), a linguistic obstacle which posed practical challenges and enhanced the feeling of isolation for young Tamil refugee men. The temple allowed them not only to build links with each other, but also to maintain links with family back home: if they couldn't talk to them or be with them, at least they could pray for them during the years of the war's violent

intensification. Soumya also presented the benefit of the temple as not only spiritual, but psychological, noting that this same population of Tamil refugees, though they experienced high levels of distress, loneliness, and depression, would not see a psychologist; the temple, on the other hand allowed them “a breath of fresh air.” Given the importance of the temple as an assembly-point for Tamil communities—importantly, communities that are defined through both shared presence in Paris, and with enduring connections to families in Sri Lanka (and later to India as well, see Chapter 4 for further discussion of the temple’s role as a community institution). Soumya said that her uncle, the temple’s founder, was emphatic that the temple be close to public transportation. She noted that when the temple changed from its original location (not far away) they deliberately chose a new location that remained close to the metro so that people could come to the temple from the suburban areas, even those who cannot afford cars. The public transportation infrastructure of the neighborhood therefore has enabled its continuing identity as a Tamil space.

But the rail infrastructure, seen from one perspective (of Tamil commuter-consumers) as a medium of connectivity, can also be seen as divisive. In a city planning meeting which addressed a major project of urban redevelopment which targets La Chapelle/Gare du Nord, the language used focused on the way in which the train tracks and the raised metro tracks broke up, cut apart, and closed off this space, creating “enclaves” which must be opened up (*désenclaver*), and yet ironically all these forms of public transportation infrastructure are designed to do the opposite, to link spaces together across long distances. If La Chapelle is cut off from surrounding Paris through these connections, it is very much brought into connection with other geographies.

Though the neighborhood of La Chapelle is administratively bisected between tenth and eighteenth arrondissements and geographically bisected by the aerial metro—two forms of division that emerged as major themes in a city planning meetings discussing the area's future—these did not emerge as meaningful divisions in exploring the use of the space of La Chapelle by Tamils living in Ile-de-France.

Liberty, Equality, and the City: A Brief Overview of Parisian Urbanism Past and Present

In this section, I trace a brief history of Parisian urbanism, arguing that it has historically been motivated by a nationalist desire for homogeneity. In contrast, I propose that spaces like La Chapelle force us to attend to heterogeneity as a constitutive feature of the urban form, and to consider cosmopolitanism (which celebrates that heterogeneity) as an imperfect counter-narrative to the fantasy of nationalist homogeneity. Interestingly, this acknowledgement of cosmopolitanism as a positive aspect of city life, and of La Chapelle and the surrounding urban neighborhoods in particular, has been integrated into contemporary urban planning models. Yet within the broader discursive constructions of La Chapelle, historical continuity in urban planning objectives suggests the limits of cosmopolitanism within this tradition, indicating that Tamil investment would be celebrated in the space, but only below a certain unspecified threshold.

A nation's capital city serves the curious role as synecdoche for the nation, but at the same time, this role also distinguishes it—and in many cases even somewhat alienates it—from the rest of the nation it represents. In Paris, from the presidential palace of the

Elysée, to the international icon of the Eiffel Tower, the urban territory is a rich landscape of national imagery; and yet, particularly in Right-wing discourse, there also exists a feeling that Paris exists outside of “the real France”—that the capital city holds separate values, that it is a space of moral, and in some cases racial, degeneration. In this latter case, it is the higher proportion of minorities that is seen as a threat to the national character of Paris, and France as a whole. This risk is seen in spatialized terms, certain neighborhoods are viewed (by some) as a threat to Paris, and Paris as a threat then to France as a whole. In an article profiling a group of supporters for the National Front party candidate Marine LePen in December, 2015, one man stated, in explicit reference to the concentration of people of non-European ancestry, “when you go to Gare du Nord, the reality hits you head on, it’s terrifying” (L’Obs 2015). Similarly, a comment left on music video posted to Facebook by French-Lebanese musician Ibrahim Maalouf proclaimed, “Vote Fn [National Front] 2017 before all of France becomes like barbès [Barbès] already in the hands of the Islamic State!” This reference to Barbès, a neighborhood in the 18th arrondissement which has a high proportion of Arab businesses and residents (and is adjacent to La Chapelle/Gare du Nord), and the idea of its links to the feared and hated group behind recent terrorist attacks in France, relates to the notion promulgated on Fox News in the aftermath of the January 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris that certain districts of Paris are “No Go Zones,” outside of French government control. Guest Steven Emerson, portrayed as “an expert on Islamist terrorism” told viewers, “You basically have zones where Shariah courts were set up, where Muslim density is very intense, where the police don’t go in, and where it’s basically a separate country almost, a country within a country” (as quoted by Mackey 2015). While this concept—and the

lack of credentials of the “expert” who espoused it—were widely mocked in France (and led to an eventual on-air apology and correction), there *is* in France a somewhat widespread idea that some urban territories have fallen out of the control of the French government. In October 2015, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of January 2015 on the office of Charlie Hebdo and a kosher supermarket in Paris, a documentary was aired on French television based on a book, by the same name, published in 2002 called *The Lost Territories of the Republic* (Brenner 2002)¹². The aim of both the book and the film was to present testimonies from middle and high school teachers of what they identified as an alarming trend towards politicized Islamic self-identity, misogyny, and anti-Semitism in disadvantaged suburban schools in Ile-de-France, and a corresponding refusal of French national identity. What I wish to underline in using the example of this documentary, or rather of its resurfacing at precisely this moment of intense national anxiety, is the way in which the supposed threat to French values and identities are conceptualized in terms of *spaces*, and national control of those spaces. While Fox New’s map of No Go Zones was mocked primarily because it included large swathes of comfortably bourgeois neighborhoods of Paris, the idea that some areas have become islands within the national territory is a very real fear, and indeed some of the specific areas characterized as No Go Zones are stigmatized urban spaces in Paris, including the area around La Chapelle. Paris mayor Ann Hilalgo responded with an urban planning commitment towards “education, employment, [civic] participation” in 20 “priority

¹² “The Lost Territories of the Republic” is also the title of an article by Mamadou Diouf, in which he proposes that these spaces exist as an extension of French colonialism (Diouf 2012). Diouf traces the term to its use by Fadela Amara, then-secretary of state for urban affairs under the anti-immigrant administration of Nicolas Sarkozy, in a New York Times interview in 2008 (ibid).

neighborhoods” in Paris, referred to as “Les Must-Go Zones de Paris” (The Must-Go Zones of Paris), an obvious clapback to Fox New’s No Go Zones. A map was circulated by the mayor’s office in which the “must-go zones” were marked by smiley face icons—with the most concentrated cluster located in the Northeastern region of Paris in which La Chapelle is located—accompanied by the text, “City Contract: The Must Go Zones of Pairs! Paris gives priority to its working-class neighborhoods (*quartier populaires*). 8 districts, 20 priority neighborhoods. Education, Employment, Participation = 26 million euros a year specifically for the working-class neighborhoods.” This is at once a reminder of the extent to which city and federal government is deeply present and invested in these supposedly un-national spaces, but also an acknowledgment that such involvement has not yet been deep enough to align those spaces with the desired national model.

La Chapelle, specifically, was prominent in discussions of the ongoing refugee crisis throughout the duration of my fieldwork. In 2015 it was the location of a large settlement of undocumented refugees—mainly from Sudan and Eritrea—which was controversially broken up by authorities (Mousset 2015). In the aftermath many of the refugees simply resettled in adjacent parks until these too were cleared, and locked to prevent their further usage. Finally, in fall 2016, the city of Paris opened a limited-capacity refugee “center” (a large dome-shaped structure) further north, in the area of Porte de la Chapelle (this is a separate—though relatively nearby—area of the 18th, on the northern border of the city—however the distinction between Porte de la Chapelle and La Chapelle seems to be collapsed in some non-local coverage of migration-related issues), yet in the interim, and even after the center’s opening (due to its insufficient capacity),

informal tent camps only proliferated, moving further east of La Chapelle, among the same areal metro line, at Stalingrad, as well as just north of La Chapelle, near the metro station Max Dormoy, and indeed, in many other locations in and around Paris. Media discussion of the refugee housing crisis in La Chapelle is part of a widespread pattern of representation the neighborhood between La Chapelle and the Gare du Nord—the area in which Tamilness is most visible in Paris—as problematic urban space. In fact, an article published by Bloomberg in October 2014 caught my eye with the sensationalist headline, “Paris’s ‘Squalor Pit’ Gare du Nord Becomes French Decline Symbol” (Benoit 2014). Official discourses are more diplomatic, but this area is included in the large-scale urban renovation project called “Paris Nord-Est Élargi”—expanded northeast Paris—being undertaken by the City of Paris, which demonstrates the city’s desire to bring La Chapelle and the adjacent neighborhoods into line with a normative model of urban planning.

I turn to a discussion of Parisian urbanism in order to place La Chapelle both within—and in some ways as a break from—that tradition. While La Chapelle is a distinctively and recognizably Tamil neighborhood, it also disrupts the dominant model—taken largely from American urban studies dating back to the Chicago School—of ethnic spaces in the city organized as monoethnic urban enclaves. Indeed the commuter-ethnicity of the neighborhood forces us to think about identity of urban space not only in terms of patterns of residency, but in patterns of use. Yet these forms of investment in the urban space, grounded as they are in commerce, are not always taken to extend beyond a kind of utilitarian exchange. In Emmanuelle Lallement’s study of vendors in Barbès (adjacent to La Chapelle in the 18th arrondissement), she notes: “The

vendors do not live in the 18th arrondissement: they come from everywhere, mostly from the suburbs, and they do not claim any local attachment” (Lallement 2016, 118). Tamil investment in La Chapelle seeks to go beyond merely commercial exchange and establish a cultural base of activities and community life. Dequierez suggests, in her study of La Chapelle, that such agglomerations of minority business districts in Paris may represent a “new kind of urban neighborhood, and new relationships of migrants to urbanism” (Dequierez 2002, 120). Chateau Rouge (again, located close by in the 18th arrondissement) is clearly also a space where Senegalese commercial investment goes beyond the realm of the economic, and where there is an effort to base “the community” (“la communauté,” emphasis added) in a particular urban location (indicating the desire to form a singular Senegalese community in diaspora) and even to “create a positive image of Senegal” (Diop 2015). Finally, such images are aimed not only at local Senegalese residents of ‘grand Paris,’ nor simply the wider French public, but also—as in the case of M. Diop’s article, which is itself published in a Senegalese online forum—to other sites of Senegalese diaspora and back to “homeland” spaces. This points to the fact that investment in urban space is simultaneously a way of creating and displaying an ethnicized community identity which is created within—and reflected back onto—the urban space itself. It can also lead to the kinds of policing of community self-image reflected in Shobasakthi’s literature of Tamil Paris, where one protagonist, traumatized by his experiences of war in Sri Lanka, and of the asylum process itself in Europe, winds up on the streets of La Chapelle where he is told by another Tamil man, “You guys get on a plane and come to Paris with the whole intention of shaming all of us Tamils!” (Shobasakthi 2015, location 2505). Sonia Das has noted that the Little Jaffnas in

Canadian cities have a sort of informal rivalry to best represent the Tamil community in their respective cities, and even in a transnational network of Little Jaffnas around the world (Das 2016, 149).

La Chapelle's Tamil identity is formed then in relation to the transnational mobility of a global Tamil diaspora (and through local dynamics of community formation—in which a single community is not simply a given, but meant to be assembled and displayed in the best possible light) and also through local-level mobility between Paris and the cities which ring it. In regards to this latter form of mobility, it is also important to position the formation of ethnic neighborhoods in Paris not only as a break from normative Parisian urban planning, but also, to some extent, as a product of it. This is because La Chapelle's residential pattern (shared by Chateau Rouge, and Barbès) is part of a long-standing divide between the marginalized urban periphery and the city center. Both Benjamin and Harvey recount how the Haussmannization of central Paris expelled the city's marginal population--poor laborers--to its outer fringes (Benjamin 1999; Harvey 2003). With the increase in international migration from the 1960s onwards, Paris's urban periphery came to be defined not only in terms of socio-economic marginality, but also as a distinctively immigrant terrain (see Avenel 2009 for a discussion of how the stigmatization of the banlieue progressively took on an ethnicized dimension). Yet these dichotomized territories are in fact intimately woven together through the weave and weft of interlinking rail networks. They are also more culturally interwoven than is often acknowledged, which is the central argument of Laila Amine's analysis of Maghrebi, Franco-Arab and African American film and literature in Paris

which critiques and counteracts the exclusion of these populations from dominant representations of central Paris (Amine 2018).

Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* examines the urban permutations of Paris, tracing in the terrain of the city larger transformations of economy, politics, and culture which coupled the rise of capitalism to the life of the city and its inhabitants, but veiled the integral link between capital and urban form so that monuments of humanity's own making appeared phantasmagoric to them (Benjamin 1999, 14). In "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century: Exposé of 1939," Benjamin writes: "As for the phantasmagoria of civilization itself, it found its champion in Haussmann and its manifest expression in his transformations of Paris" (Benjamin 1999, 14-15). Haussmann's megalomaniacal urban reforms during the Second Empire, during which he was granted enormous powers to destroy and rebuild the city seemingly in the image of his own ideal, are a fascinating instance of urban planning, which at first glance looks to be the doing of a single visionary--after all, the familiar descriptor "Paris haussmannian" conjures a vivid mental image upon which the signature clearly reads "Haussmann." And yet Benjamin argues that Haussmann's vision was in fact an expression of a larger order: "Haussmann's activity is incorporated into Napoleonic imperialism, which favors investment capital" (Benjamin 1999, 23). David Harvey's urban history of Paris in the Second Empire goes even further; Haussmann appears reduced to the tool of a political regime desperate to quell the threat of communist uprising (Harvey 2003). In Harvey's vision the urban reforms of Paris do not bear the signature of any one person--including Haussmann--but rather of capitalism itself (ibid). Regardless of their perspective on the driving force of reform, all histories of the massive urban reforms of Paris in the latter half of the

nineteenth century highlight the desire for uniformity of form in the city. The expression of this desire is still visible today in the distinctive urban form of Paris, but Benjamin also reminds us that the desire to monumentalize civilization in every aspect of the urban form of Paris could never be entirely fulfilled: “With the Haussmannization of Paris, the phantasmagoria was rendered in stone. Though intended to endure in quasi-perpetuity, it also reveals its brittleness” (Benjamin 1999, 24). The desire for a homogenous urban terrain is thus an impossibility, the city is always-already symbolically loaded (by class, gender, and ethnicity). Where these identities align with the dominant model, they are rendered as if invisible—that is, they represent normative urban space, where they differ, they are made hypervisible.

Benjamin reminds us that Haussmann’s reforms were part of a larger project of Napoleonic imperialism; yet he restricts his examination of Napoleonic imperialism to its domestic role, where it favored capitalism over incipient communist revolt (Benjamin 1999, 23). But of course imperialism is also defined through dynamics of international exploitation, such that Paris’s urban form, if driven by capitalism, cannot be divorced from its specific mode of capitalism: colonialism. As scholars of the French nation are increasingly affirming, France’s contemporary national identity cannot be divorced from its role as an (ex-)colonial power (Blachard, Bancel, et Lemaire 2005). So too, France’s imperialism expressed itself not only through the use of colonial outposts as laboratories for urban and social planning in the metropole (Rabinow 1989), but also through the incorporation of colonies in the urban space of the metropole, as in the example of the Great Mosque of Paris in the 1920s:

La grande mosquée was not only a piece of the colonies brought wholesale into Paris; it was an example of the modernist arts of display and surveillance.

Presenting cultural difference through symbolic capital like the grand mosquée would serve the function of keeping the idea of Muslims in Paris colonial in essence, since here was a site from which Islam could be produced and appropriated for a colonial project that was more powerful than ever—and at the edge of decline (Bayoumi 2000, 272).

Parisian urban space bears the mark of global flows of people and resources, both in the informal practices of its always diverse inhabitants--Bayoumi also reminds us that international immigration to France has a longer history than is often recognized (Bayoumi 2000, 268)--but also in the formal structures of city planning. Though the incorporations of difference into the Parisian urban landscape such as the Great Mosque, constitute appropriations of difference--serving as a selective display of colonial power--rather than examples of lived experience of cultural plurality, they nevertheless illustrate that the urban landscape of Paris has long been shaped through global and globalized population flows and cultural exchange.

La Chapelle, and other areas of Paris which bear visible markers of migrant identities (West African commerce in Chateau Rouge, Chinese commerce in Belleville, Vietnamese commerce at Place d'Italie are some other examples), are, however, the result of concerted effort to establish community-based networks of commerce and sociality. This is particularly interesting since as Paul Silverstein has noted:

While there do exist habitation patterns to immigration trends, even the so-called "Arab quarters" in Paris and its environs--e.g. the Goutte d'Or or Saint-Denis--tend to be multiethnic in character and non-contiguous across the urban landscape. This diffusion of immigrant groups has largely resulted from a conscious state urban policy designed to break down communitarian structures and foster socioeconomic integration... (Silverstein 2004, 11).

According to this governmental framework the very visibility of a distinctively "ethnic" presence is itself a sign of potential failure of the desired urban model, a failure which is often applied not to the model itself, but rather to the users of the urban space themselves.

In shaping the demographics of La Chapelle, state urban policy is one factor, but market costs of rentals are another major structuring element, as housing prices within Paris are considerably higher than those outside, making a commuter-economy a widespread phenomenon, not only for Tamil businesses in La Chapelle, but for a high proportion of those who work in Paris, but cannot afford to live there. Indeed, sociologists Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Chalot in their book *Elite Ghettos: How the Bourgeoisie Defends its Spaces*, turn the vocabulary of the ghetto—generally used in reference to disadvantaged minority neighborhoods—on its head by detailing how rich neighborhoods use market mechanisms to exclude those deemed undesirable (Pinçon and Pinçon-Chalot, 2007). Critically, this form of “self-segregation” attracts none of the same attention—or stigmatization—as (ethnicized) *communautarisme*, which I often heard leveled against Tamils in Paris.¹³

Official policy at once strains to maintain (always illusory, as Benjamin reminds us) homogeneity through the diffusion of immigrant groups which is meant to facilitate their assimilation, and is confronted by the failure of this policy in the existence of stigmatized—and often economically depressed—cities and neighborhoods which house a disproportionate percentage of France’s immigrant and/or minority population. The failure of this urban model is often read as the failure of immigrant groups themselves to adequately assimilate. Using La Chapelle as a case study, I argue that taking an alternate view of urban space—as a location where identity is created, not

¹³ In searching for an English translation of *communautarisme* I find that the South Asian term “communalism” comes closest—this term is used to define preference for one’s own “community” (which can be defined in caste-based, linguistic, or religious terms) and prejudice—including acts of violence—against others.

simply superimposed (or imported)--allows for an alternate view of its users, not as inadequately assimilated subjects who are creating “foreign” spaces in the heart of the nation (its capital), but as one group of city-dwellers among many (and mindful, too, of vastly varying patterns of use by those within the complex, shifting boundaries that encompass many individuals into a purportedly single group). I argue that what is Tamil about La Chapelle is also shaped by the structures of the city *and thus constitutive of the city*. There is no originary Paris before “ethnic” others, for indeed, cities are the space of ethnicity’s production and reproduction. Below, I explore two urban planning initiatives in more detail, and look in particular at how they represent the Tamil investment in the space through invocations of cosmopolitanism.

Urban Planning 1: Expanded Northeast Paris

The first urban planning meeting I attended was held at the City Hall of the 18th arrondissement of Paris in February, 2015. Held in the room in which marriages are performed, a large, richly decorated 19th century space, with frescos and bas-relief covering the walls and a large chandelier illuminating the space. The panel of discussants were seated at a row of folding tables, and the audience filled the many rows of velvet benches already present in the room, as well as all of the folding chairs brought in to accommodate the crowd. The meeting was held to discuss an ambitious, large-scale urban renewal initiative called Paris Nord-Est Elargi (Expanded Northeast Paris). The ambitious project will cover over 600 hectares of Paris (including Gare du Nord/La Chapelle) and several suburbs which border it to the North and aims to “by 2030, position the north and east of Paris squarely as a new metropolitan center which is intelligent, sustainable, united [solidaire] and recognized on an international scale” (Paris Nord Est,

no date). The project also seeks to distinguish itself through a high degree of stakeholder participation, hence the public meeting which was meant to elicit feedback and suggestions. Urbanists and architects from the team contracted to carry out the project were present, along with the elected leaders of the three Paris arrondissements implicated in the project: 10th, 18th and 19th. The thrust of the presentations was that the space of Northeastern Paris should be opened—both to adjacent arrondissements, across the boundary-marking highway of the Péripherique, which encircles Paris, and internationally, through international train travel to and from the North and East Train Stations of Paris.

While it was noted that the rail infrastructure which marks northeast Paris has the *potential* to foster connectivity, it was described as “producing insularity” within the neighborhoods that house it, and creating “a dysfunctional territory” marked by “enclaves.” In discussing the area of La Chapelle, the thrust of the urban initiative was to “open up” (*désenclaver*) the area—a term frequently repeated—and to “create links” across the urban territory; as the mayor of the 10th arrondissement remarked, to break the “remove the barriers” between the arrondissements and the suburbs (*banlieues*) encompassed in the space of the Expanded North-East Paris project. I was interested, of course, in references to the La Chapelle area specifically, and the discussion of it at the meeting again reflects the simultaneous stigmatization and valorization (through the discourse of cosmopolitanism). On the one hand, the Boulevard de La Chapelle which runs through La Chapelle was specifically named as an area in need of “rehabilitation” (indeed, this project is the subject of the second urban planning meeting I will discuss below), but also as a “cosmopolitan” space. A speaker specifically referenced the Tamil community in the area, showing a slide of Tamil storefronts in La Chapelle, he referred to

the Tamil presence as part of the neighborhood's "cosmopolitan" character. Another speaker reaffirmed this value: stating, "cosmopolitanism, as we all know, is an asset, not a handicap" to the project of urban development. But the limits of cosmopolitan were also apparent, when a discussion of "social diversity" (*mixité sociale*) both acknowledged the "cosmopolitan Tamil community" (accompanied by a slide showing Tamil businesses in La Chapelle), but also that a goal of the project was to essentially dilute a single ethnic characteristic of the neighborhood in favor of an "international La Chapelle," a process which would involve promoting "social diversity" through building housing aimed at attracting *higher-income* residents to the area, which reveals the extent to which social housing exists not only to meet the needs of populations seeking housing, but also a technology of social engineering. Rafaël Lo Duca also documents how calls to "diversify" (*diversifier*) the neighborhood are explicit in their desire to minimize its Tamil presence (Lo Duca 2015). These calls for "diversity" are interesting in that they reverse the dominant framing of diversity (from within a multicultural framework) as synonymous with minority status; in fact, the form of "diversity" evoked here refers to a majority identity, evoking the dissipation of minority identity implicated through assimilationist Republicanism. Calling for a diversification of La Chapelle can also be read as a more delicately phrased, public face to the remarks Lo Duca documented in his article on interactions between Tamil commerce and non-Tamil community associations in La Chapelle, the latter of whom were explicit in their desires to minimize the Tamil character of the neighborhood, with one man going so far as to describe Tamil businesses as a "disfigurement" of the neighborhood (Lo Duca 2015). It seems there is a balance here between being Tamil enough to be "cosmopolitan," but not too much. This recalls

Ruth Mandel's ethnography of Turkish communities in Berlin, in which she found that Turks were viewed not as part of the cosmopolitan city, but rather as a threat to it, since they were viewed as being themselves anti-cosmopolitan in their supposed failure to integrate (Mandel 2008). Similarly, Lalaie Ameeriar contends that even in normatively multicultural contexts such as Canada, Pakistani cultural expression is encouraged only to the extent that it fits into the "sanitized sensorium," mediated by government policy and racialized stigmatization of certain bodily practices from dress to culinary habits (Ameeriar 2017).

Therefore, while contemporary urban planning nominally includes a greater community participation and what we might call an appreciation for diversity (this, in French, usually takes place with the language of cosmopolitanism¹⁴), I would argue that the core is a pro-capital nationalist model of the city that shares its roots with older models of urban planning described above. This is because bringing La Chapelle into line with dominant urban planning models would mean making it less hospitable to Tamils.

Urban Planning 2: Promenade de la Chapelle

Just over a year later, in the spring of 2016 I had the opportunity to attend another urban planning meeting, this time for a smaller project targeted specifically at creating a "promenade," an open space for walking and socializing, along the Boulevard de la

¹⁴ French and Tamil models of cosmopolitanism are discussed at length in the following two chapters. Here, I wish to highlight the extent to which these limited endorsements of cosmopolitanism are not synonymous with the notion of multiculturalism in which different communities are expected to assemble in visible ways. Instead, in Paris, visible ethnic identity in urban space often translates into stigmatization of both the urban space, and the community it indexes, as being insufficiently assimilated.

Chapelle, the street which runs below the aerial metro, between the stations of Barbès-Rochechouart and Stalingrad (La Chapelle is at the center of this expanse). The meeting was held in a recently renovated area in the northern part of the La Chapelle neighborhood, just past the main concentration of Tamil businesses and organizations. The area includes a youth hostel, and a number of small businesses clearly aimed at attracting young, financially well-off consumers: restaurants with American-inspired cuisine, bars, “pop-up” shops for local designers, a book store, and a community meeting area, where the meeting was held, in a large room in which two walls were made up entirely of windows which looked out over the vast expanse of railroad tracks leading into Paris. This area had also, in the past two years, off and on housed an informal settlement of asylum-seekers, particularly young men and teenage boys, camping in the public courtyard of this newly renovated space—many of them had previously been staying in a tent city below the metro tracks on Boulevard de la Chapelle and had resettled there after that settlement was broken up by police in April 2015 (police break-ups of refugee camps—and Roma encampments in northern areas of the 18th arrondissement—were a regular occurrence throughout the period of my stay in Paris). Though by the time of the meeting I attended the (re)settlements in the courtyard outside had also been chased away, the memory of their presence seemed acute, a spectral contrast with the kinds of usages being privileged by the proposed project: outside spaces, not as areas of desperate struggles for survival, but as spaces of leisure and consumption.

The stated objective of the meeting was less to inform about a project *as it already exists*, than to elicit feedback and begin a collective effort to plan a vision for the

renovation of the space, said one of the urban planners seated on the panel at the front of a full room of attendees. Indeed, a sign-up sheet was circulated through the audience for those interested in taking part in a collective of concerned people to participate in the planning initiative (yet, I added my contact information to this sheet never heard back). Nevertheless, again the mayors of the two arrondissements concerned by the project (10th and 18th) as well as other representatives from the city of Paris, the RATP (public transportation of Paris), and architects and planners presented their visions for the space—as well as their diagnoses of its various current pathologies—before opening the floor to feedback and suggestions from audience members. While the neighborhoods being discussed have many minority and recent-immigrant residents, the vast majority of the audience, and of those who spoke were young-to-middle-aged white French people. Thus, the Tamil investment in the area was not made evident in this space, nor, in this meeting, was it explicitly discussed. However, many of the same themes as at the earlier urban planning meeting again emerged: the space was described as “cut up space” (*espace marcelé*) and that the goals of the project were to, again, “make the border fall between the 10th and 18th arrondissements,” as the mayor of the 10th arrondissement put it, and to remove the barriers to public space beneath the metro (*décloisonner l’espace publique...*). The “border” between the arrondissements referred to by the mayor is an administrative division that it not actually marked in the urban space, however, the barriers beneath the metro are, of late, indeed physical ones. Though the phrasing used by the presenter (a young white woman who gave her first name, but not her title or position), “décloisonner l’espace” used a verb which refers to breaking barriers, she did not name those barriers—it is possible that she, too, meant it in a metaphoric sense, yet

those present must have also realized that since the evacuation of the informal refugee camp below the tracks a year prior to that meeting, locked chain link fences had been erected by the city in the space left behind, to ensure it remained vacant. Because as the mayor of the 18th arrondissement remarked, “In Paris a space which is unused quickly becomes a space made use of with usages that are not those we would wish for.” Though the discussion ranged from issues of traffic at the intersection outside of the La Chapelle metro station, to questions of lighting, handicap accessibility, and quite a lot of discussion about the need for wider sidewalks and more than one exit from the metro station La Chapelle, overall the themes of the meeting can be summed up by the comments of one member of the panel: this “badly occupied” (*maloccupé*) space should be transformed into “well occupied” (*bien occupé*) space through this urban planning initiative. A contrast emerges here between a vision of this space as “badly occupied,” and the lure of the area as a Tamil neighborhood—for both Tamils and others, who come for religious, cultural, social and educational purposes, as well as for the pleasures of shopping and eating. This contrast can be expressed as differing conceptual maps laid over the same cartographic space of La Chapelle.

Urban planning meetings focused on La Chapelle as both a closed-off and divided space (closed in by spatial divisions created by transportation infrastructure such as the aerial metro tracks and train tracks and divided between administrative borders of the arrondissements) while Tamil patterns of use focus on the continuity of the space, both through the medium of public transportation into La Chapelle, and by highlighting the unique density of Tamil businesses and other organizations in La Chapelle as their reason for making the commute into the area. Indeed, mapping the concentration of Tamil

businesses and cultural organizations shows that they are undivided by the administrative and infrastructural factors highlighted in the urban planning meetings.

Conclusion

Tamil modes of engagement with the urban space evoke the figure of the walker in the city, as described by Michel de Certeau, as a figure at once a part of the rigid spatial organization of the city enacted through state interventions such as the urban planning projects I've discussed, and apart from it, whose "long poem of walking" makes the city their own, and through the act of walking, moves beyond and outside those rigid structures, and indeed, shapes the city in ways that exceed or confound them. I propose that we might consider extending this dynamic, beyond the physical act of walking, to include the voyages facilitated by public transportation made by Tamils in Paris since it is Tamil city-goers' strategies of mobility—of taking the suburban train to La Chapelle, working in its shops, eating in its restaurants, praying in its temples, walking its streets—that enable and sustain the unique Tamil character of La Chapelle. And yet these contributions were marginalized in the urban planning initiatives which portrayed the "rightful" subjects of the city as a largely non-immigrant, higher income population. Conceptualizing the city as a space constructed by those who "walk" to and within it, as much as by any formal structures or bodies, opens up the possibility of thinking of "rights to the city" as separate from the legal or administrative rights, but as an inherent claim to space on equal footing (Lefebvre 2009). In this sense, co-presence in the city and the interactions it entails means that regardless of economic and social structures that limit Tamils residence in La Chapelle, strategies of mobility create and sustain a substantial Tamil social, economic, and affective investment in La Chapelle. These activities

legitimize claims to a Tamil space within Paris, even when that space is simultaneously cut through with other, and sometimes competing claims, attempting to impose differing maps of the city. Perhaps we can imagine these multiple maps on transparent sheets, layering upon each other, each transparent enough to superimpose one vision without obscuring those that have come before it, yet opaque enough not to be overshadowed by those which are constantly in creation, and will inevitably be laid down, layer upon layer, on top of those maps that have come before. Together, they form a map of Tamil Paris in La Chapelle.

CHAPTER THREE—Longing and Belonging in La Chapelle: Urban Identity in Paris's Little Jaffna

La Chapelle is a neighborhood in Northern Paris that spans two administrative districts (the 10th and 18th arrondissements), and is nestled between two wide swathes of railroad tracks leading into two major train stations (the Gare du Nord, and the Gare de l'Est). Due to its concentration of Tamil businesses and organizations in Paris and is often nicknamed Little Jaffna, after the Tamil cultural capital of Sri Lanka. Yet travel to La Chapelle for paid work, leisure, religious practice, or domestic labor (particularly shopping for ingredients in preparation for cooking)—in short, virtually all of the activities which sustain the area's Tamil character—often involve a long commute from areas of residence (with non-concentrated Tamil populations). This mobility reveals a duality at the heart of La Chapelle's role as a Tamil space: it functions at once as a homely space, and a space away from home. Such duality is a product of the particularities of French social policy and Parisian real estate markets which push low-income and migrant residents out of Paris proper, even as the city's economy is dependent on their daily journeys, via public transportation, back into the city for work. Through strategies of public-transportation-enabled mobility, Tamils in Paris have successfully created an identifiably Tamil space in Paris, in spite of political and administrative policies in Paris, which are largely hostile to the creation of ethnically-inflected urban conglomerations, even while ambivalently embracing narratives of cosmopolitanism. R. Cheran has describes a certain kind of duality as inherent in what he terms Tamil DiasporiCity: it is a condition of simultaneous belonging and disenfranchisement, that is, the new spaces of Tamil expression opened by diasporic

landscapes are the product of the closing of prior and previous Tamil homelands lost through war (Cheran 2007). In this chapter I describe what I term the homely/unhomely split as it applies to La Chapelle: the split between identification and exotification in the construction of this Parisian district as a Tamil neighborhood—looking particularly at the role of food in Tamil diasporic labor and leisure, and in French guide books and other tourism initiatives which explicitly market the Tamil character of the neighborhood to a non-Tamil audience. I examine the extent to which discourses of cosmopolitanism in contemporary Paris provide a valorizing frame for La Chapelle, and the Tamil ethnic identity it indexes.

In France, and throughout Europe, migrants and their descendants are subject to stigmatizing discourses which posit their very presence as constituting a national “crisis.” In Paris, urban planning models explicitly discourage the formation of ethnic neighborhoods, which are viewed as a threat to the “assimilation” of immigrants and minority French citizens and residents. Yet, there is simultaneously a counter-narrative in which visible forms of difference in the city are indexed positively as “cosmopolitan,” and in which the existence of diasporic cultural continuity in Parisian urban space is not seen as an urban pathology (i.e. the failure of an assimilationist French urbanism), but rather as an enduring characteristic of the contemporary urban landscape.

Cosmopolitanism—the positive valuation of visible alterity within urban space, thus serves as a counterpoint to stigmatizing portrayals of unassimilated minority difference. Understanding La Chapelle as a cosmopolitan space therefore serves as a lens through which the visibility of Tamil culture and commerce is rendered legible—and acceptable—to the wider public. In this article I examine the role of food (restaurants

and grocery stores) and local-level tourism in defining La Chapelle as a Tamil cultural space within a cosmopolitan Paris. I focus on two groups (loosely defined, as each “group” is internally diverse) who are attracted to La Chapelle precisely *for* its Tamil identity, and in this way enact and reinscribe that identity through their engagement with the city environments. Provisionally, I divide them into those for whom La Chapelle’s Tamil identity provides a sense of *belonging* (as a Tamil self in a Tamil space—however partial that identification may be), and those for whom it fulfills a *longing* for an encounter with the exotic, or an experience of novelty (these are tourists, though not always in the normative sense of people from elsewhere, since, I will describe, there is a local-level tourism in La Chapelle).

Who’s Cosmopolitan? Whose Cosmopolitanism?

“*Cosmopolite*”—cosmopolitan—is a word that is used in French to signal not just the minimal value of tolerance for alterity, but instead, a positive valuation of it. Interestingly, while cosmopolitanism in philosophical discourses tends to be described as a value people do or do not possess, when I heard people in Paris use the term, it tended to describe qualities inherent in a place or setting. While choosing this positively-valued term to describe such settings clearly *also* reflects back upon the speaker’s desire to communicate their positive judgment as well, the descriptor “cosmopolitanism” is often used not (only) to signal a personal ethos, but rather as a more a general descriptive term somewhat analogous to how “diverse” is used in the United States. Like the term “diversity” in American English, cosmopolite can also be a way to talk about “difference” (racial, ethnic, religious, etc.) without precisely naming those differences. Since naming differences in any way (for example, through the collection of census data

on race/ethnicity) has traditionally been viewed as antithetical to France's values of "freedom, equality, and brotherhood," this term therefore performs useful work of simultaneously marking and refusing to name difference¹⁵. The public discussion of an urban planning initiative in the 18th arrondissement's City Hall discussed in the previous chapter, in which La Chapelle's strongly immigrant business profile was described as "cosmopolitan," illustrates this point. In another quotidian example, while taking my young son to the park, I heard a group of babies described as "cosmopolite" by a white French woman who explicitly named the only non-white children out of the mostly-white (all French) group in so describing it. Though philosophical framings of the term (from Kant to Derrida) discuss the implications of cosmopolitanism as a value—these babies, too young to even talk, could hardly espouse the value of cosmopolitanism, but could be seen, by virtue of their "visible minority"¹⁶ status, to embody it. This split between those who espouse cosmopolitanism as a value, and those who (perhaps merely) embody it leads us to the limitations of cosmopolitanism as well.

Ruth Mandel proposes the idea of selective cosmopolitanism to draw attention to the capacity of cosmopolitanism (in its actually existing instances and dominant

¹⁵ However, the public naming—and discussion—of difference seems to be increasingly an open topic in French politics, Left, Center, and Right. This is true both as a strategy to promote homogeneity (i.e. to restrict difference)—for example in the attempts to ban the so-called "burkini" (full body swimwear worn by Muslim women) in several cities in the south of France in the summer of 2016, the latest in a long line of legal attempts to restrict Muslim women's attire—and as a strategy to combat racism, as in the spread of the Black Lives Matter movement to protest the suspicious death of Adama Traoré while in police custody and draw attention to anti-Black racism in France (Jacobs 2016), and in protests against anti-Asian racism following the hate crime death of Zhang Chaolin in a Paris suburb in August 2016 (Zappi 2016).

¹⁶ The French term "minorité visible"—visible minority—has a semantic function largely equivalent to the American term "people of color."

discursive iterations) to create hierarchies of worthiness rather than a more egalitarian invitation to the cosmopolitan community (Mandel 2008). For if (some) minority and/or migrant communities embody cosmopolitanism, others are seen as a challenge to it. In this instance cosmopolitanism can come to be something the purported foreigner *lacks* rather than what they co-construct—or more reductively, embody. In the French context, the accusation of failure to assimilate, or “communautarisme” (dealing exclusively with one’s own “community”) amounts to an accusation of anti-cosmopolitanism. In this formulation it is not dominant structures of privilege and exclusion that are blamed for keeping some communities from integrating (socially, economically, politically) into French society, but rather the imputed pathological inability of such communities to open themselves to the other.

Pheng Cheah expresses skepticism concerning migrant cosmopolitanism from another perspective, one of caution in assuming that movements of people necessarily lead to shifts from nationalist to cosmopolitan (understood as internationalist) subjectivities:

Transnational mobility notwithstanding, it is doubtful whether transnational migrant communities can be characterized as examples of cosmopolitanism in the robust normative sense even after we have acknowledged that this normative dimension is necessarily diluted or compromised by historical contextualization. It is unclear how many of these migrants feel that they belong to a world. (Cheah 1998, 37).

Yet in contrast to Cheah’s skepticism, Tamils in Paris are making claims towards a normative cosmopolitan ethos and are also, through their investment in urban space, enacting cosmopolitanism, not only as an ethos, but as a territorialized, physical presence in a “Little Jaffna” in Paris which is explicitly understood both within the context of Paris as a cosmopolitan city, and in relation to other Little Jaffnas worldwide.

Sri Lankan Tamils wishing to be included in the space of cosmopolitanism in Paris have not been able to claim the role of worldly traveler, but rather, have expressed, from within the position of the political refugee, a sense of cosmopolitanism as a Tamil cultural inheritance which challenges the model of the provincial, non-cosmopolitan migrant/refugee. The invocation of Tamil Sangam¹⁷ poet Kaniyan Poonkundran's famous lines, "Every country is my country; every one is my kinsman," is one way of claiming a cosmopolitan ethos not, as some argue, as an intellectual hand-me-down from European philosophical traditions, but from equally (or even more) ancient Tamil intellectual traditions (Poonkundran in Cheran 2007). In 2014 this verse, in Tamil and French, was printed on a large, prominently displayed banner at the Ganesh Festival—the largest Tamil public celebration in all of Europe, which takes place annually in La Chapelle.

I wish to highlight these invocations of cosmopolitanism not only as a self-valorizing discursive practice, but also as a means of creating a relational identity between Tamil communities and the urban space itself which challenges representations of migrant and minority communities as exterior and foreign by highlighting their investment in and association with, in short, their belonging to local urban spaces. To be local is to stake a claim in the city, even if political, economic and social structures conjoin to keep those who are local to the city from full *national* inclusion, their de facto assertion of "rights to the city" could be seen as evidence of participation in the nation, perhaps not as it is imagined, but as it actually exists: in the lived social spaces of the national territory (Lefebvre 2009). Of course this position is precarious in many respects:

¹⁷ The Sangam period refers to a golden age of classical Tamil literature, broadly spanning the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE.

national law retains the rights of intrusion into these spaces in whatever exclusionary ways they wish (this is most brutally obvious for refugee and Roma populations who are regularly expelled from informal settlements in Paris with little warning), but also through the “softer” process of gentrification, as migrant and low-income populations get pushed out of the spaces of the city altogether.

Derrida took on the question of cosmopolitanism in relation to exactly such questions of *expulsion* (deportation) from the city, by defining cosmopolitanism as above all an ethic of hospitality that would recognize the rights of migrants—specifically refugees—to refuge in the city (Derrida 2001). Returning to the Kantian roots of cosmopolitanism as “universal hospitality”, Derrida reminds us that Kant proposes “an original concept of hospitality, of the duty (devoir) of hospitality, and of the right (droit) to hospitality” (ibid, 5). In so doing, Derrida invites us to think of the space of the city as a terrain in which these values could be enacted—even in spite of national and international laws which, through closed borders and deportations, fail at their ethical duties of hospitality. And yet such a definition draws a distinction between those for whom hospitality is a duty, and those for whom it is a (imperfectly granted) right. For to speak of hospitality is to speak of hosts and guests, and this necessarily equates with unequal rights to the city, for the guest is ultimately a temporary presence with subordinate rights to the “home” of their hosts. Such a model then, precludes the possibility that migrants and their descendants can make equal claims to the space of the city as home. Can one pass from the role of guest to the role of host? And though Derrida explicitly discusses the question in terms of individuals with the legal status of outsiders (non-citizens, and indeed, most especially those whom the state reserves the

right to deport: asylum-seekers—as opposed to those with the legal status of refugees—and undocumented migrants), there are many in France who are *not* foreigners, but remain “foreign” in dominant discourse. In the case of Tamil groups in France, there are many situations which fit this model: Sri Lankan Tamils with permanent residency or naturalized citizenship based on refugee status, and their French-born descendants, and Indian Tamils from Pondicherry with hereditary rights to citizenship (through “filiation”—*jus sanguinis*) from formerly-colonized antecedents. One cannot offer “hospitality” to non-white French citizens, instead, one must recognize their rights as co-hosts.

For these reasons cosmopolitanism remains an imperfect frame for describing the inclusive potential of heterogeneity in the city, yet I also agree with Kwame Anthony Appiah’s formulation of cosmopolitanism that does not rely on the guest/host metaphor, but rather rests heavily on the idea of open, compassionate dialogue between equals. Appiah’s notion of cosmopolitanism leaves open the space to “simply be intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting” (Appiah 2006, 97). Below, through discussing food and tourism in La Chapelle, I will explore this “intriguing” aspect of ethnic identity in the city—both as spaces of self-identification and homeliness (belonging), and as encounters with alterity (longing).

Food, and the Pleasure of the City

Food is a medium through which La Chapelle is made homely to Tamils in and around Paris, and it is also a draw to non-Tamil visitors to La Chapelle, whose interactions with Tamil communities in this space remain for the most part structured through the contexts of consumption and entertainment. First I will look at the role that

food plays in creating identity for diasporic Tamils in Paris. Then, I will look at how the consumption of Tamil food, and other forms of tourism by non-Tamils within La Chapelle function as a mechanism for both incorporating Tamils into the contemporary landscape of Paris, and solidifying La Chapelle's identity as a Tamil space within Paris. But if food and restaurants are a space for constructing and displaying Tamil identity, they also reveal the complexity—an at times instability—of that identity, in the face of competing categories of identification such as “Indian” or “Sri Lankan,” identifications which are at times imposed externally, and at times foregrounded by individuals themselves whose pre-diasporic identities are in many cases already hyphenated: Indian-Tamil and Sri Lankan-Tamil or Eelam-Tamil. The space of the restaurant shows that “Tamil” (or Tamoul in French) is a category in constant construction, with multiple and shifting definitions, at times over-riding distinctions of national origin, and at times highlighting them.

One of the most marked features of the La Chapelle area is the density of Tamil grocery stores and restaurants. These restaurants draw both Tamil and non-Tamil customers in large numbers: from globalized South Indian food chains to small-scale Sri Lankan-run eateries. These restaurants are recommended through word of mouth—particularly among Tamils living in and around Paris, and featured on a number of major online restaurant review sites, as well as more specialized guide books on Parisian restaurants (one of which I will discuss below).

Food is often evocative of the location it was grown, prepared, or consumed. The French notion of *terroir* emphasizes the unique role of location in producing locally distinctive ingredients and culinary preparations, to the extent that the food products of a

particular terroir are impossible to replicate outside of their particular locations.

According to Kolleen Guy, this idea of the exceptionalism of locally produced French goods combined with France's colonial expansion caused food to be a major marker of differentiation between metropolitan France and its colonial subjects (Guy 2011). Guy's historical work on the history of locally and colonially sourced French foods also points to another important way in which food marks the urban landscape: as a medium from which the outside is brought into the city, and fully incorporated into it. Historically, the city would extract food from the hinterlands, and with colonialism the reach of products only widened; so too with globalization, and the global movement of migrants who bring—and sell—new food traditions with them, this process has expanded. And yet—to varying and often incomplete degrees—the city is an equalizing force for these “outside” culinary products. Diverse cuisines have come to be an expected part of urban landscapes all over the world. In this sense, the foods of “elsewhere,” are viewed as “at home” in major cities throughout the world.

Food has also formed the basis of economic mobility, and a marker of increasing social integration, for many migrant groups, from the iconic frankfurters and pizza of the United States, to the emergence of the North African dish, couscous, as a de facto “plat national” (national dish) of France (Ribaut 2005). But even without becoming incorporated into a familiar national repertoire, diverse foodways are open for consumption in the city. In fact, it is often not *in spite of* but *because of* the perceived exoticism of minority food traditions that they become important cultural and economic sites beyond the central role they play in ethnic networks of labor, consumption and sociality as sites of tourism as well (Shaw, Bagwell, and Karmowska 2004). Uma

Narayan notes that “‘ethnic restaurants’ are an important form of economic enterprise open to immigrants to the West, and...westerners’ taste for ‘ethnic cuisines’ contributes to the economic survival of immigrants, the desire for culinary novelty making a positive difference to profit margins” (Narayan 1995, 76). Prior academic studies of Tamil communities in Paris have noted the importance of the restaurant industry as an economic engine for Tamil migrants; as one man from Pondicherry put it in an interview published in *Hommes et Migrations*, “cooking was my visa” (Petit 2011, 138 my translation). The presence of Tamil workers in the restaurant industry—particularly Sri Lankan Tamil men—was widely remarked upon throughout my fieldwork—and not just by Tamils, others in Paris were (to varying degrees) aware of a Tamil presence in Paris’s food service industry. In the restaurant industry, limited French linguistic skills pose less of a barrier, meaning Sri Lankan Tamils are employed not just in Tamil restaurants, but across the food service industry, most usually in the kitchen. This is also reflected in Tamil cultural productions in Paris, for example in Sri Lankan Tamil author Shobasakthi’s novel *Gorilla*, one of the characters, a recently arrived undocumented Sri Lankan Tamil man, is able to find a position working in fast food in Paris through Sri Lankan Tamil community networks (and by using the identity documents of a fellow-Tamil) (Shobasakthi 2008).

I spoke with Ramesh, a Tamil restaurateur, who discussed with me how widespread undocumented (Tamil) labor was in the industry, bemoaning the terrible conditions that those workers were exposed to, saying, “the pay is less and you constantly

live with the fear. You constantly live with the fear. That's not worth it.¹⁸ Ramesh's own journey to Paris is an example of the post-colonial exchange between France and Pondicherry. Ramesh had gained French citizenship through marriage to his wife, whose parents had applied for—and been granted—French citizenship on the basis that her maternal grandfather was eligible for French citizenship due to having worked for the French government in Pondicherry during the colonial period. Later in this chapter I will discuss Ramesh's decision to open a branch of an international South Indian restaurant in La Chapelle. In regards to Tamil restaurant labor Ramesh remarked:

I know a few people come to us for a job. What is the first thing we ask them? We don't ask them CV [note this was pronounced in the French manner, "say-vay"], we don't ask them are they qualified for the job. We ask them only, do you have the legal papers? So if they don't have the legal paper and they don't have the social security we won't have that. It's a very difficult thing. So now what do they do? Ours is a brand, so right from day one when they visited [referring to a visit made by the CEO and managing director of the restaurant franchise], we are very clear: go by the rules and laws and things like that. Everything we will follow for the existing country's laws. That's what we are doing in India [also]. Because in any business you can do certain [inaudible word] things. But our company and our brand, [from] day one, very clear they want to look at [the] legal side, including government side. For here, in any restaurant, or any business for that matter, I think there are one or two illegal immigrants suffering, I will not say working, they are suffering. Because what happens, in my opinion, I don't know how far it is true, they know they don't have paper¹⁹. They know it, and the owner also knows it, okay? So they'll be exploited. They'll be put into every kind of job and their hours may not be respected, kind of job may not be respected. That's what I see in any case.

However, restaurant labor is not a sector that is exclusively reserved to precarious employment, as Ramesh intimated, his own employees were working as declared legal residents. I spoke with one server at Ramesh's restaurant, a student from Kerala, India

¹⁸ Quotations taken from a recorded interview, conducted in English.

¹⁹ Ramesh's phrasing is an anglicization of the French term, "sans papiers" (without papers), used to refer to undocumented immigrant status.

pursuing an MBA at a French university in Paris, who Ramesh described as “an ambitious woman,” who he had hired in part because of her fluency in multiple languages. Ramesh explained, “Because it is an international city, multilanguage is a must” noting his servers regularly spoke English, French, Tamil, and Hindi. I met with another server in a different international South Indian restaurant franchise—a phenomenon I discuss more at length below—who had migrated from Chennai to Paris when the restaurant opened, he told me that in fact it was his English skills that had gotten him the job, since he identified as Anglo-Indian and spoke English as his mother tongue. The multilingual environment of Tamil restaurants in Paris is clear from the way in which switching from Tamil to English to French is common practice in restaurants. Indeed, the linguistic qualifications of servers in Parisian Tamil restaurants are impressive when compared to the general French public, a point Ramesh underscored when he said he’d tried to recruit (multilingual) servers from the local French employment office (called the “pole emploi”) and not been able to find “suitable people.” In a Sri Lankan-owned restaurant, I spoke with one server—in English, French, and Tamil, who was working for his family’s business. Interestingly, he was raised in France, and like many young people in Paris, unable to find a job in his preferred industry even after attending college. Instead, family networks allowed for employment in this restaurant, but he was frustrated by this situation and critical of life in France in general, calling it “a mechanical life.” Interestingly, he was the only person I spoke to who said that he dreamed of settling in Sri Lanka (everyone else insisted that though the war was formally over, the grievances that had caused it remained, and the situation was still

unbearable). But this young man's plan was to use his experience in the restaurant industry to open an upscale bar in Colombo.

But of course the importance of food extends well beyond the realm of the economic, and the study of food, in relation to a range of social and cultural domains has long been a concern for anthropologists (Mintz and Du Bois 2002). For instance, Mary Douglas spoke of “two bodies”—the physical body of the individual, and the social body to which they belong—as part of a “continual exchange of meanings,” such that food not only sustains the physical body, but the whole rich cultural complex of food practices sustains the larger social body or bodies to which individuals belong (Douglas 1970, 65). *Ethnography of Tamil foodways*, and *South Asian foodways* more broadly, illustrates a number of ways in which the link between physical and social bodies are symbolically enacted through the production and consumption of food. R.S. Khare's scholarship on Hindu food practices, and his argument that “food directly matters to the formation of a Hindu's inner being and its becoming from one birth to the next” is relevant given the religious make up for Paris's Tamil community (Khare 1992, 5). Indeed, the distribution of food itself is an important element of worship at Hindu Temples (Appadurai 1981); in Paris, too, at the Ganesh Temple, after attending the service, worshippers (and visitors like this anthropologist) sit together on the floor of the temple to eat prasadam (food that has been offered to, and blessed by, a deity) with their hands, in the traditional South Asian fashion. Khare's scholarship also points to the importance of religious and caste-based food restrictions for Tamils and throughout South Asia. This is visible in the familiar divide between “veg” (vegetarian) and “non-veg” (omnivorous) restaurants in South Asia, which is also found in La Chapelle. For example, one successful Sri Lankan

Tamil vegetarian restaurant in La Chapelle has a name which evokes Krishna, a Hindu god whose devotees have a tradition of vegetarianism, and is adorned with religious imagery and quotations—in Tamil and French—of the Bhagavad Gita. For the New Year of 2015, during my fieldwork I received a calendar from the restaurant which advertised their name and location (in the heart of La Chapelle on a street with many other Tamil restaurants—both Sri Lankan and South Indian). It contained the following text from the Bhagavad Gita (I have given my translation from the original French), in which Krishna explains that all possessions are illusions, since everything emanates from and belongs to Krishna’s divinity itself. And yet the themes of the inevitability of loss can also be seen in light of the refugee experience shared by the Sri Lankan Tamil community of Paris:

Whatever happened only happened favorably,
Whatever is happening only happens favorably,
Whatever will happen will only happen favorably,

What have you lost that belonged to you?
Why are you crying?

What have you taken, to lose?
What have you created, to waste?

Whatever you took, you took it from here
Whatever you gave, you gave it from here.

What belongs to you today
Will belong to someone else tomorrow
And the day after, to others still.

This is the law of the world
And the essence of my creation

The prominent references to Krishna, and quotations of the Bhagavad Gita, and advertising promoting “100% pure vegetarian” cuisine clearly signal a particular religious and upper caste-inflected identity.

On the other hand, rejecting food taboos can also be a way of signaling rejection of the caste system itself. This was apparent in an event I attended for the Tamil festival of Pongal. The advertising for this event (in Tamil) explicitly sought to go beyond divisions of religion and caste, and highlighted that Pongal could be a festival for all Tamils, regardless of their religious or caste identity. At the event, there were a variety of traditional Tamil foods, and beef rolls (a popular Sri Lankan snack, here prepared with a meat which is taboo to high-caste Hindus) were served at the concession stand, signaling a rejection of caste-inflected food taboos. Indeed, recently debates around beef, which long been a part of Hindutva politics in India have cropped up in Sri Lanka as well, with proposed beef bans (and stigmatization of beef-eaters) emerging from Tamil political groups which are hostile to Sri Lanka's Muslim minority (Srinivasan 2018). The presence of beef rolls also signals another way in which food both conveys and conceals various kinds of identification within the Tamil diaspora in Paris, since beef roll is a common snack throughout Sri Lanka, known as part of a category of snack foods called "short eats." Unlike some food items which are closely associated with Tamil communities, in particular, "rolls" (with beef or other fillings) are eaten throughout Sri Lanka by Sri Lankans of all ethnicities. And yet, the promotional materials for the event make no mention of Sri Lanka, and instead focus on the "Tamil" community, illustrating the way in which the choice to identify as Tamil is sometimes a choice away from identification as Sri Lankan.

Scholarship on South Asian Ayurvedic medicine, and of South Indian and Northern Sri Lankan Siddha medical philosophy highlight the use of food to manage the body, and categorize foods appropriate to particular characteristics (linked to both bodily

and behavioral traits). These traditions develop the notion that different kinds of foods are variously suited to different individuals, and that health and wellbeing is maximized by adhering to a diet suitable to the eater. Sujatha's ethnographic study of a village in Tamil Nadu illustrates some Tamil attitudes towards the direct impact of different food choices on one's physical health, as well as the belief that various foods are more or less suitable for different people—rather than classifying a food as “healthy” or “unhealthy,” Sujatha reports, Tamil villagers tended to describe it as either good or bad “*for us*” (emphasis added, Sujatha 2002, 90). This idea of “suitability” was articulated quite nicely by Ramesh when he recounted how he came to open his restaurant in La Chapelle, speaking of the neighborhood he said: “After the Sri Lankan migration a lot of shops have been taken over by Sri Lankan owners and most of the chefs and most of the cooks of the restaurants have been taken over by them. So I find that food not suitable for people like us who come from India.”

Food traditions also function as a mechanism for continuing ethnic identity in virtually every diasporic group. David Sutton describes the role of food for international Greek migrants as *synechdotal*—the taste or smell of a food evokes an entire range of affective and sensorial memories of the homeland (Sutton 2001). Tulasi Srinivas reminds us of the specifically feminine obligation to transmit food traditions to one's children in Indian diaspora—something I found true in my conversations with both Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils in Paris—since tasks of grocery shopping and food preparation for the home (in contrast to restaurant food preparation) fall disproportionately to women (Srinivas 2006). Purnima Mankekar has written about the importance of Indian grocery stores in California as critical spaces in diasporic construction of Indian identity (and,

indeed, the very idea of India) (Mankekar 2002). Mankekar's work encourages us to look not only at the economic exchange that happens in these grocery stores, but also at the symbolic labor of putting "culture" and "nation" on display. In La Chapelle, too, there are a wide array of sensorial markers that go beyond the simple fact of having Sri Lankan and/or Indian products up for sale. Storefront windows in La Chapelle, for example, are a veritable public signboard, where both local events, and critical events in Sri Lanka are advertised. Funerary announcements are a common sight in La Chapelle, almost always written exclusively in Tamil, these announce the passing, and publicize the funeral information for local Sri Lankan Tamils, but also for notable figures in Sri Lanka and the diaspora—as for example, with Tamizhini's²⁰ passing in October 2015, after which memorial posters were a common site in La Chapelle. Store fronts also hold posters for community events in La Chapelle—and quite often in suburban towns as well. Just a few examples include a conference on Tamil literature, music and dance performances and competitions, sports meets, holiday celebrations, etc. Shop windows are also a space of political mobilization, on Maaveerar Naal²¹, for example, stores held posters for commemorative events, as well as yellow and red balloon decorations to signal their observance of the day. Similarly on May 18th, the overwhelming majority of stores flew black flags with messages in Tamil, French, and English for "Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day." LTTE flags and pictures of Prabhakaran are also common, on November 27th, May 18th, and indeed throughout the year, this is the dominant public

²⁰ Tamizhini was a prominent female leader in the LTTE.

²¹ Martyr's Day, a memorial day for deceased Tamil combatants, held on November 27th. For further discussion of the symbolism surrounding Maveerarhal (Martyrs), see the following chapter.

political face of La Chapelle, and many of these materials are distributed in both French and Tamil by several prominent LTTE-aligned organizations.

But while signs, flags, and other visual cues are easy to interpret as signifiers of broader constructions of Sri Lankan Tamil identity and political affiliations, I also want to insist on the particular salience of food itself in constructing ethnic identity in the Tamil diaspora. Rohini and Krithika, two sisters who migrated to a Parisian suburb with their families from Pondicherry at the ages of 3 and 5 told me that it was their mother, most of all, who had fostered a love of Tamil culture to them (they saw themselves as much more interested in and committed to Tamil culture than most Tamils their age who had been born or raised in Paris—indeed, I met them through a university-level Tamil language course). They spoke of this cultural transmission through their mother’s encouragement to dance Bharata Natyam (a form of dance closely connected to Tamil identity in diaspora), but also both young women gave the example of the food that their mother prepared, saying they would eat only Indian or “Indianized” (*indienisé*) foods at home. Indianized foods were the foods that were bought at general French grocery stores—in contrast to those bought on periodic visits to La Chapelle—which their mother would modify in some way with spices or other ingredients bought from Tamil grocery stores. In this case, these young women focused less on the “authenticity” of the Tamil foods their mother cooked, but still highlighted the way in which food provides a sensorial, practiced dimension of identity. Another example of the food/Tamil culture linkage, which deals with the question of authenticity in a more melancholy fashion, is the Sri Lankan Tamil Pongal event I mentioned above (at which beef rolls were served), where, alongside traditional Tamil instruments, handicrafts such as woven baskets, and a

display on Tamil language, and entire wall of the event space was dedicated to local food products of Northeast Sri Lanka, beautifully on display in individual bowls and plates. A woman surveying the food display encouraged me to eat a sweet made with palm sugar; when I complimented it, but she told me, somewhat regretfully, that the texture is wrong here in Paris because the cold weather hardens the sweet. Faithful production of the foods of home is an important way to signal and transmit identity, but it also runs up against these challenges; moments that remind Tamils in the Paris diaspora of home, but that also echo with a sense of unhomeliness.

Both of these examples focus on the importance of *home* as the site of nourishment—here I mean to signal this in literal terms, though the provisioning of food, but simultaneously in a broader affective register. The emphasis on women’s care work through the preparation of food evokes bell hooks’s idea of the “homeplace” as a site of resistance from racist oppression, and her specific focus on its creation by female labor (emotional and otherwise) (hooks 1990). Mother’s cooking, and the home environment that surrounds it, become a frame of reference for a sense of home—and the awareness of *not* being at home in many cases, when the taste of home remains out of reach. It also gestures toward the gendered aspects of food preparation, in which women’s labor is associated with home cooking, yet male workers predominate in the kitchen environment, particularly outside of Tamil restaurants (where I have often also seen women at work), in the broader Paris food industry—a gender imbalance which is not unique to Tamil food workers, but rather widespread in the industry. To return to the examples above, whereas for the young sisters Rohini and Krithika, the Tamil “homeplace” is easily accessible in France in the mother’s kitchen, for the woman at the Pongal festival, home

foods relied on a particular location—a “back home,” elsewhere, the conditions of which are irreplacable in Paris. One could interpret this difference in a number of ways—that the sisters came as young children to France, accompanied by their whole family, and that their family’s migration from Pondicherry to France was a desired migration seen as a positive trajectory for the family (though not without its difficulties as well), versus the fact of an older, first-generation Sri Lankan Tamil women, who came to Paris as a refugee.

I want to turn now from a discussion of home cooking, and the grocery stores which provide the imported materials to (re)create the flavors of home, back to restaurants, which form the other major facet of the food landscape in La Chapelle. Restaurants highlight the duality of La Chapelle as both homely space: in which Tamil comfort foods from Sri Lanka and India can be easily obtained, and as an unhomely space in which food is prepared by strangers, rather than by one’s family. It was generally agreed upon by everyone I spoke to that the *closest* flavors to home are to be found in restaurants in La Chapelle as most Indian restaurants outside this area cater their menus and their flavors heavily to a non-Tamil/non-South Asian French audience. This results in some interesting local hybrids, naan (bread) stuffed with French “Vache Qui Rit” processed cheese, for example, is an ubiquitous menu item in Parisian Indian restaurants outside of La Chapelle. I interviewed a North Indian woman who teaches Indian cooking classes (for which she buys the ingredients in La Chapelle) and for some time used to take groups of French tourists to La Chapelle (more about tourism below) and she bemoaned the fact that so many South Asian restaurants, instead of preparing the regional specialties of their chefs or owners, prepare a kind of homogenized “Indian

food” based generally on a few classic North Indian dishes, modified to meet the generally low spice tolerance of French consumers (she gave cheese naan as one example of this dubious culinary production). I went to one such restaurant near my home in the 18th arrondissement. It is located outside of the concentration of Tamil businesses in and around La Chapelle and as such, the menu is tailored to a non-Tamil/non-South Asian audience. Tempted by the promise of saag paneer (a North Indian dish made with spinach and cheese) “fait maison” (homemade) I ordered the dish only to find that instead of firm cubes of paneer, the saag contained soft, melting “Vache Qui Rit”! After ordering, I began chatting with the woman who served us, who was an owner of the restaurant, as it turns out she is from Chennai in Tamil Nadu, and we made friendly small-talk in Tamil as I told her about the two years I’d spent living in Madurai (Tamil Nadu). At the end of our chat, she told us that at home she makes idli and dosa and that next time we came back to the restaurant we should call in advance, and she would bring us some. Here, the split between restaurant food and the foods of home become apparent in her kind offer to share the latter with us, and in the fact that such food items had to come from her home, and not the restaurant she manages.

Food as a boundary

The success of international chain-restaurants from South India in La Chapelle responds to the desire to obtain home foods in a restaurant setting. I spoke with the owner of a Paris franchises of a major South Indian (Tamil Nadu) vegetarian chain restaurant each who said that their goal was to provide customers with food just like they found at home, and that other “Indian” restaurants in Paris failed at this. Specifically, he noted that many of the restaurants proclaiming to be Indian in the area were in fact Sri Lankan.

This echoes Ramesh's remarks quoted above about the "not suitable" character of Sri Lankan (Tamil) food for (Tamil) Indians. Ramesh's remarks also point to additional internal distinctions within the category of "Indian Tamil restaurant"—the continued salience of the vegetarian/non-vegetarian divide, also true of Sri Lankan Tamil restaurants in La Chapelle. Ramesh recounted seeing the success of two major international vegetarian Indian Tamil restaurants and noticed too: "but there was not a single non-vegetarian brand. So we thought that's a good idea." Ramesh's remarks also illustrate the ability of La Chapelle's Tamil business quarter to grow by accretion. The success of the first international chains created the conditions in which other investors were willing to start their own businesses.

The popularity of these chain restaurants, which promise faithful reproduction, show the desire for familiar tastes, and familiar menus, and styles of service (servers who speak Tamil, for example). Thus the restaurant industry, as well as being a major factor in establishing the (seemingly unitary) Tamil character of the neighborhood is also an important factor in establishing differentiation within the "Tamil" umbrella identity—variations in the cuisine track regional and national divisions among their owners and patrons, and differentiations even within members of the same regional groups: as mentioned above, the choice to eat at a vegetarian or non-vegetarian restaurant, for example, is loaded with caste-conscious significance in the South Asian (including diasporic) context.

But it is not only the commitment to replicate the flavors of "home" that drives the success of international South Indian restaurants, but also the very quality of being international that elevates the brand—both in India, and in the various international

locations. This works reciprocally: while quality food items in India are commonly labeled as “export quality,” the brand’s success abroad gives it added cache at home; in the diaspora, on the other hand, it becomes a signal of authenticity, and more faithful replication of the taste of home. This is apparent in the menus and marketing materials of these international restaurants in La Chapelle, which often prominently highlight the number and location of outlets or franchises all around the world for a particular restaurant. Tamil food in the diaspora, then, can be both the taste of home, and a cosmopolitan flavor, even for its Tamil consumers. La Chapelle offers a dense concentration of Tamil-run restaurants, with dozens and dozens of eateries concentrated in the space of a few blocks. While there are a variety of other Tamil-run businesses in the neighborhood, the role of food and restaurants remains central both in the amount of real estate it represents, and in the unique draw it creates to the neighborhood, both for Tamils in Ile-de-France, and, as I will discuss below, in generating tourism to the area. Yet while the abundance of Tamil restaurants reinforces the overall “Tamil” character of the neighborhood, on an individual level the array of eateries reflects culinary distinctions which index communal distinctions, illustrating the internal diversity of this Tamil neighborhood.

The World in Paris: Flavors of Alterity

...It’s a matter of what used to look like an impossibility, of being in different places at one and the same time—‘place’ here assuming the bountiful burden of presence, its plurality assuring the permanent evacuation of such” (Taussig 1993, 254)

I want to turn now to a discussion of La Chapelle as part of “the world in Paris”—a phrase I am taking from the title of a French guide book which promises “a long

journey to the end of the block,” evoking the muddling of here and there, at home and abroad, enabled by the diversity of post-globalization contemporary urban landscapes (Lesbros 2011). This turns to a discussion of non-Tamil tourism in La Chapelle, and its role in mapping the area as a Tamil space.

First I want to make clear the relatively limited scope of this phenomenon. For it is true that the primary customer base in La Chapelle is quite clearly Tamil consumers, and secondarily other South Asians of non-Tamil background. This is in contrast to Tamil businesses outside of La Chapelle, which in many cases have adopted the model of the “*épicerie exotique*” (exotic grocery store), sometimes also described as “African [and] Asian” markets. These markets are found throughout Paris and its suburbs, though in more heavy concentrations in areas with higher immigrant populations. These markets are designed to provide a range of products, generally various Asian and African imports, unavailable at standard French grocery stores and markets. This strategy is also a way to broaden the customer base in areas of Paris outside of La Chapelle, as well as in suburban cities, where restricting the customer base to (primarily) Tamil shoppers would not allow for enough business. Within La Chapelle, there is sufficient critical mass of Tamil consumers that the stores can offer highly specialized products from Indian and Sri Lanka. However, in my fieldwork I found that ethnic tourism adds another dimension to the customer bases of these shops. The North Indian woman mentioned above, who used to conduct guided tours of La Chapelle told me that in recent years there has been an expansion of interest in India from French people and that because of this the shops of La Chapelle are doing “roaring business,” since this enables them to expand their potential market beyond a relatively limited ethnic market.

Perhaps a bit paradoxically, therefore, one of the ways in which La Chapelle is defined as a Tamil space is by attracting non-Tamil visitors through tourism materials: published guide books, private and public tours, and a variety of advertisements in media (stories about La Chapelle were published in online and print newspapers and magazines, on television, and on French and Swiss radio during the time I was conducting fieldwork). All sources of tourism material for La Chapelle are predicated on the idea of a critical mass of Tamil presence—and in many cases it is worth noting that this is described in more general terms as “Indian” cultural space, eliding the considerable Sri Lankan Tamil population. This presence is felt in the urban infrastructure of shops, temples, restaurants, window displays and public signage, but also in the presence of Tamil individuals within the urban landscape, all of which confer an “authentic” Tamil character to the neighborhood. The premise is that the location of Tamil culture in La Chapelle makes the area unique, sets it apart from the adjacent urban territory, and worthy of visiting. Such visits are often defined in terms of travel. Using the trope of travel inverts the general paradigm of migration. Instead of focusing on the voyages that have brought Tamil migrants, their descendants, and the various business and cultural spaces they have established in La Chapelle to Paris, instead Parisians (and other visitors to Paris) are invited to travel to Tamil cultural homelands—spaces that are at once defined as far away, and nearby as the tagline of *The World in Paris* promises, “a long journey to the end of the block” (Lesbros 2011).

According to this book, Paris “is a modern Tower of Babel, an inexhaustible source of cosmopolitan encounters and discoveries, and culture shock” (Lesbros 2011, 9 my translation). This passage from the book’s introductory preface shows both the

attractive and repulsive quality of Paris's diversity: on the plus side, its cosmopolitanism (portrayed as an inherent value) and its inexhaustible capacity to provide new experiences; and yet, the metaphor of the Tower of Babel carries within it its own potential for shock, confusion, and ultimately, destruction. Yet the book is clearly aimed at an audience that welcomes these encounters with "the other" and, in cataloging Paris's diversity region-by-region it lists not only sites of consumption, but also of worship, education, and suggestions for "where to run into" people from various regions and countries around the world. The promise of the book then, is precisely the potential for communication across diverse groups—perhaps a suggestion that a "modern" Tower of Babel could fare better than the ancient one.

The book combines text and photographic images of the various locations it profiles. In the section on "India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka," a full page is printed with two photos, presented without caption, to mark the beginning of this section. On the top half of the page is a close up of a pile of coconuts to be used in a Hindu religious ceremony (these impressively large stocks of coconuts are set up along the route of the Ganesh procession through La Chapelle—as well as being present on a more modest scale in daily worship at the temple and in small altars in some stores and restaurants), on the lower half is a portrait of Prabhakaran, a wide smile across his face, wearing a civilian button-up shirt, pictured alone, in front of a yellow background with a graphic of red stars. In spite of the fact that the LTTE, founded and led by Prabhakaran, has been a prohibited organization in France (and the European Union) since 2006, and that Prabhakaran was killed by the Sri Lankan Army at the war's dénouement in 2009, his image is widespread throughout La Chapelle, where he can be found most often in

political posters, but also on post cards, t-shirts, and even mugs (I recall one window display in a printing shop that had a row of mugs with photos of Prabhakaran lined up on top of a row of mugs picturing one of the artist David's iconic portraits of Napoleon Bonaparte). The fact that the image selected shows Prabhakaran in civilian clothing, not—as is much more common, the striped-camouflage Tiger military fatigues, and that it is presented without comment suggests that the makers of the book did not recognize Prabhakaran or realize his critical and controversial history. This shows first of all how successfully pro-Prabhakaran elements have been in claiming public space in La Chapelle, and also the limits of socio-historical context-free “cosmopolitan encounters.” The text of the guide book reflects these limitations as well; though several paragraphs are dedicated to the history of “Little Jaffna” (as it is referred to in the book) in Paris, particularly the Sri Lankan civil war propelling refugee migration to France, it is an account which relies on simplified generalizations (which are extremely common across international media depictions of the conflict, it bears noting), which repeat the problematic racialization of both Tamils and Sinhalese, and elides the diversity of each group (in religious terms, for example, since there are many Protestant and Catholic Tamils and Sinhalese—indeed, many Tamils in the Paris region are Catholics), and of Sri Lanka as a whole (where other ethnic groups are present): “The war opposed the Sri Lankan government, dominated by the Sinhalese Buddhist majority, with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Hindu in religion...” and that “Sri Lankans are Buddhists. They have lighter skin than the Tamils” (Lesbros 2011: 270 and 271, my translation). Of course readers truly interested in exploring the Tamil community in Paris can be expected to go beyond a few pages of reading in a general-audience tourism guide,

but nevertheless the coverage in this book represents both the promise and the poison of inter-ethnic exchange through tourism: an appreciation and awareness of the other, but one that often remains clichéd, and ultimately superficial.

To better understand how tourism functions in mapping La Chapelle as a Tamil place, and marketing that character to an outside audience, I attended a “cultural walk in La Chapelle” in Spring 2016. The walk is part of a series of such outings, which span both valences of the term “cultural”—the walks promote the kinds of artistic activities linked with culture in the sense of high culture, and they also highlight territories within Paris linked to particular immigrant or regional cultural groups within Paris. In La Chapelle, the walk combined a guided tour of the neighborhood’s Tamil spaces, with a lesson in photography. I met first with the tour guide, who explained to me the history of the outings, and the context of the non-profit group that organized them. This group organizes a variety of “cultural activities” throughout Paris in which participants are invited to explore an area of the city while engaging in different artistic activities: some examples include theatre workshops, sketching, and in the case of the tour I went on, photography. The outings are planned all throughout the city, but generally in areas that are considered to be a bit off the dominant tourist track—though the tours do sometimes include foreign tourists, they are generally aimed at those who live in or around Paris, thus the dynamic is more often that of Parisians exploring their own city. Participants pay for the tours (25 euros, or 15 for students and retirees), but the guides themselves make very little off of the tours; the guide I spoke with told me his motivations were much more personal than financial, since the time involved largely outweighed any money collected. Because the guides are essentially donating their time, they are also the

ones who propose locations and plan the trips themselves. The guide for the La Chapelle walk is a professional photographer, and he conducts two tours: one through La Chapelle, and the other through the nearby neighborhood of Goutte d'Or (a neighborhood with a long-standing and populous Arab presence, though also a substantial West African character). He had lived for ten years, from the mid-nineties to the mid-two-thousands, in the neighborhood just to the north of the Ganesh Temple (the northernmost part of La Chapelle) and that's what led him to choose this neighborhood for his photography lessons. He told me he liked living in the parts of Paris with large immigrant populations (he himself is non-immigrant), saying it was partly an aesthetic thing, but also that he felt good there ("je me sens bien"), and enjoyed the sense of "dépaysement"—which is the feeling of going outside one's country, an experience of travel, or simply exposure to something different without travel. After our conversation, I signed up to go on one of the next tours scheduled in La Chapelle, and showed up, along with my camera, to find two other participants; both were white French women, and they knew each other through work for a different arts-based social organization, I guessed that one was in her late forties or early fifties, and the other in her early thirties. A fourth person had also been scheduled to attend, but never showed up to the meeting point (another challenge of this line of tourism work). Our guide first gave us a brief history of the neighborhood and the Sri Lankan Tamil migration, and then showed us how to use some of the manual features on our cameras. He explained that the focus of this photographic tour would be photographing objects in store windows, and also indoor spaces. He reminded us that we should ask for permission before taking photos, especially if people would be the subject of the photo, or appear in the frame. First, we walked to clothing store windows along

Faubourg Saint-Denis. A shop-keeper at one invited us in, where saris were folded beautifully in floor-to-ceiling shelves along the wall. The conversation was somewhat minimal between all parties—asking if a photo was okay and then thanking the two women working there as we left. Next was a store where the guide knew the owners and had taken groups many times. The front portion sold jewelry, cosmetics, and some general household goods, but the back room was given over to religious icons and figurines. Most of these were Hindu gods and goddesses, and this seemed to be the focus of my companions' photographs, but there were also Christian images of Jesus and the cross. As we left the shop, we all thanked the owner and our tour guide made a purchase of incense, while one of the other participants bought a length of plastic flower garlanding before we left. The last stop was up to the Ganesh Temple, where first the guide recounted the origin story of the god Ganesh and then we went in. Again, the guide had pre-arranged the visit and received permission, but there was no formal interaction with the temple officials or other worshippers. Our guide told us that entry was free, but that we may wish to leave a donation in the large brass collection containers inside the temple. He spoke with a temple official (in addition to the priests, who conduct pujas throughout the day there is generally also a volunteer sitting at a table to the left of the door; this person sells offerings for the deities and is a general contact point for people entering the temple) who he already knew, but beyond smiles, none of us exchanged much other conversation with the few worshippers who were there during our time. Though in some Hindu temple contexts photography of certain areas is prohibited, at the Ganesh temple the priests seemed encouraging of photography. This has been true in less touristic situations on previous visits I've made to the Paris Ganesh temple where

worshippers often take out cell phones to record their offering of prayers, and to bring home images of the deities. Before leaving, all of us ended up putting a few euros into the collection containers. In this case, as in the store we first photographed, absent much inter-personal contact, money became the main medium for direct interaction with us, the tourists, taking on the role of consumers. This had me feeling ill at ease throughout the afternoon, as I inhabited this role of consumer-tourist, feeling more removed from than I generally did in other facets of my research, where talking about my previous studies in Tamil and my current project generally created at least some sense of connection in conversations. Yet when the tour wrapped up in a Sri Lankan Tamil owned café, where we reviewed photos, and offered feedback to the tour guide (who recorded it on his laptop to use as published reviews to encourage participation in future guided tours) over cups of masala tea, I got the sense that the other two participants felt much closer to the neighborhood and the Tamil community within it after the tour. The older woman mentioned that she had often passed by Tamil shops, but never before gone in. The younger woman said she was impressed by the feeling of having experienced “many different things” in a neighborhood “that I had thought of as homogenous” (“que je croyais uniforme”).

Tourism promises that to explore this Tamil cultural district in Paris is both to know better a “real” and “authentic” Paris, and to travel outside of Paris to a Tamil cultural space defined in reference to the territories of India and Sri Lanka. While on the one hand xenophobic narratives suggest that areas of Paris with high immigrant concentrations have “lost” their Parisian, or French character, tourism to La Chapelle also hinges on the idea that there is a different kind of real and authentic Paris defined not by

its monuments or historical significance for the nation, but precisely through the “authentic” experiences of working-class migrants themselves. While this view certainly does not mark an unproblematic incorporation of ethnic difference into the Parisian social (and urban) landscape, as the understandings of Tamil (and other minority) communities promoted through tourism are often superficial, and at times outright inaccurate, yet it creates a map of Paris as a multiethnic, cosmopolitan space, and positions those aspects—and the people who construct them—as defining factors of the city, rather than an attack on the city’s identity. This phenomenon is not isolated to La Chappelle, La Chapelle is rather one of many such neighborhoods in Paris (though the exigencies of Parisian urbanism have limited the extent to which ethnic neighborhoods can arise and thrive), and Paris is one such cosmopolitan city in a network of global or globalized cities (Sassen 1991, Appadurai 1996), as well as in a network of Tamil diasporic urban spaces (Cheran 2007).

Consuming Alterity

Returning to the discussion of the centrality of food in shaping both urban and ethnic identities, I turn now to the phenomenon of “ethnic” food tourism as a specific dimension of the overall tourist interest in La Chapelle. The first point to be made here, of course, is that “ethnic food” is a deeply loaded category, which speaks to race and class stratifications within a particular social context: these factors structure who eats “ethnic” and who just, *eats*. I pick up the term as it filters through Uma Narayan’s thoughtful examination of Lisa Heldke’s notion of food colonialism, in which “ethnic food” is understood to be the food of ethnicized subjects: newly arrived immigrant groups, and minority populations (Narayan 1995). Heldke sees a “culinary imperialism”

in the eating habits of privileged Americans who consume ethnic foods as a way of gaining prestige for themselves, without any real investment in understanding the cultures from which these cuisines originate (Heldke 1993). Or, as bell hooks states, using food and eating as a metaphor for consumption more broadly (both through consumer capitalism and sexual encounters): “The over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate—that the Other will be eaten, consumed, and forgotten” (hooks 1992, 39). Responding to Heldke, Narayan does not dismiss the critique of culinary imperialism, but wishes to “complicate this discussion of ‘food colonialism’ by thinking about ethnic foods from the point of view of immigrants to western contexts, rather than of mainstream western citizens” (Narayan 1995). Narayan emphasizes that expanding the potential consumer base *beyond* ethnic minority communities is a trend most often welcomed by the minority restaurant owners themselves, to whom this represents, to again quote the North Indian tour guide of La Chapelle, the possibility of “roaring business” for Tamil restaurants and shops. Narayan’s broader point is that ethnic restaurants are “an integral part of contemporary western landscapes,” and thus, “what mainstream western eaters who are concerned about ‘food colonialism’ need to think about most are not the original cultural contexts of these ‘ethnic foods’, but rather the complex social and political implications of who produces and who eats such ‘ethnic foods’ in western contexts” (Narayan 1995, 79). Such an approach includes a condemnation of structural impediments to full inclusion of ethnic minorities in Western societies, but ultimately affirms the democratizing potential of ethnic restaurants to “contribute to an appreciation of [minority groups] presence in the national community,

despite ignorance about the cultural contexts of their foods—these pleasures of the palate providing more powerful bonds than knowledge” (ibid, 80). Familiarity with local “ethnic” restaurants therefore contextualizes these spaces of economic, culinary, and cultural exchange not as links to foreign territories, but rather emplaced within local urban landscapes. While not overstating the potential of these bonds forged through food, it is important to contrast this to the alternative of finding the food of the other repulsive, and refusing to eat it. Years before I began researching this project, during another stay in Paris, I was once shopping at a Vietnamese-owned grocery store when I overheard a conversation between a white French man and woman next to me, as they were browsing the vegetable selection, displayed out on the street in front of the store, as is typical in small markets in Paris. The woman, looking at a selection of yams, wondered out loud how one would cook them; in reply, the man proclaimed dismissively, “oh, but that’s for Africans!” And the pair walked away without making a purchase. The event has stayed with me through the years because of the way in which it illustrates the conflation of a category of “ethnic foods” which encompasses the mainly Asian products offered by the store (which I shopped at frequently) and the idea of “African food” held by the passers-by, as well as their clear refusal to enter into that category. Just as I described Tamil food landscapes as terrains of differentiation, this French couple used food as a way to identify alterity, and, in this case, reject it.

Longing and Belonging as Cosmopolitan Affects

La Chapelle is *simultaneously* a Parisian neighborhood, and a Tamil neighborhood. Paris’s “Little Jaffna” is one of many worldwide, embedded in a network of circulating Tamil cultural practice, *and* situated within the particular context of

contemporary Paris and France. The kinds of interactions motivated by the affective registers of longing and belonging, demonstrate how cosmopolitanism is lived in the everyday spaces of the city, and formed through the interactions in and within urban space. Asserting a sense of belonging means claiming Paris as home for diasporic communities—even while acknowledging the ways that new landscapes of belonging remain haunted by a sense of the unhomely, and a longing for homes lost through migration. The cosmopolitan affect of longing for alterity in the city, on the other hand, illustrates both the potential to disrupt host-guest models of cosmopolitanism by recognizing certain neighborhoods as ethnic minorities as co-hosts rather than guests in the city, but, when mediated through the limited exchanges of consumption and entertainment, risks producing exoticization rather than solidarity.

Cheran reminds us that diasporiCity is at once a landscape ripe with the possibility of new forms of Tamil identity (which, importantly, are not deemed “inauthentic” for their newness), and as a space opened through alienation and loss (Cheran 2007). La Chapelle reflects this duality, it is a space where Tamils come to meet each other, socialize, worship, eat foods of home (or as close as possible!), and buy the products that enable them to make Tamil homeplaces of their own through the consumer-commuter journeys between La Chapelle and various residential areas; and, simultaneously, a space of ambivalence: marked by the cold climate, the various limitations of French urbanism and a gentrifying real estate market, the imposed mediation of public transportation, and, for some, the vulnerabilities of being a young woman in public spaces, or being subjected to the pressures of (pro-LTTE) Tamil

nationalism. The two sides of the experience—homely and unhomely—do not cancel each other out.

Anxieties about the production of visibly ethnic space—that is, a space in which ethnic difference is made legible to an outside audience, and ethnic sameness is made accessible to minority populations—tends to see only the aspect of sameness and repetition. Areas in which migrant cultures are made visible in the city tend to be seen as faithful reproductions of cultural practices and the territories from which they originate overlooking the ways in which this Parisian urban space is clearly differentiated from homeland referents by Tamils themselves, and the processes of gentrification that structure the residential/commercial duality of La Chapelle as a Tamil business district, but not a Tamil residential space. When only elements of mimetic Tamil cultural production are recognized, spaces of Tamil cultural expression in Paris are interpreted as foreign spaces within France. Ethnic tourism turns that anxiety on its head, instead welcoming “foreign” spaces into the city as positively valuated spaces which fulfill a longing for alterity. But overstating their foreignness carries similar risks of rendering the “Frenchness” of the space invisible and hyper-visibilizing “Tamilness,” giving the impression that Tamil Paris exists outside, rather than within—and constitutive of—contemporary Paris, and contemporary French society. Tamil migrants themselves will often focus on the specificities of the locations of these transnational communities—they are not liable to forget the major disjunctures involved in leaving one “home” to build another: this is the unhomely hardness of the palm sugar, to evoke a culinary metaphor from my fieldwork. It is at once the sweetness of home, and the bitterness of exile.

CHAPTER FOUR—Ritual Without Religion, Culture Without Ethnicity: Tamil Public Festivals in Paris

This chapter examines the ways in which Tamil identity is performatively enacted in several public celebrations, namely in three different celebrations of Pongal (a secular Tamil harvest festival) throughout Paris, and in two different Hindu chariot festivals in La Chapelle. I focus in particular on how such enactments refer simultaneously to spatially distant (i.e. homeland) territories and encode Tamil identity into Parisian spaces, and in so doing produce diverse enactments of Tamil communities, rooted in Paris, and branching out in transnational relationships. I argue that the diversity of articulations of “Tamil-ness”, hosted by diverse constituencies within the overarching “Tamil community” in Paris illustrate that Tamil communities do not come to a multicultural stage as pre-existing entities but rather emerge performatively—this is in line with a theoretical orientation that all identities are performatively enacted, therefore it is not *that* Tamilness is enacted which is my focus, but rather, *how*, and what the implications of each enactment are.

I argue that the festivals should not be merely be viewed through the dominant lens of “making visible” an a priori Tamil community (which is the dominant framing of most existing commentary on the largest, the Ganesh Festival, which is the only one that has attracted much scholarly/media attention²²) because it is through these events that something called the “Tamil community” in Paris is brought into being. Instead, one

²² An article in the French Catholic newspaper, La Croix entitled, “Les Hindouistes de France en quête de visibilité” (Hindus in France in search of Visibility) is one example of this narrative in the popular press (Lesegetrain 2012).

should focus on what the stakes of performing “a” Tamil community are in the political context in which they take place, in this case, a diverse Parisian landscape in which the dominant ideology of French Republicanism is hostile to enactments of minority ethnic and religious practice. While the Pongal celebrations foreground Tamil ethnic unity, and the chariot processions seek to build a community in religious (Hindu), rather than ethnic (Tamil) terms, all of these public enactments of Tamil culture and Hinduism (which are, critically, not synonymous forms of self-identification) are constrained by the ambivalence of city and state level officials towards multiculturalism as public practice, but facilitated by a depoliticized, albeit marginalizing, representation of Hinduism as a “cultural” rather than “religious” practice.

The Ganesh festival, which has been held in La Chapelle for over a decade, has in recent years drawn crowds as large as 30,000 people. It is the largest such festival in Europe, and as such attracts members of the Tamil diaspora from throughout France and Europe, as well as other Hindus, and, importantly, a large number of spectators without any particular religious or cultural ties to the event. Organizers are able to stage a large-scale religious festival with the support of the city of Paris, through framing the event as “cultural” rather than “religious” in order to comply with the dominant context of French secularism (*laïcité*). The same unique relationship of Hinduism to the French state (namely, its lack of status as an official religion) also facilitates the annual Rath Yatra, a Hindu chariot festival hosted annually by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in Paris, which, though it is not a majority-Tamil organization, takes place in the same location (of La Chapelle) as the iconic Ganesh Festival. In this chapter, I compare the Ganesh festival (which I attended in 2012, 2014, 2015, and 2017) with the

Rath Yatra (2015) and with several celebrations for the secular festival of Pongal that took place in 2016. I argue that while each of the Pongal festivals seeks to unify Tamil communities by reaching to a shared cultural heritage to reconcile painful histories of war, caste oppression, and colonization, and to position a united Tamil community as model secular citizens in a multicultural French national community, they paradoxically attract stigma from a wider French public by foregrounding (minority) ethnic unity. In contrast, while the Hindu Chariot Festivals would seem antithetical to France's famously secular public culture, they are rendered publically acceptable by presenting Hindu ritual as a de-ethnicized "cultural" practice. The seemingly paradoxical situation of enactments of ritual without religion, and culture without ethnicity is made legible through an understanding of how secularism as a discourse in contemporary France is used to delimit normative and non-normative French subjects, not merely along the axis of religious/secular, but also in a sort of civilizational hierarchy in which the abject other is the figure of the radicalized (and racialized) Muslim (Lentin and Titley, 2011). Last of all, and importantly, though secularism is often taken to be the mark of Western cultural and political superiority, it also has a genealogy in non-Western contexts, including Tamil political movements, a point I explore below.

Practiced Places and Grounded Selves: Localized Performativity

In this chapter I put the construction of self in conversation with the construction of place. To facilitate this conversation, I will also curate a conversation between Butlerian performativity, de Certeauian politics of space, and Tamil notions of *ur*, or homeland (see below for a more detailed explanation of *ur*). To start out, it will perhaps help to return to R. Cheran's call to attend to "the space of the hyphen," this time not as a

metaphorical space, but as a space which is, in de Certeau's terms, "a practiced place" (Cheran 2007; De Certeau 1984). This will lead us to examine the kinds of practice—in the form of public celebrations—which produce, simultaneously, Tamil spaces and Tamil selves in Paris.

My use of Judith Butler's notion of performativity in regards to the formation of diaspora social groups is inspired by Ramy Aly's use of this analytic framing in his ethnography of British-Arab youth in London (Butler 1990; Butler 1993; Ramy 2015). A theoretical understanding of ethnicity as performative emphasizes that diasporic ethnic identity is not merely carried with migrant communities like a suitcase, but rather emerges in and through the process of migration and resettlement itself, and indeed, that the context of resettlement shapes the forms that diaspora ethnic identity will take. However, whereas Aly's examination of the performative nature of the construction of diaspora identity among Arabs in London leads to a critique of the dominant context of multiculturalism in the United Kingdom which interpolates "minority" subjects to performatively enact and embody racialized and ethnicized group identities (ibid), I maintain that the situation in France is markedly different, and as such, that public expressions of Tamil identity such as the Ganesh Theertthirvizhu or Pongal celebrations should not be reduced to the pressures to perform an ethnicized identity in a multicultural context. First of all because the political stakes of multiculturalism in Paris are still far from being established as a hegemonic norm, but may importantly function as a counter-hegemonic political stance to dominant discourses which continue to privilege assimilation and an interpretation of *laïcité* (secularism) which seeks to render minority religious expression invisible in public spaces; secondly because the element of

continuity from family, regional, and even national traditions is important to diasporic populations on many levels, beyond an overarching “ethnic” identity, it also enables relationships between people, and between people and gods. And simultaneously enables relationships between people and territories, creating sacred spaces in unfamiliar territories through a Tamil ritual vocabulary and thus transforming those spaces from foreign to intimate. I am interested, therefore, in exploring the ways that performative iterations of Tamilness in Paris do not only create French-Tamil subjects, but also transform the identities of the spaces in which they take place, co-producing Tamil selves and Tamil spaces from *within* Paris. Necessarily, this also involves understanding the local context in which these celebrations take place, all the more so since differing levels of participation by French state and Parisian local-urban representatives and infrastructures are an integral part of how these celebrations are enacted. Specifically, the context of stigmatized minority identity attempting a collective instantiation of belonging in the valorizing context of cosmopolitan Paris, even while the very terms of the engagement—that ethnic difference itself is being made public—are fraught with anxieties over French fears of “communitarian” multiculturalism.

Yet an analysis of diasporic cultural celebration that attends exclusively to the context of resettlement—in this case, that is framed exclusively within the problematic and polemic of multiculturalism and secularism in France—would certainly fail to answer the question of why cultural practice is important to the very people who conduct it. After all, it is not *just* to construct and project a collective self-image that these festivals are celebrated. Far from it; as we will see, people celebrate in the Ganesh Festival for religious devotion, to feel closer to family and community members, to show

thankfulness for blessings conferred, in longing for blessings to be conferred, and indeed for as many reasons as there are participants. Pongal celebrations, too, are important social and familial events, often rich with nostalgia for older participants, and all the excitement of a major celebration for children. So while I wrote above that ethnicity is not something that is picked up and carried like a suitcase from homeland to diasporic locations, neither should we say that migrants travel without cultural luggage of any kind. To that end, it is equally important to contextualize these celebrations from a Tamil ethnographic context which offers its own insights to the ties between public ritual, self-construction, community-formation, and place.

Fortuitously, the interaction of self-making and place-making have a robust heritage in Tamil scholarship in the form of the “ur,” a Tamil concept of home or homeland. Valentine Daniel defines “ur” as a kind of scalar system of membership from natal village outward (Daniel 2010). He writes, “every Tamil, by definition, has an ur of his own” (ibid, 323), that is, s/he is an “uran,” a Tamil word for someone from the/a ur, which Daniel defines as “a being to whom being-in-the-ur is his way of being” (ibid, 336), that is, belonging to a place, an ur, is an integral part of Tamil selfhood. Daniel argues, the loss of the ur, this self-referential location in which one dwells (in the Hiedegarian sense, thus, in which one is rooted even if one is not physically present there) is one of the deepest losses faced by Tamil refugees, such that it constitutes not only a displacement, but a kind of unmooring: “When a Tamil loses her ur—to an extent that is not the case in the loss of other things, including house and property—s/he loses her world, which was for her, *the* world, and is then forced into a quest for authenticity in a strange space out of place” (ibid, 329). Sharika Thiranagama’s ethnographic work with

displaced Muslims in Sri Lanka showed how this loss extended over generations, with parents lamenting that their children did not and never could inhabit the same *ur* that they once had (Thiranagama 2011). Thiranagama's work also draws attention to the fact that "ur" and "homeland" are not necessarily perfectly overlapping categories, and that notions of "homeland" can slide between personal relationships to hometowns, geographic designations, or indeed, political allegiance to the notion of an independent state of Tamil Eelam (Thirangama 2014)²³. My analysis of Tamil celebrations in Paris therefore sees performativity and emplacement as linked terms. Mindful of the context of the *ur* in which place and self are intertwined, I look for how the lost *ur* is made present (if only partially) in the space and time of the festival, and for ways in which the festivals seek to re-root Tamil selves in Parisian landscapes.

"Murugan and Ganesha Love Paris"²⁴: Hindu Sacred Landscapes in La Chapelle

It's hard to describe the particular pitch and the timber of Tamil devotional music being played over loud speakers, at such a volume as to just slightly distort the sound, over the hum of the hundreds, even thousands, of voices of spectators gathered along any given point of the procession route; conversations in Tamil, in French, in Tamil on one

²³ In comments on this chapter, Sharika Thiranagama also noted the salience of caste to the very notion of the *ur*. In Diane Mines's ethnography of Hindu ritual processions in Tamil Nadu she describes how social and economic distinctions between the caste-Hindus and Dalits are expressed in the spatial division between the central territory of the *ur* proper and those who are relegated to peripheral space of the *katu* (Mines 2005, 49). In a city like Paris in which as many as 50% of the Sri Lankan population is Dalit, perhaps the concept of the *ur* itself must be called into question? (No statistics exist on caste composition of Paris, but this figure was suggested to me in August 2014 in an interview with Shobasakthi, and author/actor who is highly involved in Dalit community organizing in Paris).

²⁴ Section title taken from the article, "Murugan and Ganesha Love Paris: Two Gods enjoy a yearly chariot festival that's as good as it gets anywhere (Flament 2002). This article is written for a transnational Hindu audience.

side (parents) and French on the other (their responding children). To which is added, at various moments, the sharp sound of coconuts cracking against pavement, the singing of a group of women in the procession, the smack and roll of the heavy wooden *kavadi* frames over the backs of dancers. The laborious forward momentum of the enormous chariots, conveying gods under canopies swathed in bright silks, patchworks, and the verdant shade afforded by clusters of banana leaves, all moving forward under the power of many hands of the faithful, pulling two thick coir ropes down the middle a Parisian street, replacing the normal traffic of cars, motor scooters, and city buses.

For over two decades, this has been an annual event, known as the Fête du Dieu Ganesh—the Ganesh Festival, or Vinayakar Theertthiruvizha—the chariot festival of Vinayakar, another name for Ganesh, more commonly used by Tamil speakers, or Ganesh Chaturthi, the name of the auspicious day, usually around the end of August or beginning of September (though calculated according to the lunar calendar) on which Ganesh is venerated, and around which the festival is timed--though as Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud has noted, in Paris this date is rescheduled to the nearest Sunday, since permits for the procession can only be obtained on this day, owing to the lesser traffic (Goreau-Ponceaud, 2014). Growing in scale year by year, the festival now attracts around 30,000 participants and spectators. The core participation in the festival—its organization and its funding—comes from the Ganesh Temple of La Chapelle. While the external signage to the temple bears the French name, “Temple de Ganesh,” is it also known as by the Tamil name Sri Manicka Vinayakar Alayam, and the promotional materials for the festival—namely flyers and posters that feature in nearly every shop window of La Chapelle, as

well as in other Tamil-owned businesses outside of La Chapelle in the weeks leading up to the festival are French/Tamil bilingual.

“Theertthiruvizha” means holy chariot festival, and is the Tamil name of a particular kind of Hindu festival that consists of taking the temple deities—that is to say, their embodied presence in the forms of the statuary images of the gods and goddesses to whom regular worship is offered in the temple—outside of the temple, a process which affords a mutual opportunity for devotees to express their devotion to the deities, and for the deities to bless the people and places they encounter during along the route of their processions (the Sanskrit term, Ratha Yatra describes the same kind of festival). Before the procession itself are two weeks of ritual and ceremony that take place at the temple. And as Soumya, the niece of the temple’s founder, and a core volunteer at the temple told me, in order to organize the procession, attending to both the sacred and mundane (including obtaining the appropriate permits from the city) demanded a lot of time: ‘Those five hours of the procession take a lot of work!’²⁵ In 2013, I attended a ceremony, about two weeks before the procession itself, during which Ganesh was installed on the seat that would later be taken out in the chariot. The generally austere exterior of the temple was decorated with mango leaf garlands, and the single room of the temple was packed. The rack of shoes in the small enclave of the entrance overflowing out onto the street, a small prelude to the festival itself, in which the temple would spill over onto and take over not only the space of the sidewalk in front, but a triangular procession of several kilometers. This act of coming out onto the street also necessitates coordination

²⁵ Translation from French; notes from an unrecorded conversation, May 2016.

with the city, when I asked if the permit process was complicated, Soumya replied, ‘No, it’s not complicated, but we couldn’t do it everyday!’ She noted, too, ‘When we do the procession, we respect the French rules (règles). We are responsible for the streets.’ Indeed, this process of taking on the responsibility of the streets, is related to a special investment in that space, not only in terms of the kind of legal responsibility Soumya gestured to in our interview, but from within the logic of the ritual as well.

The path of the Ganesh Theertthiruvizha enacts its own form of spatialization. As Knut Jacobsen writes, on Hindu religious processions more generally: “Religious processions are particular displays of religion that lay claim to public space. Some are pilgrimage processions that move towards a sacred space, others make their space sacred as they progress” (Jacobsen 2008, 5). Diane Mines, in her ethnography of a Tamil ritual procession in South India notes that the procession “also lays claim to territory and defines sets of social inclusions and exclusions” (Mines 2005, 40). Sandra Freitag, discussing “Hindu” mobilization in North India in the late 19th century describes how public procession and religious organizing are not only motivated by the desire to consolidate as single religious community in opposition to others (in this case, Muslims), but are also driven through internal rivalries, which in turn become obscured under the larger category of “Hindu”:

That is, as one group of Hindus expanded or rehabilitated an old religious procession, a competing group would infuse religious symbolism into a popular bathing fair. It would thus appear to those outside the "Hindu" boundary that those inside were trying to expand the activities which reinforced Hindu identity, and that this was being done at the expense of those left outside. (Freitag 1980, 603)

It is not unexpected, then, that a diaspora festival becomes an event to performatively forge relationships between people, gods, and places, since ethnographic accounts of

Tamil ritual processions suggest that is an integral aspect of the practice; drawing in the wider political context of the ritual should not, then, be seen as a way in which diaspora religious practice *departs* from an originary practice coded as more “authentic,” instead, we should expect the chariot procession to be a political—and politicized event—without that frame diminishing the motivations articulated by participants in more religious and devotional frames.

Ganesh festivals in particular have a significant political history. Raminder Kaur’s comparison of Ganapati (a local name for Ganesh) imagery in Western India over a hundred year period shows the evolution of Ganapati imagery from warrior-like anti-colonial icon to the child-like pot-bellied imagery (supposedly more scripturally faithful) which characterizes modern depictions of the deity, and illustrates how the “religious” celebration of Ganapati utsava (Ganesh festival) carries parallel political significance (Kaur 2002). With the ascendance of the BJP political party in India, there has been a particular instrumentalization of the Ganesh Chaturthi with Hindutva (Hindu nationalism), which has aligned the celebration, for some, with this politicized form of Hinduism (see Fuller 2001 for discussion of this link in Tamil Nadu, and The Hindu August 22, 2017 for a more recent critique from within Tamil Nadu). One man I spoke with, a middle-aged, highly educated, French-Tamil bilingual man who had grown up in Pondicherry and moved to Paris as an adult who expressed a kind of hostile dismissal of the Ganesh festival, I was surprised, since indeed others I had spoken to in my research talked about the event’s importance “for the community,” and when I inquired further, he made a connection between the rise of the Ganesh festival here and elsewhere in diaspora, and the way that Hindutva politics in India have been working with diasporic

organizations to encourage a restrictive and Sanskritized expression of Hindusim abroad, which is part of a religio-nationalist political movement at home. I found his to be an interesting analysis, which is why I have included this framing for consideration here. Yet, I also wonder to what extent that is an Indian-centric understanding of the event. It is true that Ganesh processions have taken on an important role in Hindutva politics in India; but while it may be the case that in India the worship of Ganesh is understood as the importation of a predominantly Northern religious practice into the South, the centrality of Ganesh to the Ganesh Temple in Paris stems from his status as the *kulam devi* (family deity) of the founder, and the continuation of a family legacy of founding Ganesh temples in northern Sri Lanka. Moreover, Ganesh is a common and beloved figure in Sri Lanka in ways that also undercut other forms of social and ethnic division—worshipped by Upcountry Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils, but also found in Buddhist temples, with the Sinhalese name Ganadeviyo. I do not introduce this politicized context to suggest that this overrides the event’s other, positive, salencies—devotional, personal, an expression of community unity, and so many more—but rather to underscore the point that while on its face the festival’s function as representative seems self-evident (it indeed succeeds in assembling the *largest* Tamil constituency in Paris), that representativeness is in fact situated in a contested political context.

Within Paris, the Ganesh festival is enacted as “non-political” by avoiding Tamil nationalism, and through using a particular orientation of cultural rather than religious celebration, but it’s seemingly apolitical form is actually political in how it aligns the Tamil community with a particular practice of Hinduism that is linked to a Sanskritized and, at times chauvinistic, form of Hinduism. Yet I do not wish to overstate this point, for

while the larger—indeed global—context of politicized Hindu is relevant, the temple is also a space of continuing Tamil cultural practice, and is meaningful for many in its congregation because of the continuity it affords with religious practices that span ties to distant geographies, and also to distant generations as an inherited tradition, often one that is being actively passed down to children who are brought to the temple, and whose life events are marked through temple celebrations.

Indeed, the Ganesh festival has an unparalleled status as a representational event, both popularly within Paris, and also reflected in the scholarship of Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud, who has published most extensively on Tamil communities in France. Goreau-Ponceaud offers this analysis of the Paris Ganesh Festival:

This ritual process of ambulation around the temple assumes renewed meanings among Tamils in Paris, in so far as it also delimits a political space of identification between the city and the Tamil community. The main function of this procession in a diasporic context is to exhibit one's own religious culture. The latter becomes a marker of cultural uniqueness. This procession can also become the means to form ethnic communities and identities in the immigrant context, especially as the route of the procession has never been changed. The procession-ritualized time enables the community to stick out from discretion and be visible in full view of everyone, which makes it a means of drawing public attention. While the Ganesha festival is organized with the aim of allowing the Tamil population to achieve a certain degree of legitimacy within the French public sphere and society, the process is far from going unquestioned by the French polity. (Goreau-Ponceaud 2014, 229)

Goreau-Ponceaud's analysis of the event emphasizes the performative enactment of Tamil identity, and the way in which this co-creates both a Tamil community and Tamil neighborhood through the spatial rooting of that community's identity in the particular urban space of the procession's path (i.e. in and immediately around La Chapelle). In his formulation, "visibility is a first step towards recognition in public space" (my translation Goreau Ponceaud 2008, page 397).

I wish to challenge the (apparently) singular representativeness of the Ganesh procession on two levels. First, that while an ethnic link between the Tamil community and the Ganesh Temple is clearly an important part of its history and contemporary functioning, in ethnographic encounters at the temple I found that temple leadership was eager to downplay such a link, and highlight the multiethnic, or even *non-ethnic* character of their religious practice, and religious community; that is, a Hindu community resisting claims of being (at least *exclusively*) a Tamil ethnic community. This involves contextualizing the temple's articulations of a Hindu identity within the context of French state interface with religious institutions, and, through both comparison and contrast to another chariot procession which takes place by La Chapelle, and is organized by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Secondly, as mentioned above, I will turn to Pongal festivals as alternative articulations of Tamil identity in Paris, to highlight the possibility of alternate frames of representation for the Tamil community outside of a Hindu religious tradition; that is, non-Hindu, or more accurately multi-religious, Tamil communities. While my analysis of these events seeks to contextualize them in broader French discourses of multiculturalism and secularism, I argue that they should also be understood from a genealogy of Tamil political thought and engagement with secularism and multi-religious and multi-ethnic (if not “multicultural”) social politics in order to understand exactly why and how other Tamil organizations put forth differing self-representations.

Animating the critique of the representativeness of these specific events is a critique of the idea of community “visibility” more generally, since the kind of identity-work being done in both the Ganesh and Pongal celebrations (and even the ISKCON

Rath Yatra in La Chapelle) shows that communities--Tamils and all others--are not something *a priori* that is made visible through the public event, but rather something that is performatively brought in to being as it is brought into view, and importantly, that for the Tamil community in Paris, community remains plural, not singular. Before my analysis of ritual processions in La Chapelle, and Pongal celebrations in and around Paris, I will briefly turn to the politics of visibility in Paris, arguing that this term must be understood not as a natural product of someone or some set of practices being done “in public” (as opposed to a “private sphere” which is presumed to be the only appropriate place for the expression of minority cultural, and especially religious, practice), but rather as a kind of linguistic metaphor which becomes comprehensible only within the wider discursive context—and specific political enactments—of secularism and multiculturalism in the context in which these festivals take place.

In/visibility and In/divisibility

In the French discourse of minority identity, visibility serves as a strong metaphor. From the concept of the “visible minority” to the contentious legal and social definitions of so-called “ostentatious displays”²⁶ of religious identities, the visual recognition of difference and its management are central to understandings of France’s contemporary social landscape, namely the desire for an indivisible national community, and anxieties about its divisibility. Likewise, a sense of “invisibility” is synonymous with social and economic marginalization. In conversations with Tamils living in Paris, as well as media representations of French Tamil communities, issues of visibility are a

²⁶ French law prohibits the amorphously defined category of “ostentatious displays” of religion in a number of public settings.

prevalent theme—both through a perceived sense of the “invisibility” of the Tamil community, and the simultaneous hyper-visibility of cultural and racialized differences.

As Olivier Voirel notes, “Everything seems to indicate that the question of visibility henceforth occupies a preponderant place in contemporary societies” (Voirel 2005, 89, my translation). This is perhaps especially true in France where a wide swath of social and political movements have been conceptualized as a part of a “struggle for visibility” (Voirel 2005; Macé 2007), and where the term “visible minority” is both a popular and sociological category for understanding non-majoritarian identities in France. In this formulation that which is “visible” about the person described as a “visible minority” are specific forms of “difference” which are socially and culturally rendered visible through contrast to an unmarked, normative standard. Éric Macé argues that the term “occludes what it refers to—the social structures of race—by using the euphemism ‘visible’” (Macé 2007, 76, my translation). In spite of its shortcomings the term remains a dominant lens through which to conceptualize—and quantify—forms of discrimination against minorities in France; for example in a survey on discrimination conducted in 2008 by l’Ined and l’Insee—the French National Institutes of Demographic, and Statistical and Economic Studies, respectively—concluded that “Among minorities...not all groups are ‘equal’ when it comes to discrimination. The most visible are the first to be its victims” (Beauchemin et al. 2010, 2, my translation). In fact the write-up of the study published by the National Institute of Demographic Studies (l’Ined) is entitled “Discrimination: A question of visible minorities” (ibid).

Already we see a double valence of the quality of “visibility” emerging—on the one hand, a visibility that is struggled for by social movements in order to escape the

social and economic marginalization described as a state of “invisibility”, and on the other, visibility itself as the very thing that makes individuals and communities susceptible to discrimination. Indeed, this ambivalent or doubled quality to in/visibility applies to the Tamil diasporic communities living in the Ile de France region who are susceptible to the accusation of being improperly “assimilated,” and thus attracting the stigmatizing visibility of the so-called unassimilated minority (see Mbembe 2013; Balibar 1991). Yet Sri Lankan Tamil groups in Paris also seek to become visible, as we have seen, through public celebrations, and also, thought that is not the focus of this chapter, in an attempt to gain wider political recognition for the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka (efforts which are largely expressed through support for an ethnically defined Tamil nation-state, Eelam) (see Dequierez 2011).²⁷

Indeed the metaphor of in/visibility is so prevalent in France that it may not immediately appear to be a metaphor at all. That the qualities encoded in the term “visible minority”—namely phenotypical variance from whiteness—are indeed “visible” is taken for granted. But this is only possible if the markers of whiteness itself are rendered invisible, if not, both majority and minority individuals would be equally “visible,” and the term would lose all meaning. In this way when a deviation from majority is named—when the difference is rendered not only as visible but as salient—the specificity of the majoritarian identity is effaced, made invisible, the unmarked standard against which “visible” difference will be recognized. The way that this plays out for individual bodies is similar to how ethnic difference is constructed in the city, the

²⁷ See also Giacomo Mantovan’s work on Sri Lankan Tamil asylum narratives in Paris, which explores the extent to which LTTE membership or support becomes a “collective history” of the Sri Lankan Tamil community (Mantovan 2018).

marked quality of “ethnic territories” renders normative ethnicity invisible in the urban space.

In addition to the question of who is made in/visible through the discourse of visible minority, is the question of to *whom* they are visible (or not). There is, therefore, a hidden actor implicated in this terminology, the viewing subject. The term then reveals an implicit understanding of identity not (only) as a self-generated state, but as something granted externally, through the gaze of others. Just as Saussure argued that words only become distinguishable and thus intelligible through the larger framework of grammar, it seems to me that “visible minorities” are made visible—and intelligible—through the wider discourses of secularism and multiculturalism, the dominant discourses which produce and manage minority status, for, as Asad notes—“minorities are defined as minorities only in hierarchical structures of power” (Asad 2003, 175). The contrast between the stigma of unassimilation and the positive value of forming part of a cosmopolitan urban patchwork illustrates the extent to which visibility is not merely an antidote to the negative conditions of invisibility, but is rather an ambivalent position, constantly open to negotiation and interpretation. The public celebrations discussed in this chapter are engaged in those acts of negotiation, which are open to multiple interpretations, from the diverse Tamil communities they both assemble and make claims to represent, and from a wider French social body which is by no means external to these celebrations, but rather interpolated as both spectator and participant.

Temples and Temporality

The Ganesh Festival is notable for its scale and grandeur. In fact, in *The Encyclopedia of the Sri Lankan Diaspora* uses a photograph of the Paris Ganesh festival

spread over two full pages as a title page for the section “The Communities,” which has subheadings detailing the various centers of Sri Lankan diaspora organized by continent in Asia, North America, Europe, and “Australiasia” (Australia and New Zealand), suggesting the festival’s iconic status not only for Tamil communities in Paris and France, but throughout the many sites of the diaspora (Reeves, ed. 2013). I suspect that the implicit visual contrast between Haussmannian Parisian urbanism and Tamil ritual aesthetics makes these images particularly appealing, both to Tamil and European/Western audiences.

In addition to attracting massive Tamil Hindu participation, the festival is also, and explicitly, an open invitation to interact with the Ganesh Temple, and by extension, with the wider communities—variously and over-lappingly defined in ethnic (Tamil) and religious (Hindu) terms—of which it has come to be a representative institution. The Ganesh Temple is mediatized as the sort of central institution of Paris’s Tamil community to an unparalleled extent (see also Dequierez 2002, page 30). I noticed a trend in press articles about La Chapelle or Tamil communities in Paris/France generally to use images from the Ganesh Festival—this may in part be a strategic decision, such images are easily obtained and do not run afoul of French law concerning the use of private images, they are also visually appealing and exhibit a distinctiveness that an everyday urban scene of the same streets on which the procession takes place would lack. The temple also functions as a key site of openness into the Tamil community, in part because contact information is easily available on the temple’s extensive website. I first made email contact with the temple during my preliminary fieldwork in August 2013. During a photography tour of La Chapelle in which non-Tamil tourists are introduced to the

neighborhood, the tour concludes with a visit to the temple, and it is the site of the most sustained interaction between tourists and Tamil community members in La Chapelle (as discussed in the previous chapter). But as I argue throughout this chapter, such claims of ethnic representativeness are easily troubled—not the least by temple leadership themselves, who were eager in my even my earliest exchanges with them to highlight the “mixité” (diversity—generally indicating an ethnic/racialized dimension) of the temple. Indeed the notes from my first visit to the temple, during which I met with middle-aged Sri Lankan Tamil woman whose contact information I’d gotten as a result of writing to the contact email listed on the temple’s website, show the all-caps word MIXITE, in the notations of our brief introductory conversation, in which she told me about the temple’s founding and current activities. I most likely highlighted this word in my notes at least in part because this challenged certain preconceptions I myself had about the temple—my notes from my first visit to the temple’s services also make note that though the congregants were certainly primarily Tamil in background, they were by no means exclusively so, and this point went on to be highlighted to me in almost all my subsequent interactions with the temple. In an interview with a major temple volunteer in May of 2016, “Soumya” emphasized what she presented as the temple’s historical role as a Sri Lankan Tamil community hub in its early years and told the story of its progression into a Hindu center, certainly for Hindu Tamils from Sri Lanka, but also for other non-Tamil South Asian communities, and for non-South Asian Hindus. Previous research done on the temple also notes the readily-observed inter-ethnic nature of the temple space as early as 2002 (Dequirez 2002) and in an interview in 2007, the temple’s (now deceased) founder, Sanderasakaram, noted the temple’s openness to non-Tamils in almost

identical terms to what I was told by three temple representatives with whom I spoke (Goreau-Ponceaud 2008, 248); however in previous analyses, these remarks are not given extended attention, and the Tamil community-building role of the temple is emphasized. Yet these earlier studies do recount a salient point in relation to this: that the festival was banned from the portion of its ritual circumambulation of the streets which lay in the 10th arrondissement by that arrondissement's mayor in 1999 and 2000 (Goreau-Ponceaud 2014). Dequierez discusses the 2000 ban, quoting the mayor, Tony Dreyfus, from an article in the major newspaper *Le Monde* in which he expresses his fear of a "Little India" forming, leading to transformation of the 10th arrondissement into a "little New York" (Dequierez 2002, 9). These layered invocations of a "little" elsewhere reveal first, in the anxious reference to a Little India, a concern that migrant/minority populations create foreign spaces within France; secondly, the idea of Paris itself becoming a "Little New York," is an instantiation of a widely spread invocation of a spectral "Anglo-American" model of multiculturalism which is seen as antithetical to French republican equality. And yet the Ganesh festival has travelled through the streets of both the 10th and 18th arrondissement every year since, and seems to have become fully absorbed in local and city-level calendars, where it is no longer the subject of controversy, but rather publicized as a tourist event, the account below examines this transformation in reception in more detail.

The Ganesh festival—and the Ratha Yatra, which I will describe below—are presented as "cultural celebrations" within the urban space, while simultaneously being important religious events for their participants. This is facilitated by Hinduism's lack of status as an "official" religion in France. The contrast with the mediatized panic about

Muslim prayer in the streets shows the uneven unease with which public religion is viewed in France. A second point of contrast would be the Catholic religious processions which take place with some frequency in the streets surrounding Catholic churches, lending support to the claim that French “secularism” targets Islam in particular (Scott 2010). Yet recall that what animated the banning by Mayor Dreyfus was not the religious character of the event, but rather the way it enacted a distinct ethnic community and rooted it into a particular urban territory. The way that the multi-ethnic character of the *religious* organization of the Ganesh Temple was highlighted to me responded—even without my articulating it—to the implicit critique of its ethnic nature.

Another point here regarding the representative politics of the temple is the temple’s relationship to what—particularly prior to the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009—was a competing voice for “visibility” and “representation” of the Tamil community in Paris, diasporic organizations aligned with the LTTE (pro-Eelam organizations still remain a striking part of the visual and discursive urban landscape of La Chapelle, from numerous public portraits of Prabhakaran, to the annual commemorations of Tamil Genocide Day, on May 18th, and Tamil Martyr Day—Maaveerar Naal, on November 27th throughout La Chapelle). Prior to the defeat of the LTTE, diasporic temples (not only in Paris) were often understood to have financial and cultural links to LTTE-sponsored groups; this was enough to dissuade certain people from temple-going, a point I heard from one woman during my fieldwork in 2016, who mentioned that she felt the Ganesh temple was the most “non-political” Hindu temple in the Paris region (meaning non-LTTE aligned). Naturally this kind of “non-political” stance is, within a polarized political landscape, itself a political position. One which,

though seemingly at odds with the dominant pro-nationalist (public) voice of La Chapelle, also facilitated the temple's status as the emblematic center of Hinduism in Paris (and indeed, all of France).

I return here to Soumya's account of the temple's founding, and of the importance of the Ganesh festival, which I've reconstructed based on my extensive notes from our non-recorded, French language open-ended interview. The temple was founded in 1985 by Mr. Sanderasakaram. Soumya attributed to him the phrase, "we cannot live in a place without a god," and noted that the choice of deity, Ganesh, reflected his family's god in their home village temple. She told me, "all families have their own particular gods," in what I understood as a reference to the *kula deyvam*, the family deity associated with Hindu families. As discussed in chapter 2 (Mapping La Chapelle), the Tamil population in Paris at that time was overwhelmingly men who migrated without their families as refugees. "They felt alone without their families, and the temple allowed them to sustain their relationships with their family in Sri Lanka, because they could pray for them." Indeed, this led to a theme that was developed later in our conversation, of a kind of paralleling of action between Sri Lanka and Paris that made the distance between those two locations more psychologically bearable by bringing two distant locations into a parallel temporality: through the knowledge that one's family was praying in the same way, to the same god, back home at the same time that the refugee in exile returned those prayers in Paris, and through the continuity of ritual temporality—which Soumya said, continues today, where Mr. Sanderasakaram's family temple in Sri Lanka carries on with ceremonies on the same days as the Paris Ganesh Temple. While the temple offers continuity with religious practice in places of origin (the ritual, she said, is "*comme chez*

nous”—meaning like it is in our home/homeland), Soumya also spoke of its ability to serve as a moment of rupture from the routines of life in Paris. Speaking of Sri Lankan Tamils, not only in the Ile-de-France region but mentioning other European hubs like London and Germany, Soumya told me, “people take their annual vacations (“les congés”) at the time of the festival. They work during the rest of the year in restaurants, and they eat meat, and they’re not able to come to the temple, but when they take their vacation, they can eat vegetarian.” This summarization, translated from my handwritten notes, makes note of a particular expression of Hindu religious practice in the form of abstaining from meat, at least during the limited period surrounding participation in a major religious event—including taking the kinds of vows that lead to various ritual acts incorporated in the procession, like walking or dancing with a heavy wooden kavadi frame on one’s back, or carrying a clay pot with a flame inside it on one’s head, gesturing to the significant investment of time and departure from quotidian life necessary for ritual participation. But she also spoke of a perhaps counter-intuitive limit to such participation: “Nowadays, many people return to Sri Lanka to do the kavadi over there. Before, one couldn’t go back, it had to be done here, but now it’s possible to return because they’ve got French nationality and the civil war is, let’s say, almost over.²⁸” Thus the more permanent and settled the community becomes in France, the more this enables investment in religious ritual back in Sri Lanka. This is in line with Carol Greenhouse’s analysis of contemporary citizenship, in which she notes that the conferral of passports

²⁸ The civil war officially ended in 2009, yet the refusal to fully acknowledge its end was common among Sri Lankan Tamils I spoke to in Paris, who instead focused on the continuity of militarization and injustice in Tamil-majority (ex-LTTE-controlled) territories in Sri Lanka even to this day.

that allow for visits “back home” is not solely a bond to the citizenship-granting state, but also a means for multiple affiliations (Greenhouse 2002, 199). Investment—in this case both spiritual and financial—in one or the other location (family temple’s back in Sri Lanka, or the Ganesh Temple) are examples of these multiple affiliations, and need not index a greater orientation towards one or the other cultural, political, or economic milieu. Instead, the paralleling of religious activities across space and over time can index the ways in which diasporic communities are enmeshed at once in host and homeland spaces, as well as the transnational networks that hold the two together.

Yet the trend towards participation in family temple celebrations in Sri Lanka can be understood as one of two currents toward the lessening of an (at least exclusive) identification between the temple and the Sri Lankan Tamil community to the extent that the temple no longer took on the role of the exclusive or even primary location of religious ritual for its membership as family temples in Sri Lanka regained that role for some diasporic residents of Paris. The second factor that was highlighted, in this conversation with Soumya as in other interactions with the temple, was the increasing participation of people with different Tamil backgrounds (via South India, Mauritius, Ile de la Reunion, Martinique, and Guadeloupe) as well as non-Tamils from North India and Nepal, and finally Western converts to Hinduism. Soumya highlighted to me the temple’s “free entry” (“libre,” relating to freedom, rather than cost) when discussing this aspect, and said that the temple sought to meet the religious needs of all who attend. This tendency could fairly be presented as the temple’s foregrounding of a kind of inclusive religious practice over bonds based on what in French falls under the amorphous linguistic umbrella held aloft by the term “origine”—origin—harkening to geographic,

genealogical, and the purportedly genetic category of race/ethnicity. This last implication is just that—only implied and not stated outright—but is clear in the way that the question, “vous êtes de quelle origine” (what is your origin?) is so disproportionately--indeed ubiquitously--posed to France’s “visible minorities.” Such foregrounding communicates the inclusivity of the temple, and indeed, reflects its evolving membership and its current role, but I also see it as a kind of preemptive rebuttal to the accusation of “communautarisme” that is so commonly leveled against Tamils.

Laïcité and Ethnicité: Comparing the Chariot Festivals of Ganesha and Jaganathan

I did not expect to end up at a temple of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (popularly known at the Hare Krishnas, commonly abbreviated by its own members to ISKCON) in Sarcelles (a city just outside of Paris, linked by a regional train) when I began fieldwork on La Chapelle. But my attention was grabbed when I saw flyers for an ISKCON chariot festival taking place in La Chapelle. This annual festival, the Ratha Yatra of the god Jaganatha is held by all branches of ISKCON, including the Paris-area temple in Sarcelles, which, at the time of my interview in 2016 was preparing for its 27th ritual procession in Paris. The flyer led me to attend the festival in June 2015, and later, in January of 2016, to visit the temple in Sarcelles, where I had a recorded interview with the temple’s lead official, in French (quotations below are my translations of the transcription).

The festival departs from just in front of the public park adjacent to the metro station La Chapelle²⁹, which is also in the northern part of the concentration of Tamil

²⁹ This park became a flashpoint in discussions of migration—and remained, at least as late as May 2018—closed to the general public in order to prevent its use by undocumented migrants (who were primarily from Eritrea, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Syria, rather than Sri Lanka)..

businesses, and half a city block from the Ganesh Temple. Thus the Ratha Yatra makes use of the same urban space as the Ganesh Festival, though the path of the procession does differ—while the chariots of the gods in the Ganesh festival essentially trace the perimeters of Tamil economic and cultural activity in Paris, in the Ratha Yatra the chariot begins in the heart of La Chappelle’s Tamil community before traveling to the central Parisian location of Les Halles, an area chosen for its visibility and accessibility rather than its local population. As the temple president said, “the goal of such a festival is sharing,” which he outlined with the examples of chanting mantras, and sharing food³⁰, with the wider public. When I asked if it posed any challenges to host a religious festival in Paris, he replied,

We don’t talk about that. You know here in France we are a country which wants to be secular (“qui se veut laïque”), you know what that is? Secular [in English]. And which puts religion to the side. The religious—for the government—the religious is in the private domain. It’s like that. That’s France (“C’est la France”). So everything that is religious cannot be put out in front, that’s all. And Ratha Yatra is just as much a cultural festival as a religious one. But for the French authorities it’s above all cultural. They don’t want to hear about the religious. There you have it.

I was stuck by the way in which the Ratha Yatra’s emplacement in La Chapelle builds on the Tamil networks and geography of La Chapelle, which are both affirmed and re-enacted through the Ganesh procession. At the same time, unlike the Ganesh procession, the Ratha Yatra is not encoded as a “Tamil” celebration (indeed, the majority of ISKCON members/leadership are not Tamil—though many Tamils actively participate in the Ratha Yatra). The Ratha Yatra’s use of this space seems to me to both underscore the Tamil identity of the neighborhood while also overwriting it with a “Hindu” one,

³⁰ See Berger (2011) on the importance of distributing food in ISKCON’s philosophical framework.

which is then itself overwritten as “cultural” rather than “Hindu” in the French political landscape. In my interview with the temple’s president I asked about the choice of the Ratha Yatra’s location:

There are a lot of regulations to host an event in the streets, so the first years that we did it—there’s a neighborhood that is well known for public demonstrations, it’s the neighborhood of Nation, République. So for a long time we did it there. And then about ten years ago we began to do it in the Indian neighborhood—La Chapelle. Before, we didn’t go through the Indian neighborhood [with the procession], but we’ve started to do it, and it’s appreciated. The local businesses take the opportunity to make offerings. Well, the Indian neighborhood is very South Indian—Tamil (note: he used the word with the vowel “i”, closer to the original Tamil word—*thamizh*—rather than the French “*tamoul*”). And Ratha Yatra is not known in South India—it’s more Orissa. So now it takes place throughout the world, but the beginning was [in] Orissa. Jaganath, the particular form of Krishna that we see on the chariot, is from Orissa. As you know the Tamils are very communitarian (“*communautariste*”), they have their divinity, Ganesh, who is the most well known for the Tamils, so the Hindu Tamil community of the neighborhood—little by little—has become familiarized to Jaganath, but at the beginning they didn’t know about him. Even if they were Hindus, they didn’t know him.

The temple’s original choice of location then depended more on administrative ease, and corresponded with the normative models of use of urban space, in which demonstrations—of any kind (and I’m taking this as a translation of the term he used “manifestations” which is generally for political demonstrations)—were spatially contained. The time frame for the shift to La Chapelle, over a decade ago, means that the Ganesh festival was already a well-established public event in the neighborhood. In this way, the Ganesh festival not only cemented a spatial link between the Tamil community and the urban territory of La Chapelle, it also created the conditions in which this urban space could be seen as amenable to another Hindu ritual procession. But as we see in the remarks above, there are competing claims for what kind of identity is being enacted by Tamils in La Chapelle—in religious processions, and in daily life. Whereas we have seen Ganesh Temple leadership trying to push back against accusations of

communautarianism, in these remarks, the communitarian nature of the Tamil community is presented as taken for granted (“as you know”).

The second theme that emerges is the question of the unity—or lack thereof—of a Hindu community in La Chapelle, Paris, and France. This in fact was a theme that emerged as quite salient throughout our interview. After the remarks above, I asked the follow up question, “do you have any relationships with the temples in La Chapelle?” The answer led to a discussion of the effort to form a Federation of Hindu Temples in France:

We’re trying—because it’s not at all easy—to create a Federation of Hindu Temples in France. The founder of the Ganesh Temple, who passed away two years ago, was part of this group which wanted to unite the Hindu temples in Paris, with us, and other temples. But it’s been very slow to take off, because, if you like, the main problem is that many, many Tamils have a hard time with French. They’re not integrated, if you will. They are integrated when it comes to business, and certain [Tamil individuals] are well integrated—that is to say, they understand the French system well, but there is still a generation of people who, particularly in regards to religion, they have their habits, their rituals, and they don’t understand why Westerners do the same things. They prefer to stay with their own (“rester entre eux”).

Before going further into the question of such a federation, and the desire for representation to which it speaks, I will turn briefly to a discussion of French secularism, generally, and the way in which it has managed state-religious interface specifically.

Laïcité, the French model of secularism, provides a framework of law and/or policy that guides the French state’s management of religious institutions, and the religious practices of citizens and residents. However, it is also felt to be a core French “value,” which is expressed as a national ethos. During my fieldwork, a friend of mine in Paris recounted to me the story of a friend of hers who recently acquired French citizenship. Like all applicants for naturalization, he had undergone an interview in which both his French linguistic competency, and his cultural compatibility with France

were being assessed. He was asked, “if France were to add a principle (“valeur”) to its national motto—liberty, equality, and brotherhood—what should it be?” It was not an open-ended question; *the* answer was, “laïcité.” Likewise, as part of a series of workshops required to obtain the French long-term residency permit (the “carte de séjour”), which confers the right to work and live in France, immigrants must attend a series of classes designed as a kind of orientation process to France—both the logistical and administrative formalities, and what is felt to be a general cultural competency, including training on secularism.

Of course much has been written on secularism generally, and its French instantiation of laïcité in particular. I find Talal Asad’s summarizing statement to be a useful guide, “Secularism doesn’t simply insist that religious practice and belief be confined to a space where they cannot threaten political stability or the liberties of ‘free-thinking’ citizens. Secularism builds on a particular conception of the world (‘natural’ and ‘social’) and of the problems generated by that world” (Asad 2003, 192).

The current legal framework for secularism traces back to the law of 9 December 1905 which legally established the neutrality of the state in relation to religion (Conseil d’Etat 2014). But laïcité’s earlier mention in the 1789 declaration of the rights of Man, a document which is still today felt to be a foundational expression of French national values, gives the term a longer genealogy. The law of 1905 also affirms that the French Republic “guarantees the free exercise of religion” limited only for reasons of “the interest of public order” (ibid, my translation). Both the freedom to practice religion, and the state’s commitment to secularism were reaffirmed in the most recent constitution, the October 4th 1958 Constitution, of which the first article proclaims, “France is an

indivisible, secular (*laïque*), democratic, and social Republic. [France] guarantees equality before the law of all citizens, regardless of origin, race, or religion. [France] respects all [religious] beliefs (*croyances*)” (Constitution of 1958, first article, my translation).³¹

The law of 9 December 1905 mandates that the French government would neither recognize or finance any religion, a departure from Napoleon the First’s “Concordat” agreement with the Vatican in which Catholicism was specifically recognized as “the religion of the majority of the French” (Conseil d’Etat website). Additionally, the Reformation and Calvinist Christian churches, as well Jewish religious authorities were recognized by the state and included in state-sponsored public services (*ibid*).

Although *laïcité* is, in theory and in popular understanding, a strict relegation of “religion” outside the sphere of government (and more generally, into the private rather than public sphere), in fact such a full separation has never truly been enacted in France, in spite of its status as the archetypically secular nation. As the French government website, “Vie Publique” (Public Life) admits, “[The state’s] relations with the Catholic church remain privileged, in spite of the law [of 1905]” (Vie Publique, 2017). The realms of religion and politics are also brought together in an annual event in which the French President meets with “religious authorities” (*ibid*). “Until 2004, only the representatives

³¹ In 2013 a Socialist-led Leftist coalition in the National Assembly redacted the word “race” from a number of key pieces of legislation taken directly from this constitutional language, with the intention of repudiating the very notion of “race” and reaffirming, in an amendment, “The Republic combats racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia. [The Republic] does not recognize the existence of any so-called ‘race’” (Le Monde with AFP, 2013). In 2018, under the leadership of Emmanuel Macron’s En Marche government, the word “race” was removed from the constitution itself (Le Monde with AFP, 2018). The new text “guarantees equality before the law of all citizens, without distinction of sex, origin, or religion” (*ibid*).

of the four old recognized³² religions were present at this ceremony; since then, the president of the French Council of the Muslim Faith is also invited. In general, the State maintains regular relations with six major (grandes) religions” (ibid, my translation). These six religions are represented by religious organizations which represent Judaism and Calvinism (these organizations have maintained their standing from under the Napoleonic Concordat), Protestantism (formed in 1905), Buddhism (1986), an assembly of Orthodox churches (1997), and Islam. The first such official organizational body for Islam in France was formed in 1990, but its current instantiation was (re)formed as recently as 2003 (ibid). Absent from among these religious representatives, is an organization representing Hindus and Hinduism in France, a point which was expressed with some frustration by the president of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness in the remarks above, and which we returned to throughout our interview. For him, such recognition from the state is necessary to combat the “denigration” of Hindu practice as a “cult” (“secte”), and is a pressing need. On the other hand, when I spoke to Soumya at the temple I asked about links to other Hindu temples to which she replied, that there were some, but no network. She lightheartedly remarked, “not like the Catholics, we don’t have a Vatican!” This expression seemed to highlight an ease with staying outside of the forms of state-sponsored religious organizations (through the contrast with the religious organization that has been historically—and remains—most intertwined with the French state). In this sense, ISKCON and the Ganesh temple are making competing claims to representativeness of the Hindu community, and expressing

³² That is, recognized by Napoleon’s Concordat.

differing goals when it comes to state recognition, even while they are both enacting representations of Hinduism from within the local urban space of La Chapelle.

A Festival for All Tamils? Between Unity and Distinctiveness in Diasporic Tamil Pongal Celebrations in France

In this section I will compare three Pongal celebrations hosted by various Tamil community organizations in Paris, France in January 2016. At each of these events, French Tamil diasporic community and identity are performatively enacted in terms that both appeal to a larger sense of pan-Tamil unity, and (re)create bonds within Tamil organizations that are based on regions and communities of origin as well as contemporary residency in specific localities in and around Paris, France. Each festival celebrates a sense of the distinctiveness of Tamil heritage, while making claims to larger community inclusion that traverse multiple geographic and temporal frames: for full inclusion of Tamil communities in Paris as stakeholders in an emerging multicultural and cosmopolitan urban landscape; for a sense of Tamil unity worldwide; and for preserving and transmitting Tamil identities that are nostalgically rooted in absent Tamil homelands of both India and Sri Lanka. A comparative ethnographic analysis of the three festivals reveals the ways in which the celebration of Pongal—presented as a festival for all Tamils—simultaneously reveals the multiple ways by which Tamilness is performatively enacted within this diasporic location.

Pongal is a harvest festival celebrated by Tamil communities in India, Sri Lanka, and around the world. It is, according to many, the most important festival of the year for Tamil families and communities. In recognition of this, in 2016, following a move by Canadian parliament to enshrine January as Tamil Heritage Month, Canadian Prime

Minister Justin Trudeau addressed Canada's large Tamil community in a brief trilingual (English, French and Tamil) recorded address in which he offered "inniya Pongal nalvazhtukal," the traditional expression of good wishes for Pongal in Tamil. I mention this not only to give context to the importance of the holiday for Tamil communities but also as a point of contrast: noting how the festival has been successfully drawn into a multicultural Canadian repertoire of celebrations (indeed, Trudeau's Pongal message appears to have become an annual tradition), recognized by the head of state, as opposed to the situation in Paris, where, absent any top-down official recognition, Tamil communities in Paris are making efforts to draw the festival into a field of national recognition in France, through the use of official spaces (staging the festival in a city hall) and inviting local government representatives to participate.

The holiday extends over four days, each of which has a different focus. The date of the festival is determined by the Tamil calendar, and typically falls around mid-January. The three festivals I attended all took place over the same mid-January weekend in 2016. The festival is widely celebrated by Tamils in Paris, and I heard about more public celebrations than the three festivals I was able to attend, including one hosted by a Tamil Catholic association, which highlights another salient point about Pongal, that its celebration is not restricted to any particular religious group. The celebration is also marked by Tamil businesses adding another component by which this holiday is made visible in the public urban space of Paris. Tamil shops sell some of the typical markers of the celebration like sugar cane and clay pots for preparing the rice-based dish that shares the festival's name: pongal, and often also put up festive displays featuring these items and messages of holiday wishes. Additionally, many businesses (particularly those in the

concentration of Tamil businesses in the neighborhood of La Chapelle) financially sponsor the various public Tamil festivals organized by community associations in exchange for advertising on event materials. The most common motifs for Pongal holiday decorations are stalks of sugar cane, and a clay pot intentionally made to overflow with the rice and milk-based dish “pongal,” which is ubiquitously prepared and served on this holiday. Other common motifs are decorated cattle, relating to the Maatu Pongal, or cattle pongal day of the festival.

For many Tamils, Pongal is a uniquely important time in the year to spend time with family, and reaffirm social bonds; people spoke of fond childhood memories of Pongal and the desire to transmit that to their own children. These affective experiences of the festival are of course at the core of its importance and I do want to make that clear even as I move my analysis away from how individuals experience the event and towards the way that the event takes on what we might call a self-representative, indeed a self-performative importance for Tamil communities in Paris. What I mean by that is, it acts as an occasion in which Tamil cultural practices are celebrated and enacted, and thus these practices are both transmitted to a new generation, and transposed from the landscapes in which older generations who have migrated to Paris once celebrated them, into the context of Paris itself. I want to pay attention to these shifting temporal and spatial frames: from older generations (indeed, stretching back to long-deceased ancestral history) to children, and from various homelands (for the celebrations I attended, these are specifically Puducherry/Pondichéry, and northern and eastern Sri Lanka) to specific spaces in Paris.

Anthropological theory has often focused on festivals, holidays, and group celebrations as moments of Durkheimian collectivity, or Victor Turner's *communitas*, in which social distinctions are minimized and cohesive social bodies emerge (Durkheim 1912; Turner 1974). But ethnographic accounts of Tamil festivals have often pointed to the important role of these events not only in uniting community, but also, and just as importantly, as occasions to publically differentiate, often in ways that re/create hierarchies of within social formations as well (see Clark-Deces 2007). Keeping this ethnographic perspective in mind should temper a certain essentializing tendency of multiculturalist discourse in which minority ethnic groups are depicted as homogenous cultural and political entities. Turning now to the example of the following three Pongal festivals, we see the desire to enact "a" Tamil community even as they reveal the plurality within that community.

I'm first going to describe two different festivals put on by organizations with ties to Pondicherry, India, and then, lastly, a festival put on by a Sri Lankan Tamil organization. The first event was the only one to charge an admission fee, seven euros, which included a meal. It was hosted in a location called *La Maison de L'Inde*, or India House, a part of an international student housing complex in Paris dedicated to Indian university students in Paris. This choice of location, with walls lined with portraits of famous Indians including Swami Vivekananda, and Indira Gandhi, reflects the political alignment of this organization, which seeks to maintain and promote ties between France and India. Specifically, the organization claims as their "Single goal: to promote the history and culture of the French territories in India." And thus the relationship between France and India is framed through the colonial relationship between the two countries.

Interestingly this colonial history is presented rather nostalgically, as the context for a kind of cultural exchange that seems to sideline the innately hierarchical and exploitative relationship of colonization. At the same time, the organization is invested in a certain reconciliation of this potentially painful past, and has done this through efforts such as highlighting the role of Indians in French military history (particularly the world wars), and through seeking the support of the Indian embassy in France for many of their public events highlighting India in Paris—including the Pongal festival I discuss, which was advertised as “sous le patronage”, under the patronage of, or, with the support of, the Indian Embassy. To this end, while the group has a core membership with family ties to Pondicherry (and notably this includes both Indians and the descendants of French colonists—and blurrings between these categories), it also consciously recruits from a wider French public which needn’t necessarily hold any pre-existing relationship to India. Because of this orientation, the audience at this Pongal festival was the most diverse, out of a packed room of attendees, I would estimate based on just a visual impression that about a third were of Indian descent, the rest being a multi-ethnic microcosm of Paris. The Pongal celebration ended with a traditional Tamil meal, but most of the event was focused on a program of speakers, dance, and live music taking place on a stage towards which rows of folding chairs were oriented. The performers were students from the music and dance classes offered through the organization. This line-up included art forms specifically coded as “Tamil,” for example Bharatha Natyam³³, which was present at all three Pongal festivals, and was identified by the M.C. as “a dance form from the South of

³³ See Ann David (2012) for a discussion of how Bharatha Natyam functions as a signifier of Tamil identity in the UK diaspora.

India, specifically Tamil Nadu,” as well other Indian art forms such as Bollywood dance and Dhrupad singing, performed by students from diverse backgrounds. In this festival then, connections with India, mediated through the location of “India House,” and participation of Indian embassy were foregrounded, and the specifically Tamil character of Pongal, though discussed in a brief speech by the M.C., was given less prominence.

The second event took place in a public hall in a suburban city just outside of the Paris city limits, but still within the inner ring of the Paris metro service. Though I saw the event advertised online through the network of Paris Tamil Facebook groups (of which there are several), it appeared to have the smallest attendance and had an almost familiar air. Indeed, I found that many of the attendees were part of the extended family of the organization’s founders, whom I’d met with earlier in my research. Yet while this event seemed primarily to be an occasion for maintaining Pondicherry-based social and familial ties within a diasporic environment, it was also quite consciously a public event, with a printed program of events which, as in the other festival, took place on a formal stage. Additionally, the program gave billing to the invited participation of both the Ambassador of India to France, and the mayor of the city in which the event took place. Highlighting the participation of these officials lends prestige to the event, and also serves as a conscious move to position Tamil culture under the Indian motto of “unity in diversity,” and to emplace the event in a local context through including a local city mayor, even while it seemed (at least at the time that I was there) that the event didn’t capture a wider audience outside of the organization’s membership, itself based on ties to place of origin (Pondicherry) and the families of its founders more than on the basis of shared area of residency (the family I knew previously, for example, did not live in or

even particularly near that area). In terms of the version of Tamil culture put on display, discussions of Tamil literature, and again the dance form Bharatha Natyam were the main acts in this program. Similarly, one older gentleman who graciously greeted me when I showed up as a rather conspicuous guest, highlighted the “great men” of India in his conversation with me, among them Thiruvalluvar (the author of the *Thirukkural*) and Gandhi, and offered me a copy of Tamil classical Sangam literature translated into French. I would say that in general the version of Tamil culture presented at this festival was in line with the “great man” school of history that my interlocutor espoused, forms of literature and dance that fall easily under the rubric of “capital C” Culture.

I turn now to the third festival, hosted by a Sri Lankan Tamil community organization, and note that this celebration conceptualized and enacted Tamilness quite differently, even while explicitly aspiring to (re)present a single unified, indeed, global, Tamil community. Looking at the advertising posters for this event makes that immediately clear. Though the association with Pongal is abundantly clear through the inclusion of Pongal pots, sugarcane, a decorated bull—and, less specific to Pongal, Thiruvalluvar (which shows the overlap of shared cultural/literary heritage between different Tamil communities and organizations), the festival itself is named, in both French and Tamil as “Tamil Diaspora Festival.” Two promotional images for the event circulated (both in print and through Tamil online networks, where I first encountered it), one in Tamil only (except for the French translation of the phrase “Tamil Diaspora Festival”) and the address, and the other in both French and Tamil. The text of the Tamil poster translates as:

Tamil Diaspora Festival, A Unique Day for Tamil Identity, Tamils throughout the diaspora are united; caste, religion and nation are in the past. Together, the Tamil families of France host this function for all to gather together! Thank you.

This makes explicit the desire to be a festival for a united Tamil community which will overcome divisions based on caste, religion, and nation. The symbolic self-composition behind this festival is foregrounded—both as the festival of all Tamils, and also a symbolic enactment of unity and solidarity among Tamils. Nation is put into the past and the idiom of family is put forward instead. This formula also stresses the importance of a singular Tamil community even while consciously naming the terms of its divisions (caste, religion, nation—one might extend this to nationalism). Indeed, the only country which is explicitly named in this brief text is France. The same text is present on the bilingual poster as well as a French text, which is not simply a translation. In the French text, the unifying potential of the Pongal festival is highlighted as a product of its diasporization, rather than as itself the traditional enactment of the festival:

As you know the Tamils have been scattered all around the world on all five continents³⁴ and have kept this agricultural tradition within themselves. They adopted, over time, the Pongal festival as a common festival for all Tamils of all religions and as a symbol of unity and solidarity.

In this reading the diasporic enactment of the festival is therefore not a kind of imitative enactment of an originary cultural practice, but rather the diasporization of Tamils has given the festival a renewed, and even magnified, importance. While the Tamil text is self-evidently intended for a Tamil-literate audience (which, with such rare exceptions as an anthropology graduate student, means primarily a first generation Tamil migrant audience), the intended audience of the French text seems to be more of an open

³⁴ The reference to five continents is standard in France, where the continents are named as: America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceania.

question. On the one hand, it presumes an outside audience, using the third person (“ils”/”they”) rather than a second person (“nous”/”we”) throughout, and begins, “The festival of Pongal is traditionally celebrated in honor of the sun which accompanies the Tamils in their noble agricultural tasks.” This kind of distant present-tense voice, in which all Tamils are represented as performing agricultural tasks seems like the kind of simplification you would give someone entirely unfamiliar with Tamil culture, but on the other hand, the next sentence begins, “As you know (“Comme vous le savez”) Tamils are scattered across the world...” implying an audience with prior knowledge of Tamil culture and history.

This festival also had international guests of honor, a journalist from Sri Lanka and a professor of Tamil literature from Canada, again emphasizing the desire to build a global Tamil identity (as well as the role of language and arts in forming that identity, points explored in the following two chapters). Several people I spoke to at this festival emphasized the secular cultural nature of Pongal: that it could be celebrated by Muslims, Christians, and Hindus, and that, as one man noted, “Tamils are not all Hindu,” even if the two tend to be amalgamated, he said, even by Tamils themselves. This forms a clear challenge to the representativeness of the Ganesh Festival, and is an articulation of a Tamil community which would encompass, but exceed, the community assembled by the Ganesh Festival.

If we grant a certain historical and cultural specificity to French secularism (*laïcité*), it seems to me appropriate to do the same with a Tamil conception of secularism--*matha caarpinmai*—a direct translation of secularism, it literally translates as impartiality to religion. This is in line with Thomas Blom Hansen’s statement that, in

India, “The meaning of secularism was authorized as ‘equal respect for all religions,’ and politicians, ministers, and officials would generate and consolidate their nationalist and secular credentials by visiting temples, mosques, and Sikh gurdwaras, and by attending ceremonies and processions of different communities” (Blom Hansen 1999, 54). Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam notes that, “rather than proclaiming a secular state where Church and state are strictly separated, the LTTE follow[ed] the Indian model where all religions are at least in theory equally respected” (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2005). Popular expressions of this ethos in both India and Sri Lanka are images that unite religious symbols from multiple religious communities. Such an expression of secularism does not attempt the same muting of (minority) religious expression that *laïcité* requires, but rather acknowledges the presence of multiple religions in the public sphere—without preference given by the government. As Blom Hansen writes of India, “It was not as if religious manifestations were not allowed in the public sphere. On the contrary they were encouraged and revered as repositories of the cultural legitimacy that the state, routinely depicted as purely technocratic, could not generate” (Blom Hansen 1999, 54).

Given the important place of secularism in South Asian political spheres, it bears emphasis that Tamil communities in Paris would have had long engagement with secularism from pre-migratory social and political movements—to put it bluntly, this is not a case of a minority community adopting a French discourse, or creating an imitative model of it, but rather entering into conversation with it. Without contesting the early European development of secular discourses, one can also trace a genealogy of the term within Tamil intellectual traditions—indeed, I have been told many times by various Tamil interlocutors (in Tamil Nadu and during my fieldwork in Paris) that the

Thirukkural, the revered classical Tamil moral treatise, is an example of a secular text (it's also worth noting that this example is prominently highlighted in a subsection of the Tamil-language open-access Wikipedia entry on secularism). Yet in gesturing to these Tamil-centered historical roots, I am not arguing for a kind of cultural specificity to either *laïcité* or *mata caarpinmai* that would make such terms entirely incommensurate. Nor am I seeking to ignore the shared genealogies of various vernacular forms of secularism within European political thought, and the shared political legacy of British colonialism which introduced discourses of secularism across what are now the modern nation states (both secular and religious) of South Asia (Blom Hansen 1999 discusses both the colonial genealogy and post-independence politics secularism in India). Instead, to use the metaphor of language, I am saying that (many) Tamils are fluent in the idiom of secularism, thus it is not a foreign (French/Western) language they learn upon arrival. A very brief overview of secularism's history in Tamil political spheres (which are—pre-diaspora—themselves transnational), reveals both similarities and uniqueness. More broadly, in recounting the classical Tamil genealogies of secularism constructed by my interlocutors in Paris, I wish to illustrate the degree to which these claims of specifically Tamil secularism challenge the dominant Western framing of secularism as absent from non-Western nations, thereby rendering individuals from those places incompatible with the values of European nations to which they migrate (Scott 2017).

But beyond invocations of the Thirukkural, secularism—specifically the rejection of Brahminical Hindu orthodoxy—emerged from Tamil nationalist cultural and political movements in the 20th century, which embraced a rationalist atheism (even if the extent of the enactment of such policies was always partial). The rejection of Brahminical

Hinduism is also bound up in anti-caste-oppression movements, which also saw limited enactment in Sri Lanka, particularly in Jaffna (Pfaffenberger 1990). Secularism was an early feature of Tamil nationalist movements, in response to a move away from secularism as the Sri Lankan state model and the enshrinement in 1978 of Buddhism as a state religion. On the other hand, various separatist groups, including the LTTE, tended to form along caste- and religiously-inflected lines from the start, even as they espoused anti-caste and secularist ideologies. Tigers were famous for certain practices that enacted a very powerful symbolic rejection of Hindu hierarchy such as burying (rather than cremating) war dead (called *maaveerargal*, martyrs). While Micheal Roberts argues for essentially Saivite roots to LTTE's *maaveerar* rites (Roberts 2005), Hellmann-Rajanayagam argues that "the concept of the martyr in LTTE ideology also feeds on Christian ideas," showing how the influence of Christianity on LTTE is a result of both the demographics of its core membership ("the Karaiyar, who comprise a major faction of LTTE members, are largely Catholic") and the involvement of local churches and clergy in advocating for Tamil rights and in "bring[ing] aid to Jaffna and the Vanni after other NGOs decided they could not do this any longer" (Hellmann-Rajanayagam 2005). Later, as the LTTE became the dominant governing entity in the North, Muslims were expelled from Tiger-controlled territories; showing the failure of a model of Tamil nationalist secularism which could make room for ethnic and religious diversity. The enactment of secularism in a Tamil context therefore should emphatically not be seen as Tamils taking up the French state's discourse, but rather as a point at which differing genealogies of secularism intersect. The organizers and participants in the Pongal event I have described were engaging in conversations about secularism, and doing so from a

Tamil political context that highlights secularism as a way to achieve ethnic-linguistic unity. Yet in the French model of secularism, minority ethno-cultural-linguistic solidarity of the kind embodied in *mata caarpinmai* is itself a threat to the very national identity felt to be embodied in—and achieved through—*laïcité*.

Yet this is not a binary between assimilation and *communautarisme*—and even less so between secularism and religion—in which the former is coded as “French” and the latter is coded as “immigrant/foreign”. Instead migrant/diasporic communities including the Tamils are having inward and outward directed conversations about the terms of integration and the terms of religious or secular expression. This involves a conscious engagement with the French and Parisian political and social structures and ideologies but also is contextualized in pre-diasporic and culture-as-diasporic political and intellectual legacies. Such intellectual heritages should neither be framed as diasporic politics disengaged from territories of resettlement (i.e. entirely home-directed, as in the classic models of long-distance nationalism), nor should they be seen as rendered “inauthentic” by their emplacement within the political and social structures of diaspora-hosting nations. By pulling away from either of these theoretical models, I also hope to pull away from a framing in which diasporic and minority intellectual and cultural production is assessed in terms of its “assimilation/integration” (or failure thereof). Instead, I present this diverse group of Tamil public celebrations as events which carry on cultural practices and political and intellectual debates from two different “homelands,” while simultaneously being the means through which to claim membership and legitimacy, and manage the double-edged sword of “visibility” within France.

I return now more at length to the third Pongal festival described above. This Pongal festival was hosted in the city hall of the 2nd arrondissement of Paris (each of Paris's administrative units has its own city hall). The choice of location, within an official city—and state—structure is also a symbolic act, one which is indicative of the mutual interpolation by and of the state. Whereas the state's interpolation of its marginalized subjects in France has been long-studied, often the counter-interpolation of those subjects is often ignored, and instead a narrative of the *rejection* of the state by marginalized communities is put forth (through tropes of rioting suburban youth, radical Islam, etc.). Yet the Tamil community events I describe in this chapter all share in common a high degree of participation with—indeed solicitation of—state involvement in community formation. Tamil community organizers are seeking—and being at least partially conferred—the legitimacy of the French state.

But if the message behind such official solicitations may be understood as, “We are Tamil, but we are also French.” There is also a sense in which the community events are also proclaiming, “we are French, but we are also Tamil.” And this statement is directed to a very different audience. For as much as the festivals do the work of presenting legitimate Franco-Tamil subjects in a context in which unassimilation, if not unassimilability, is presumed, that is to say, in which it is considered necessary to “prove oneself” as French, they are also symbolically “proving oneself” as Tamil—within the diasporic context this involves making the case that diasporic Tamils are a legitimate Tamil community, and as such are cultural and *political* stakeholders in homeland-oriented political arenas. Whereas such diasporic involvement has been courted and welcomed in Indian Tamil political arenas (with the creation of the Person of

Indian Origin—PIO—administrative status, and particular support for the currently-ruling BJP from diaspora-based organizations), because of the legacy of overseas LTTE organizing and fundraising, diasporic politics for Tamil Sri Lankans is quite fraught—indeed, at the ninth anniversary of the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War, President Sirisena’s official speech still centered around the perceived threat of the Tamil diaspora (AFP, 2018). On a more intimate scale, the events are also about transmitting Tamil identity to youth who are presumed to be French—from this perspective the dominant anxiety about the French enculturation of so-called immigrant youth is turned on its head. Frenchness will happen on its own, and instead it is Tamilness that must be instructed (indeed the question of the proper balance of Frenchness and Tamilness for diasporic youth, and how to achieve it, is a preoccupation for many Tamil parents in Paris, and is explored further in the next chapter). The Pongal event also breaks with dominant framing in France in which French secularism is juxtaposed against immigrant communities’ (read Muslim) religiosity. In the case of the chariot processions, the binary is resolved through enfolding Hinduism into the discourse of *laïcité* as a cultural, rather than religious practice. The Pongal festival from the Sri Lankan organization challenges the binary between French secularism and immigrant religiosity by foregrounding and instantiating their own version of secular values rooted in Tamil intellectual genealogies and political projects. Rather than juxtaposing French secularism against immigrant religiosity, therefore, this is an instance in which two understandings of secularism are brought into dialogue.

The Pongal festival included performances, a related conference in Tamil (which I was unable to attend because of the overlapping scheduling of the other Pongal festivals I

attended), traditional Pongal activities such as making pongal, drawing kollam (chalk drawings), tracing the Tamil letter “a,” and displays representing Tamil culture. I want to briefly show how Tamil culture was both enacted and literally put on display in this event, and draw attention to the ways in which this cultural self-presentation was unique to this event. While the performances also included the ubiquitous Bharatha Natyam, they also included other forms of “folk” dance such as karagam, kavadi, and parai attam. The displays featured Tamil literature and the Kriya dictionary—familiar to any student of Tamil! But emphasized handicrafts such as weaving, and, most of all, traditional Tamil foods. While the appearance of Thiruvalluvar on the festival’s promotional materials nods to an appreciation for the kind of “great man” vision of history that was recounted at the second festival (described above), overall the version of Tamil cultural heritage on display at this event emphasized folk tradition, and quotidian cultural practices, particularly those carried out by women (like weaving and cooking). But while the explicit goal of this festival was to assemble Tamils in the French diasporic context, another important aspect is the way in which here too there was a desire to bring Tamils into a French *national* context. The location of the city hall is a clear gesture towards this, as was the fact that multiple city officials were invited to (and indeed did) participate. But another interaction at the festival illustrates the limited success of this kind of multicultural framing in the French context. It appeared that the vast majority of those in attendance at the festival were of Tamil heritage—though within this internally diverse category, I met and spoke to people with ancestry from Pondicherry, Indian Tamil heritage via the island of Reunion, and Sri Lanka, both those born abroad, and those born in France—aside from the invited city officials I only encountered two women

who did not have pre-existing cultural and familial ties to Tamil culture. They told me that they had heard about the event from someone at the city hall, but remarked somewhat critically of the organizers, “it seems they wanted to keep to themselves.” Though this is but a single remark, it echoes a larger stigmatization of the Tamil community in Paris as having a negative tendency to “keep to themselves” (terms almost identical to those used by the ISKCON president, for example). This highlights the extent to which public Tamil celebrations in Paris are both an occasion in which Tamil intra-community bonds are meant to be maintained (and in some cases forged along new lines), and, simultaneously, function as a kind of valorizing self-representation in a context in which Tamil identity ranges from invisible/unrecognized to hypervisible/stigmatized.

While these kinds of public celebrations around a major holiday might seem like expected displays of a collective identity from within a multicultural landscape, I wish to highlight that within the French political context this kind of multicultural performativity is far from mainstream. This was made clear in the last presidential campaign, during which the now-president Emmanuel Macron proclaimed: “I profoundly believe that France has never been and never will be a multicultural nation” (Lang, 2017). In this context the work of performing (and valorizing) what is distinctively Tamil is also a political move asserting the right to be distinctively Tamil from within France, and this forms a shared project across the three Pongal festivals, even while each conceptualizes and enacts their own distinctive vision of what it means to be Tamil.

Conclusion

The Ganesh festival disavows the framework of ethnicity, even while ethnicity remains an important component to its actual organization and enactment. The fact that ISKCON has followed the path of the Ganesh festival in La Chapelle is the symbolic completion of this negation of ethnicity, even though the ISKCON leadership draws on the same Tamil networks of financing and participation as the Ganesh Festival, and its presence in La Chapelle is both predicated upon and reinscribes that neighborhood's distinctively Tamil character. The Pongal festivals, on the other hand, while making claims to a more inclusive vision of *Tamil* society, do so through an explicitly ethnic framing. I want to make clear here that I am not suggesting that such an ethnic framing is necessarily "communitarian" (communitariste), as some French critics might claim, since the festival also aims to be a space of cultural sharing of Tamil heritage to a wider public, but I do want to emphasize that prioritizing shared ethnic membership as the basis of a public event is a controversial act within the local context of Paris. For example, an event organized by and for Black Feminists in Paris was condemned by Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo, of the Socialist Party, when it was revealed that certain workshops aimed to be open exclusively to Black women (Couvelaire 2017).

The Ganesh temple is aware of—and celebrates—the special role it plays to many in the Tamil community as a place of worship and an oasis of the familiar and familial, and well as the special role that the Tamil community plays in the founding, financing, and maintenance of the temple; yet, at least in conversations with me, as a white European-American anthropologist, those speaking in a representative role for the

temple preferred to define the temple's community in terms of a larger religious—not ethnic—community, and, furthermore, to highlight that religious community's openness.

This is the first angle from which the temple's "natural" role of amplifying visibility for "the" Tamil community is challenged. The second comes from competing Tamil resistance to its representative quality. This is because of its particular status as Brahminical Hindu temple—something that other Tamil political movements have struggled against and which risks (even in spite of more inclusive intentions) taking on a chauvinistic political identity given the BJP's history of strategic deployment of Ganesh Festivals in India. This is also the context in which the Pongal festivals, particularly the Sri Lankan Tamil organized one which I discuss the most at length, function as alternative expressions of Tamil identity—understood as alternative expressions of Tamil politics as well, and thus engaging in an alternate dialogue with the structures of the state and surrounding community as well.

On the other hand, ISKCON asserts a Hindu identity that is not ethnically inflected (or, more accurately, that is ethnically inflected with the invisible majority identity). Yet interestingly, on the occasions in which both of these Hindu religious communities become most visible, and interact with a wider public, they do so in a context in which public ritual is re-presented as "cultural" rather than religious practice. The overlapping use of the urban space of La Chapelle is salient in that it shows the ways in which such religious—and ethnic—communities become inscribed in specific territories, and it also offers an occasion in which interaction with otherwise abstract and amorphous "valeurs" (values) of the state—like *laïcité*—translate into observable and emplaced bureaucratic and logistical actions (filing forms, closing streets, etc.). Whereas

the temple representative I spoke to seemed content to limit their interaction with the state to this public festival, the temple leadership at ISKCON was frustrated to be excluded from the official and mediatized representation of religion in France. The Pongal festivals would seemingly better adhere to secularism but instead turn out to incarnate the fear of multiculturalism, revealing how the two terms intersect in the fear of the other. While secularism is meant to contain difference through relegating it to a private sphere, multiculturalism seems to invite difference into the public arena in the form of spectacle and celebration.

Each of these events (Ganesh, Ratha Yatra, Pongal) is also an interaction with the state as it touches on our everyday intimate lives, through the very spaces in which our lives take place. Though the mutual interpellations with the state are not the only framework from which the events might be analyzed, they nevertheless provide ethnographic examples for France's largely unexamined official interface with Tamil ethnic and Hindu religious communities. The example of Muslims has been overdetermined within the very framework of the discursive construction of the debate, Tamil and Hindu participation in questions of secularism and multiculturalism takes place within this framework, not outside it, though the Tamil agents themselves bring other political and religious debates to the arena which though both "secular" show that secularism can be contextually specific enough as to be incommensurable (when French secularism looks at Tamil secularism, it cannot "see" it—ethnicity's hypervisibility makes the political message of inclusion invisible). More fundamentally, I would argue that examining the question of *laïcité* from an ethnographic rather than purely discursive analytic lens pushes us to confront the fact that the state's own normative model of

secularism is in fact at odds with its actual administrative and bureaucratic functioning. Rather than relegating religion to a separate sphere, instead French secularism provides a framework for an officially codified interaction with some religious officials and not others.

Secularism also functions as a way to exclude certain communities—archetypically Islam (Lentin and Titley, 2011). If we understand this exclusion as a break from the historical role of *laïcité* as a mechanism to restrict the Catholic church's influence on the French state (Macron's recent promise to “repair the link³⁵” between Catholic church hierarchy and the state illustrates the extent of this shift), and instead a response to a number of anxieties about the presence of minorities in the French national body, then the potentially surprising difference between anxieties about the foregrounding of religious versus ethnic identities becomes more legible.

³⁵ “réparer le lien” (Chambraud 2018)

CHAPTER FIVE—“Our Language Must Remain”: Tamil Mother Tongue and Mobility in Paris

This chapter examines the role of Tamil language in notions of Tamil identity and belonging for a range of individuals and organizations within this diverse community, ultimately arguing that an overarching sense of “Tamoul” identity is formed in the intersection of both French and Tamil linguistic nationalisms. Efforts to transmit Tamil language to second and third generation Tamil youth in Paris are motivated by ideologies of language devotion and a strong link between linguistic and cultural/ethnic identity; at the same time, both parents and youth also understand themselves to be a part of a French national community in which speaking French is an essential basis of membership. While the shift from Tamil to French may be seen as a threat to a Tamil linguistically-based identity, in reality, anxieties about what I describe as *fear of a disappearing Tamil*, locate the primary threat to Tamil cultural continuity as situated not in diasporic language shift, but in ostensibly homeland settings where it is seen as under attack. This motivates members of the diaspora to take on the role of cultural guardians of Tamil—expressed both through transmission of linguistically “pure” Tamil to their children, but also, in a new generation, through French-medium expressions of Tamil linguistic nationalism.

This chapter is drawn from interviews with French youth of Tamil heritage who are actively engaged in expanding their Tamil linguistic competency, non-Tamil-speaking French youth of Tamil heritage who are using the French language to express Tamil identity and politics, as well as interviews with Tamil teachers from an older generation, who reflect on the task of transmitting Tamil linguistic competency to French-born youth. This chapter demonstrates that Tamil language provides an

ambivalent unity among a “Tamoul” community in Paris which must be performatively enacted to overcome internal differences which threaten to fracture its unity (along the lines of national origin, caste, class, legal status, political orientation, etc.), as explored in the previous chapters.

I begin with a brief review of the well-established link between Tamil linguistic and ethnic/cultural/political identity. Pride in Tamil linguistic and literary traditions, and a metonymic association between Tamil language, society, and identity are significant aspects of the dominant conceptualization of Tamil identity, and animated Tamil intellectual, social and political movements throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Ramaswamy 1997). The importance of “Mother Tamil”—a personification and even deification of the language—retains a powerful symbolic and spiritual resonance today and has inspired a deep affective bond of self-identification between (many) Tamils speakers and their language—called language devotion—modeled on the relationship between mother and child (Ramaswamy 1997).

Lisa Mitchell, in tracing the development of these linguistic ideologies in South Asia reminds us that:

By recognizing how the linguistic identifications that appear so natural today may have come to make sense only within a very particular restructuring of knowledge, technology, patronage, authority, and relations of power during the nineteenth century, we can see that such identifications were neither necessary nor imaginable prior to the nineteenth century. (Mitchell 2009, 67).

Mitchell argues that during this time “specific languages [went] from being understood and portrayed as natural features of particular local landscapes and environments to being experienced as inalienable attributes of human beings...as the fundamental bases of individual identities” (ibid, 13-14). Yet these linguistically-based “individual identities”

would also become the basis of “imagined communities” (Anderson 2006), ultimately coalescing in the formation of a linguistically defined state (Tamil Nadu) within the Indian federal republic in 1956³⁶, and, in the late 20th century, attempts to form a linguistically based Tamil state in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka (either within a federalist framework in Sri Lanka, or, as in the case of Tamil Eelam, as an independent republic). The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has often been theorized in terms of long-distance nationalism, in which the homeland territory (Eelam) is seen as the primary location of political activity, even for diasporic individuals (Appadurai 1996; Hobwbawm 1990; Fuglerod 1999, Wayland 2004). Even when transnational or online Tamil activity is considered (Amarasingham 2015; Ranganathan 2010), this online activism is still understood as primarily invested in the specific location (and political project) of Eelam. In this chapter, I consider a potentially deterritorialized aspect of Tamil linguistic nationalism, as a continuation of the progression Mitchell recounts from language as a property of landscape to language as a property of (mobile, in this case) individuals, and as a personified entity in itself (Mitchell 2009). I propose that we think of the act of migration as a continuation of this process of deterritorialization, and the concomitant personification of Tamil and consider Mother Tamil as a migrant, or even as a refugee. That is, a recasting in which Tamil is seen as under threat in Tamil homeland spaces, and in which diasporic locations are seen as sites of asylum, where Tamil must be honored and transmitted from generation to generation.

³⁶ In 1956, the boundaries of “Madras State” were redefined along linguistic lines; in 1960 the state’s name was changed to Tamil Nadu (“nadu” means land or country in Tamil).

From Plural Tamil to Singular *Tamoul*

But if Tamil itself is undergoing a process of deterritorialization, its specific reterritorialization in Paris (and France more broadly) must also be considered. To this end, a brief review of French linguistic policies, as well as a comparative look at another Francophone site of Tamil diaspora (Montréal, Canada) will be helpful in understanding the ways in which the specific context of French linguistic nationalism shapes even a transnational linguistic identity.

Sonia Das's linguistic ethnography of Tamil communities in Montréal is a useful comparative lens in two respects: 1) it broadens the perspective on French-Tamil linguistic interactions, 2) like Paris, Montréal's Tamil population is both Indian and Sri Lankan in origin (Das 2016). Das describes how Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil strategies for linguistic transmission interact with Québec's own French-English linguistic rivalry to create a unique situation in which Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils seek to emphasize the linguistic distinctiveness of their two dialects of Tamil, in order to uphold differing community self-identities, rooted in respectively cosmopolitan and primordialist linguistic ideologies (Das 2016). Bolstered by governmental policies which support heritage language programs for children, Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil communities have established two distinctive Tamil heritage languages in which each community's supposed linguistic distinctiveness is used to signal their social incommensurability (Das 2016).

The situation is different in France. For one, there is little state support of Tamil heritage instruction. Rather than deepening a linguistic rivalry between Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils, who speak differing dialects of Tamil, Tamil language becomes, in spite

of both linguistic and non-linguistic differences between these two groups, a site of commonality. Both Indians and Sri Lankans espoused notions of Sri Lankan Tamil as more “pure,” this was an area in which Indians tended to praise the Sri Lankan community for its commitment to pure Tamil, and stigmatize their own regional dialects in which English loan words were more readily used. This linguistic commonality is asserted mainly on the level of shared linguistic ideologies which undergird a shared sense of ethnic identity as “tamoul,” an identity which is simultaneously externally ascribed by non-Tamils to whom the distinctions between Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils are not apparent. While in actual practice linguistic transmission efforts (through numerous Tamil “associations”) remain structured around shared places of origin (and thus, overwhelmingly not mixed between Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils³⁷), in some cases, language instruction is a site of intra-Tamil connections and collaborations which bridge those divides.

In Paris, as I will show, almost everyone I spoke to--be they Indian or Sri Lankan Tamil, students or teachers--emphasized the ancient heritage of their spoken language (what Das terms its “primordial” qualities), but rather than contrasting this primordial understanding of the language with a cosmopolitan one (as in Montréal), Tamil-speakers highlighted the language’s capacity to modernize, and internationalize—to travel from the palm leaf manuscript to the smart phone. Thus, learning Tamil could complement a cosmopolitan self-identity as a French Tamil subject who would be equally at home in both Tamil and French spaces (and in many cases blur the very notion of their

³⁷ It is also important to underscore that such “associations” also reflect divisions within each of these groups (which of course have their own internal diversity)—as is shown below, one significant distinction is the choice of affiliation (or not) with LTTE-linked language centers.

separateness). Linguistic proficiency—not just in Tamil, but, critically, in French as well—is at the heart of this identity, as it was widely understood that French fluency is essential to leading a good life in France³⁸. Bilingualism represented the ideal model for French-Tamil youth who would at once honor their Tamil primordial linguistic patrimony and carry it forward into a cosmopolitan future in France, though, as always, the reality is more complex, and the struggle to maintain inter-generational Tamil fluency is acutely felt.

Fear of a Disappearing Tamil

“...the life and death of a people came to be associated, not with their geographic location or even with their shared cultural practices, but with the life and death of their ‘language’” (Mitchell, 2009, 89).

Language loss across generations is a typical concern for all diasporic populations, but for Tamil speakers such diasporic language loss provokes an additional anxiety in relation to fears about Tamil’s viability as a minority language in India and Sri Lanka. I use the phrase “fear of a disappearing Tamil” to refer not only to anxieties about improper language transmission in the diaspora, but to reference to the way in which such anxiety is specifically grounded in historical, political, economic, and social contexts of India (Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry) and traditionally Tamil-majority regions of Sri Lanka, in which Tamil fluency is seen as threatened or in decline. The forces behind the supposed decline of Tamil are very different in those two settings. In India, Tamil’s

³⁸ Lack of French fluency poses obvious practical obstacles in the overwhelmingly monolingual context of French. Lack of French fluency among immigrant communities also attracts stigmatization of such groups as unassimilated, or even unassimilable.

decline is largely understood as a product of globalization and neoliberal ideology that privileges the economic advantages of learning English and sociolinguistic practices of mixing Tamil and English which signal modernity among a younger generation, and secondarily (more so historically) with the dominance of Hindi as a national language. Whereas in Sri Lanka, the fear of the decline of the Tamil language is linked to both legislative changes to the standing of Tamil as a minority language, and marginalization and violence against Tamils within Sri Lanka, which are seen as part of a strategy of genocide against Tamil communities in Sri Lanka. The history of violence against Tamils in Sri Lanka can be seen as intertwined with violence against the Tamil language itself, as for example in the burning of the Jaffna library and its vast and irreplaceable collection of Tamil historical texts in 1981, and with the loss of rights and status of Tamil communities stemming from the Sri Lankan Government's progressive abdication of minority community rights in the Sinhala Only Act of 1956, and in the Constitution of 1972. Language maintenance in Paris, therefore, is not only a product of the desire to maintain local communities of Tamil speakers, but is rooted in pre-migration experiences in national homelands, and expresses a continual investment (whether material or affective) in homeland linguistic politics. The linguistic ideology expressed in Paris, however bridges the distance from homeland to diaspora by (re)imagining a global(ized) Tamil speaking community as the flame-keepers of an awesome but imperiled linguistic heritage.

The first part of this chapter presents several linguistic autobiographies elicited from university students studying Tamil at a Paris university, to show how these linguistic ideologies emerge from their own engagement, past, present, and projected into

the future, with Tamil language, and more broadly, how they construct a sense of Tamil identity in which one's language, rather than one's location, is a marker of authentic Tamil self-hood. It then turns to a discussion of two Sri Lankan Tamil language centers, situating specifically Parisian ideologies about the Tamil language within now transnationally circulating narratives of Tamil as a "pure"—and simultaneously cosmopolitan—language. In part two, I examine French-medium expressions of Tamil identity which do not center—or at least do not exclusively center—around the *use* of the Tamil language, but nevertheless seek to (re)assemble a single linguistically based Tamil community.

Part I, Mother Tamil's Children in France

One of the first things I did in my fieldwork in Paris, beginning in fall 2014, was contact several organizations that offered Tamil courses to both children and adults, and start auditing a Tamil literature class at a university in Paris. I got permission from my Tamil professor to give a pitch in each of her classes to her students—who were overwhelmingly of Tamil origin—asking if they would be willing to meet with me for my research. It so happened that while the majority of students in the university Tamil courses were of Sri Lankan Tamil heritage, all those who volunteered to meet with me were either themselves from Pondicherry, or had parents who were. When I started talking to these college-aged young people, it became clear that in the realm of language there were connections that crossed Sri Lankan and Pondicherry Tamil communities, and that language became a way to talk about both similarities and differences between themselves as Tamils and other Tamils. This was not too surprising given that such comparisons between regional varieties of Tamil had also been a regular feature of

conversations about the language that I had in both India and Sri Lanka. Notably, in South Asia those conversations also included considerable discussion of which dialects within Tamil Nadu (typically privileging Madurai over Chennai) or Sri Lanka (in which the Jaffna dialect is privileged) were most “pure.” I return to the notion of “pure,” or classical Tamil (sen Tamil), and its importance, later in the chapter.

While I was in Batticaloa in May 2015, my husband and I went out to dinner and ordered our food in Tamil. Our waiter, a young Tamil man who was himself fluent in English, seemed amused by our use of Tamil, and we started talking about where and why we had learned Tamil. His English fluency was, in fact, partly a product of having pursued higher education in an English-medium university in Cyprus. As the conversation turned to Tamil, and its various dialects, my husband asked him, “so which Tamil is best?” and the young man unhesitatingly but somewhat sheepishly (given that he himself spoke the Eastern dialect) replied “Jaffna!” And then added—“but don’t make a political problem out of it!” The comment of course alludes to very deep political problems that could be extracted from the rivalry between the Jaffna peninsula and the Eastern province (which, though once united under the control of the LTTE split when an Eastern LTTE leader defected and formed his own political party in the Eastern region). But I also dwell on it to draw out the way that beliefs about different forms of Tamil and their competing pure, or classical, nature are widespread among Tamil speakers, be they diasporic or not, and while they index real differences, at times those differences are subsumed within a singular category of Tamil, while at times, they are seen as the basis for altogether separate community membership.

French Colonial Patronage (and Exploitation) of Tamil

In this section, I present a brief interlude into the linguistic history between French and Tamil to contextualize the university environment in which the students I spoke with were learning Tamil, and emphasize the historical *durée* of French and Tamil linguistic encounters. Tamil has been taught at this Parisian university since 1868. The mission endowed to the School of Oriental Languages—as it was previously called—at its establishment in 1795 was “the instruction of living Oriental languages with a recognized utility for politics and commerce” (Loi du 10 Germinal, 1795). The university’s literature in 1948 affirmed these practical interests in learning Tamil stating; “missionaries, planters and functionaries often find themselves in need of knowing Tamil” (Miele 1948, 123), but also spoke appreciatively of the language’s beauty and heritage noting: “The literary production of Tamil extends over two millennia...the mystic lyricism of the middle ages has a personal aspect that classifies it as among the most beautiful expressions of religious feeling; while modern Tamil prose writers are, in all of India, those with the most elegance and refined sensibilities” (ibid). In general, France’s colonial engagement with India is often a lacuna in both French colonial historiography (in which the Indian “Comptoirs” are presented as marginal colonies) and Indian nationalist historiography (in which independence is granted in 1947, and not belatedly, as with Pondicherry, in 1962). Yet as Appasamy Murugaiyan makes clear in his contribution to the edited volume *Historie Sociale des Langues de France* (A Social History of France’s Languages)—in which Tamil is included as “a language of immigration”—the connections between the Tamil language and France go back much further than common understandings—which tend to link Tamil exclusively to the post-

1980s wave of Sri Lankan Tamil migration—typically acknowledge (Murugaiyan 2013). In Das’s ethnography of Tamil communities in Quebec, she traces the encounter of French and Tamil linguistic communities back to the French-Indian colonial encounter and argues that French/British rivalry for colonial dominance produced particular investments in Tamil language printing and publishing both in practical applications in service of the French colonial project, but also to gain prestige in orientalist academic pursuits (Das 2016). Yet Das’s examination of the colonial relationship between France and (Tamil-speaking) India is entirely confined to the (early) colonial era. My research makes the case for a continuing postcolonial relationship between France and Pondicherry, which emerges in the life stories of French Tamil students in the university classroom, whose French citizenship (acquired by grandparents in Pondicherry during French colonial rule) and French-medium schooling (which is also French government-subsidized, as part of the effort to continue the French sphere of linguistic—and political—influence in the international “Francophonie”) enabled them to settle in and around Paris.³⁹ This is the history that brought these Pondicherry-origin students into the

³⁹ In many cases, even families in Pondicherry with French citizen family members (including the citizens themselves) do not speak French fluently, or even at all. One man I interviewed, who had gained French citizenship through marriage to his French national wife in Pondicherry noted that none of them spoke French before migrating to Paris—though he speaks six languages (Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, Telegu, Hindi, and English), he has found French particularly challenging. Whereas French linguistic competency is a requirement for *naturalized* citizenship, descendants of those who opted for French citizenship during or at the end of the French colonial period when it was made available are eligible for “automatic” citizenship through *filiation* (*jus sanguinis*), though in actual practice it can be maddeningly difficult to claim that citizenship without French fluency (in one case I heard of, a man spent 15 years proving his French citizenship in Pondicherry—once he was granted his French passport, he moved to Paris).

Tamil classrooms of a French university, where they are joined (and in fact, outnumbered) by students of Sri Lankan Tamil heritage as well.⁴⁰

Speaking with a professor who has been affiliated with the university for 30 years she said that when she was first there, students of Tamil were usually older, already highly educated, and though there were some diasporic students from overseas France, the students were generally not heritage learners. Over time, this has shifted to a younger population, the majority of whom have family links to Tamil regions of Sri Lanka and India. In a Tamil literature class in which I was present the professor admonished a student of Sri Lankan Tamil heritage who was reading the Tamil text out loud in a mumbling voice, ‘Don’t forget that you have here a piece of your linguistic patrimony (*patrimoine*) and the responsibility to render it homage.’⁴¹

The notion of *patrimoine* in French is actually far more widespread in its usage than the direct translation, patrimony, suggests. It certainly refers to the kinds of collective cultural heritage signified by the term “patrimony” (and which I took to be the professor’s meaning in the quotation above, hence my choice of the term in the translation), but it need not index the collective, civilizational scale that the English term implies. Indeed, the notion of inheritance suggested by *patrimoine* can be anywhere from universal (as in humanity’s shared patrimony) to national (anchored in the idea that each nation-state holds its own specific cultural patrimony) to familial: an inheritance from one generation to the next. The question of defining and transmitting Tamil *patrimoine* in

⁴⁰ There are also some students of non-Tamil heritage in the classes I visited, but they form a clear minority.

⁴¹ All single quotation marks in this chapter indicate quotations taken from extensive notes (rather than word-for-word transcriptions), and are my translations from French, unless another language is specified.

the Paris diaspora is central to this chapter, which will first consider the specifically linguistic dimensions of Tamil *patrimoine*, through the linguistic autobiographies of several young women, and through discussion of Tamil language centers in Paris, through which we will see that this “patrimony” is more often associated with the figure of the *mother*, rather than the patriarch.

But we will also see that Tamil *patrimoine* for Parisian Tamils cannot be reduced to language alone, and that, in the face of language breakdown, the French language, rather than Tamil, can be a means of transmitting Tamil patrimony across generations. This is made clear in the introduction to the French translation of a poetry collection of Paris-based Tamil poet Ki. Pi. Aravinthan (1953-2015) in which the translator, Franco-Tamil scholar Appasamy Murugaiyan notes that in Paris there is “a strong desire among Sri Lankan Tamils to learn and practice translation, evidently motivated by the need to transmit their linguistic and cultural patrimony to the young generations” (Murugaiyan 2014, 8). I turn now to Kavita’s linguistic autobiography, which reveals her desire both to claim her own Tamil patrimony and pass it on to her children.

Kavita’s Linguistic Autobiography, a mother’s struggle to teach Tamil:

I met Kavita⁴² in my Tamil literature class, where she was clearly one of the best students, and asked her to meet to talk about her reasons for studying Tamil. In our literature class, there were a half dozen typically-college-aged students—all young women, and then three older students: myself, a retired woman, and Kavita. Kavita was 34 when we met. She was married, with two children, who were then six and three years

⁴² Like all personal names given in this chapter, this is a pseudonym.

old, and worked as a preschool teacher (note that preschool is part of the French public elementary school system).

Kavita and I spoke in French, and while I didn't record the conversations, I was furiously scribbling down notes as we talked. She began by telling me about her parents and her early life. Kavita's mother was from Pondicherry, but from a rural village, rather than the main urban center, and never attended school. Kavita's father was an Italian who came to Pondicherry in the 1960s, among the first hippies, Kavita told me ("*parmi les premiers babacools*"). Her father ran a restaurant, and her parents met when Kavita's mother began working in his kitchen. Though Kavita was their only child together, her mother had sons from a previous marriage, and Kavita told me that her brothers spoke only Tamil. Kavita, on the other hand, learned Tamil from her mother and Italian from her father, and beginning at age 12 began learning French as preparation for entering the Lycée Française de Pondichéry—the French high school of Pondicherry, which is maintained with the financial assistance of the French government, at age 16. Attending this high school provided a direct path to higher studies in France, and she arrived in Paris to pursue her *license* (somewhat equivalent to a bachelor's degree). At the time she was unaware of university programs in Tamil, and so she earned her degree in English and Italian. After graduation, she'd hoped to be admitted into a competitive teacher-training program, but when she was not accepted, she found Tamil classes at the university and, in 2003, enrolled for a single year to keep from "wasting her time" until she could reapply to the teaching program again for the following year.

‘Tamil is not an easy language. It’s not like English or French, where there is no literary version,’ Kavita said. Das traces the emergence of the ideology of two forms of Tamil which Kavita expressed in this statement, noting that:

This distinction between literary and colloquial Tamil partially overlaps with the *Tolkappiyam*’s [note: an early Tamil grammatical text] earlier categorization of three genres: elututtamil (written Tamil), metai tamil (staged Tamil), and peccu tamil (spoken Tamil). Europeans added new functional distinctions—High and Low, literary and colloquial, and classical and modern...” (Das 2015, 38).

The diglossic characteristic of Tamil, which is reflected in phonemic and grammatical changes (particularly to pronouns, and various suffixes used to conjugate verbs) between the literary standard and various spoken dialects of Tamil, is widely recognized by its speakers and was a feature of all Tamil instruction that I have received, in which we would typically learn both “written” and “spoken” (in the local dialect) pronouns and verb endings, and be encouraged to practice speaking (and writing) in both forms. Nevertheless, some linguists and scholars of Tamil, including Das herself, argue against a diglossic model of Tamil, saying “there is not categorical distinction between Sri Lankan and Indian regional varieties, or even colloquial and literary registers of Tamil” (Das 2015, 140). Those who challenge a diglossic model also note the ways in which “literary” Tamil is used in public oratory (Bate 2009), and many modern Tamil literary genres experiment in writing in various spoken dialects as well, suggesting the purportedly neutral “linguistic” divisions within written and spoken are in fact more suggestive of sociological and situational distinctions. This is a particularly salient point in environments in which speakers of different dialects of Tamil either do or do not claim mutual comprehensibility, since to do so is also a choice towards or away from collective identification in a singular, linguistically-based Tamil community.

At any rate, despite the challenges posed by learning Tamil, what Kavita expected to be a kind of place-holder year dedicated to Tamil began to have a stronger and stronger pull. In 2012 (two years before our meeting), after achieving her goal of becoming a French public school teacher, she returned to the same Paris university, this time enrolled in a three-year degree program. The reason, she said, was out of personal interest, as a “return to the source” (*retour à la source*). Also, ‘I go back to India often, and I find that English dominates, that Tamil is becoming lost, and that troubles me. I have a patriotism towards Tamil. In France, people speak French, but over there they don’t speak Tamil.’

Kavita is reflecting several aspects of language devotion here, first the strong emotional association with her mother tongue. Though “mother tongue” translates very well with the Tamil expression “taay mozhi”—literally mother language--and the personification of the language as the divine “Mother Tamil” (Tamizht Taay) in many cases, including Kavita’s, the association is also quite literal: she, and many others, learned Tamil from her own mother, leading to an easy overlap between associations of language *and* mother and language *as* mother. Kavita also articulated here, for the first time in our discussion (in which I occasionally prompted her with questions, but in which, for the most part, she spoke freely and at length) what I have termed the fear of a disappearing Tamil. A Tamil which is becoming lost (*se perdre*). While Tamil linguistic nationalists around the time of Indian independence focused on the threat of Hindi—only accepting inclusion in the Indian nation (as opposed to an independent nation of Dravidistan) under a federalist structure in which Tamil gained both federal recognition and state-level dominance, today English is presented as its greatest threat. And this time, not through “foreign” Hindi imposition (though Hindi and Tamil are both Indian

languages, this doesn't stop many speakers from viewing them as foreign to each other), but through linguistic practices being adopted by Tamils themselves, a point Kavita returned to later. Lastly, Kavita draws a contrast between the way in which French serves as the exclusive national language in France, and the failure of Tamil to gain the same status within its linguistic territories in India (both Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu, which are separately administered as a Union Territory and State, respectively). Though Kavita can be seen as an immigrant to France who is highly invested in her own language, her sentiments are exactly in line with French linguistic nationalism in which full French fluency is seen as a precondition to full participation in the polity (as evidenced by its requirement in citizenship acquisition). And far from contesting this model for France, she would rather like to see it applied in her country of origin as well. Yet Kavita would also like to see Tamil flourish within France, advocating for full bilingualism as the ideal practice for French Tamil individuals. Bilingualism allows for the mutual expression, and reconciliation, of Tamil and French linguistic nationalisms: to be a legitimate French citizen or resident, one must speak French; to be a legitimate person of Tamil origin, one should speak Tamil. And yet, to return to Kavita's narration:

The Tamils who are born here don't speak Tamil. They are ashamed to speak it because they haven't perfectly mastered it. But you, you speak French even if you make mistakes—that's very good. People [meaning Tamils who emigrate to or are born in France] have to speak French, but the youth doesn't have to speak Tamil. So they don't.

Here Kavita uses the verb "être obligé" to express the contrast between the practical imperative of speaking French, and the moral imperative of speaking—or failing to speak—Tamil. Tamil isn't obligatory in the same way that French is, which means that its appeal is something else, something more affective.

‘The birth of my daughter is what pushed me to start Tamil again, in relation to transmitting Tamil to my children. In relation to Tamil which is disappearing in India.’
(C’était la naissance de ma fille qui m’a poussé à reprendre le tamoul par rapport à transmettre le tamoul à mes enfants. Par rapport au tamoul qui disparaît en Inde.”).
This is an even clearer evocation of the fear of disappearing Tamil and also draws a parallel between two spaces of Tamil fluency: her own diasporic household, and Tamil-speaking regions in India. Interestingly, the expected distribution of Tamil fluency is inversed between these two: whereas in India Tamil is disappearing, here in France (Kavita lives in a suburb of Paris), she is trying to revive it, though with difficulty, ‘My daughter isn’t bold enough to speak Tamil because she has an accent.’

Returning to her motivations for learning Tamil, she added, ‘Eventually I’d like to teach Tamil, either here at the university, or somewhere else, maybe in India. That’s my desire. My motivation for learning Tamil is, first off, my own interest, but after that, if it allows me to change careers, I’d like that.’ Kavita misses Pondicherry, and returns whenever she can. But she told me that because of her mixed heritage, ‘In Pondi people are surprised when I understand Tamil. When I say that I’m Tamil they don’t believe me, so I’ve started to say that I studied Tamil. That pushes people to think about the value of Tamil. But really it’s also because of my mother that I speak Tamil.’ She, in turn, is trying to transmit her mother’s language (mother tongue) to her own children. The mother’s role as a Tamil teacher is something that occurred across many of my conversations, but for Kavita, there were challenges to that role as French speaking spaces and individuals began to take on a greater role in her children’s lives. ‘My daughter spoke Tamil until beginning daycare (crèche) when she was two-years old.

After that, she spoke French. She's not bilingual, but she understands [Tamil]—not everything, but for the most part. She can respond, too, but her dad only speaks French, and she's in French surroundings [milieu]. Though if I ask her to say something, like, “amman, tanni veenmun” (mama, I want water) in Tamil, she can do it. But my son doesn't have the same level [of fluency] because he started daycare at one, and because he speaks French with his sister. My daughter knew a lot more [Tamil] words at that age. I do everything so that my children will have a Tamil culture. Once a year we go to India to see the family.'

I asked her, 'Is it possible to open them up to the culture here?' And she replied that though there were opportunities for Tamil culture in Paris, this was too far from her home in a suburban city, and therefore not possible for her family to access this year, since she had to maximize her time for studying since she had reduced her working hours to part time for the year, in order to work towards her university degree in Tamil. 'But next year my daughter will start Bharata Natyam.' Bharata Natyam, a South Indian classical dance form, is also a way in which Tamil communities throughout the diaspora seek to transmit Tamil cultural heritage—and identity—to their children, overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) to daughters. For example, writing of Toronto, Tom O'Neill notes, “Many parents also actively encouraged their children to learn aspects of their Tamil heritage such as Bharata Natyam classical dancing, Carnatic music and religious and language instruction” (O'Neill 2015, 129).

The conversation turned to Kavita's husband's family who she described as 'A Tamil family who have been here for a long time.' She said her mother-in-law speaks Tamil, 'but not like a Tamil' (pas comme une tamoule), which was also the case for her

father-in-law. Her husband on the other hand does not speak Tamil at all. Kavita explained, ‘immigrants are so afraid that their children will do badly in school that they speak French with their kids. But there are two problems with that. First, they lose their mother tongue (*langue maternelle*), and secondly, they learn a very bad French. It’s more difficult to correct bad French than it is to teach French starting from scratch. I tell the parents [of my students], “speak your language. They will learn French at school. Let us do our work!”’ When I asked her whether other teachers shared this attitude she said, ‘they told us to tell parents not to speak bad French to their kids in our teacher training—if not I wouldn’t have dared!’ In this pedagogical model, the primary duty of the school is to teach French, and parents’ effort to participate directly in this effort will only undermine the efficacy of teachers in carrying out this duty. While historically the home languages of immigrants have been seen as threatening to French cultural assimilation, Kavita stressed that her colleagues (including those who trained her), saw parents’ perceived lack of French linguistic competency as the greater threat. The central importance of French fluency goes unchallenged in such appeals to bilingualism, instead, the heritage language becomes not only a benefit in its own right, but a way to linguistically compartmentalize school and home environments such that the latter does not infringe upon the former.

Ultimately, though, Kavita had some compassion for this immigrant anxiety, ‘The parents want their kids to succeed,’ in France, and were willing to pay the price of losing their heritage language in order to promote French fluency. Even if Kavita’s pedagogical model for teaching French actually recast such parental strategies as detrimental to French fluency, she understood the parent’s will to promote French fluency in their

children. Outside of an immigrant context however, she posed the rhetorical question, ‘But in India, why let Tamil go?’ Even her brother’s daughter in Pondicherry went to an “English medium school,” and, Kavita recounted sadly, her niece doesn’t know how to write in Tamil. To Kavita, while she would like to see Tamil continue to be spoken (and written) by Tamil youth in the diaspora, including her own children, it is the sense of Tamil’s declining use in traditionally Tamil-homeland areas that bothers her the most. Language loss in this sense is not only, or even primarily, a diasporic issue, but rather a more existential threat to Tamil. Seemingly straightforward relationships between territory and language are complicated through this process—though her niece in Pondicherry is not literate in Tamil, in Paris, Kavita is studying Tamil literature at the university level.

As our conversation wound towards its end, Kavita reflected on the difficulties of moving from Pondicherry to France. After attending the French high school in Pondicherry, she came to France—it was the first time she’d left India, and she found the experience difficult. But, she said, she felt a lot of pressure to stay. ‘People said, “why are you giving up?” But now I think I should have said, “it’s not a question of giving up!” I could have gone back, but at the time I felt I had to stay. But what can I say, I have a fabulous husband and two marvelous children. Maybe I couldn’t have had this life in India...” She talked about her parents’ passing away, her mother only a year and a half ago, and questions surrounding what was to be done with the family home, wondering if her children would someday appreciate it, or if it was best to sell it off. ‘In India, I feel foreign, and in France too. But I feel less foreign in India.’

As our conversation ended, the last notes I took end on a resolute tone, whereas she attributed the failure of prior attempts to teach her husband Tamil to having been overly strict in her approach, she declared, ‘Beginning next year I’ll try to teach my children Tamil more formally—but I won’t be so strict.’”

Rohini’s and Krithika’s Linguistic Autobiographies, Sisters Reflect on their Mother Tongue

Rohini and Krithika are sisters. The younger sister, Rohini, was 24 and the elder, Krithika, was 27 years old in November 2014 when the following conversation took place. Both sisters were taking Tamil courses at the same university—though I was not in the same class as them, I had briefly visited one of Rohini’s Tamil classes while recruiting people to speak with for my research. Rohini volunteered, and suggested that I meet her with her sister as well. Rohini and Krithika were born in Pondicherry, and their family moved to France in 1992 (when they were two and five years old). Their grandfather had served in the French army during World War II, along with many soldiers recruited from the then-French-colony of Pondicherry. On the basis of his military service⁴³, he was granted French citizenship, which he had passed down to his daughter, and she, in turn, had transmitted to Rohini and Krithika. Even before her family moved to France, Krithika had attended the French school in Pondicherry.⁴⁴ Rohini was too young for school while she still lived in Pondicherry, and began her schooling in France, as did their two younger brothers, born in France. Despite French

⁴³ The military contributions of Pondicherry Tamil soldiers in both world wars are often highlighted by Pondicherry communities in France to this day, including memorialization through public monuments and events sponsored by both French and Indian government representatives.

citizenship, the move to France was challenging for their mother and father, who found that their Indian qualifications as an English teacher and accountant, respectively, were not recognized in France. Instead, their mother worked as a childcare provider, and their father, having found only janitorial work—a downward mobility which his daughter described as having ‘broken his morale’—was now retired. Though the sisters left Pondicherry early in their lives, the family had made four visits back since, and Krithika had additionally done a month long teacher training program in Pondicherry as well.

The sisters told me they speak French to each other, and French with a smattering of Tamil words at home. They recounted that their parents encouraged them to speak French at home to help them in school. This forms part of the pattern of Tamil language loss that Kavita criticized in our conversation, but in many ways Rohini’s and Krithika’s relationship to Tamil should give mothers like Kavita hope: both sisters had decided to enroll in university courses in Tamil, and both felt a strong desire to connect with their Tamil heritage—and language.

I asked them about their family’s involvement in Pondicherry-linked cultural events or organizations. In response they introduced a contrast between Pondicherry and Sri Lankan Tamil communities in the Paris area, telling me, ‘it’s mostly Sri Lankans that have lots of gatherings (*fêtes*), but we stay within the family (*rester en famille*).’ Indeed, they identified their cultural contact with Pondicherry as exclusive to their family circle—the nuclear family of six, and their grandmother, who lives part of the year in Pondicherry, and part of the year with them. Unlike their parents, with whom they speak French (albeit with Tamil code-mixing), their grandmother speaks only Tamil, and they in turn, speak Tamil with her.

In addition to the sense of greater public celebration among Sri Lankan Tamil communities, specifically linguistic differences emerged as well. We talked about the various Sri Lankan language schools for children, and they noted that they had had no Tamil classes as children. Rohini expressed her opinion, which began at an early age, that Sri Lankans speak good Tamil. She said that in talking to them she began to think, “I should know my language and my heritage,” as she felt they did. In general, she seemed to express a sense that Sri Lankan Tamils served as guardians of the language, speaking “good Tamil,” and more diligently transmitting that linguistic competence inter-generationally.

I asked each sister when their interest in formally studying Tamil began. For Rohini, it began with a book. In middle school, a friend of hers gave her a Tamil textbook which ‘sparked my desire to learn Tamil,’ but it was not until this year that she actually began since, earlier, she had been studying chemistry, and did not have the time to enroll in Tamil classes as well. The importance of literacy is underscored again in Rohini’s account. Though she had enough spoken fluency to converse with her grandmother, in her telling, it was not until she began reading and writing that she truly started to “learn Tamil.” Curious to know more about the friend who had given Rohini the book, later in our conversation, I asked the sisters if they had had Tamil friends growing up. Krithika’s reply was, ‘none at all.’ For Rohini, there had been only two. Both were Indian Tamil in origin, one of whom was born in France. Rohini said that this friend, ‘sees India like the Europeans do—that is to say, like a tourist does, as colorful and exotic.’ However the other friend lived in India until she was seven and ‘speaks very good Tamil.’ It was this second friend who gave Rohini her first Tamil textbook.

Krithika's formal studies of Tamil had also begun just that year. She was doing a Tamil "formation" this year after having done a *license* (3 year degree) in English and then continuing on to an elementary school teacher training program. However, she'd been unhappy in the teacher training program and quit it to earn a degree in Tamil instead, with the idea of going to be a teacher in India. I asked if she imagined that as a long-term or temporary position, and she said she was still trying to figure it all out, but that the idea had grown from a month long internship (*stage*) that she'd recently done in India, which was organized by a family friend. She told me she preferred it there because the students were more respectful—Rohini interjected her to ask me if I had noticed the disrespectful style of speech of French kids (I had mentioned having taught English in a French public elementary school from 2008-2009)—and also the possibility of helping students in need in India.

The conversation returned to Rohini, who remarked, 'there is a problem of preservation of culture [in India] because Indians look too much to Europe and think that things are better here, but they don't appreciate their heritage and as a consequence they don't take care of their monuments, and their heritage.' She identified the Tamil film star Kamal Haasan as one person fighting for such preservation. Rohini's appeal to Kamal Haasan's good example shows that the charismatic appeal of Tamil film stars extends across generations and nations, into a second generation of the diaspora (see the following chapter for more on Tamil film in the diaspora)⁴⁵. Though Rohini emphasized material culture, like monuments, over linguistic practice, her anxiety about Indians'

⁴⁵ Subsequent to our interview, in February 2018, Kamal Haasan also formed a political party in Tamil Nadu, reflecting the enduring link between cinema and politics in Tamil Nadu, as well.

perceived inadequate stewardship of their cultural heritage echoes with the fear of a disappearing Tamil.

I asked her what had made her think differently from the attitude she characterized above, and recognize the value in her cultural heritage. Bharata Natyam was the turning point, followed by other capital C cultural activities like playing classical music on the veena, and Tamil martial arts. Rohini told me that when the family visited Pondicherry in 2003, her mother forced her and Krithika to take Bharata Natyam classes, but in the end, they both really enjoyed it, and continued with the dance in France, though it was not until 2008 that they were able to find a teacher in their own town. Krithika commented that though there were teachers in Paris, they wanted something closer to home. This echoes the struggle Kavita described to find Bharata Natyam classes for her daughter in their own suburban city. These challenges show the geographic centrality of Paris in Tamil cultural activities and the extent to which those who wish to participate in those activities must be willing to travel to Paris; after all, Kavita, Rohini, and Krithika were, at the time our interviews, travelling to Paris in pursuit of Tamil studies.

Rohini and Krithika agreed that it was their mother who fostered their love of Tamil culture. Besides her pivotal role in arranging Tamil cultural activities like Bharata Natyam, the sisters presented their mother's cooking as another example. Just as Kavita had learned Tamil from her mother and sought to transmit it to her children, Rohini's and Krithika's mother was taking on the role of cultural education for her daughters (and for her sons as well). Though their mother chose to speak to them mainly in French, hoping to facilitate their upward mobility in French society, her encouragement to study Tamil cultural forms, and her efforts to maintain connections with Pondicherry had led her

daughters to pursue Tamil fluency as an expression of their appreciation for their Tamil heritage (for Rohini) and as a pragmatic tool to strengthen their own bonds with India, perhaps even to the extent of a return (for Krithika). Though their mother focused on Tamil cultural transmission outside the linguistic idiom, her daughters ultimately connected their own Tamil heritage with the Tamil linguistic competency that they seek to achieve through higher studies.

Elodie's Linguistic Autobiography: Tamil as a Bridge Between Communities

Elodie, too, was a student of Tamil at the same Paris university in fall 2014, however, we had met previously, at an academic conference on South Asian literature in Paris, in which the Indian Tamil author Salma was featured. We stayed in touch and later met up for an open-ended interview, in French.

Elodie's father is from Pondicherry, and her mother is from Chennai (Tamil Nadu). Elodie's paternal grandmother had chosen French citizenship at the time of Pondicherry's independence, and passed it on to her children, including Elodie's father. Though he was a French citizen, he had no desire to go to France and was not educated in French schools. But, as his family had financial problems, he eventually gave in to familial pressure to go to France, enrolling in the public university of a small French city. The experience was difficult both academically and personally. Because he didn't speak any French at all, he felt lost in his classes, and socially isolated, and left to go stay with an older uncle in Paris. Yet he had a hard time in Paris as well, unable to find a job and with no savings to rely on. Luckily a social worker (*assistante sociale*) from his university managed to reach him in Paris, and encouraged him to come back to the university. This person was able to point him towards part-time courses in English (since

he was unable to understand French) so that he could continue collecting his scholarship, without which he had no source of income. Yet because he had left his student lodgings unoccupied during his stay in Paris, he no longer had a place to stay in his university town. Fortunately, the same social worker was able to find him a network of Indian students who were willing to host him while he looked for new accommodations, also fulfilling some of his need for community. After pursuing his studies for some time, and learning more French, her father returned to Paris. This time, he was able to find employment, and also continued his studies in information technology, a departure from the degree in business that he had earned in India (but which was not recognized in France). During this period he worked his way up from his first position as a security guard to a successful career in hospital administration. According to Elodie, her father's English fluency was an asset to this upward mobility. Even as a security guard, he was able to translate for his company, where not many others spoke English at that time. Elodie recounted that her mother, too, was eventually able to draw on the cultural capital of speaking English for professional advancement in France—but not without first learning French.

Elodie's mother is from Chennai, meaning she did not have French citizenship. Elodie's father returned to India for the marriage, but after moving to France, they were once again married, in a French civil ceremony, to simplify the administrative process of her application for citizenship (through marriage with a French citizen). Based on his own difficult experiences as a non-French-speaker, her husband suggested she take time to learn French before trying to work. She began taking French courses (though Elodie didn't specify where she studied, free and low-cost French courses for immigrants are

offered at most city halls in France, as well as by many different non-profit organizations); her teachers, noticing that she was intelligent and motivated, suggested that she study for the French baccalaureate degree. Though the French parts were difficult, the other subjects were easy for her mother to pass, Elodie said, since she (like her husband) had earned a bachelors level degree in India (a higher level than the baccalaureate), which was not recognized in France. Having obtained a French degree, she was quickly able to find work, and, with the added benefit of speaking English, she rose quickly. Elodie recounted that her mother worked until her third child was born, when she extended her maternity leave for several years before eventually pursuing a career in hospital information technology.

Elodie is her parents' first child, and she said that they spoke to her exclusively in French. She explained to me that her parents were trying to learn the language themselves through practicing it with her, and once she started going to school, she would correct them in their French. This charmingly inverts the role of mother tongue transmission, such that their young daughter became the teacher, but I suspect it was also, from her parents' perspective, part of the strategy described by Kavita, and enacted by Rohini's and Krithika's parents, to prime their children for success in French-medium schools by exposing them to the language at home. Elodie's parents also bestowed a French name on their daughter. Nevertheless, with each other, her parents continued to speak Tamil at home, and when she was eight or nine years old, her Tamil-speaking grandparents came to live with them. It was the arrival of her grandparents, who did not speak French, that prompted Elodie to learn Tamil in order to speak with them. The role of grandparents, even more so than parents, as transmitters of Tamil linguistic

competency was also reflected in Rohini's and Krithika's linguistic autobiographies, and was a feature of a conversation I recount below, in which a French-Tamil mother ascribes her older daughter's superior Tamil skills to the relatively greater amount of time spent with her grandmother. The grandparents' role in language transmission in all of these cases reflects the greater pull towards Tamil when French cannot be used as an alternative means to communication. This is a factor which enables many Sri Lankan Tamil parents to transmit Tamil to their own children, since for most in the first generation, they did not have the ability to pursue the French-at-home strategy of linguistic transmission.

Elodie was a very motivated student of Tamil, and in the beginning, studied on her own, and with her father's help, until a friend of her family's suggested that she get materials from the Tamil Cholai. Elodie described the Cholai as a Sri Lankan Tamil organization that exists throughout Europe and that has a very good curriculum for Tamil language, with lots of cultural aspects. She explained to me that the Cholai offer Tamil classes, but because she lived outside of Paris, and the Cholai is centered in La Chapelle, she found it too far to attend the classes, and instead studied from their textbooks at home, and then took the exams to progress from level to level. I told Elodie it was rather remarkable that she was so self-motivated from a young age. Elodie said that for her, learning Tamil was always something she wanted to do, in contrast, her younger brother and sister had to be encouraged, and even pressured, by her parents to study Tamil. Now, as an adult, Elodie was at the time of our meeting, pursuing a masters in comparative French and Tamil literature, enacting the desired outcome of full French and Tamil fluency, even down to an appreciation for the literary traditions of both languages.

The Politics of Linguistic Transmission:

One of the things that interested me about Elodie's linguistic autobiography was her use of Tamil Chola⁴⁶ pedagogical materials, and her participation in the exam system. In discussing this, Elodie also mentioned that there are not always good relationships between first generation Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils, but she said this was changing in the second generation. Indeed, the university classrooms where I met Kavita, Rohini, Krithika, and Elodie were spaces in which second and 1.5⁴⁷ generation Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil students were learning side by side. Yet I admit that I was somewhat surprised to hear that the Chola⁴⁶, too, were attracting Indian Tamil students given the degree to which they are identified with Tamil Eelam nationalist politics. As Elodie noted, the Tamil Chola are part of a network of schools throughout Europe which teach Tamil to Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic youth. Ostensibly the schools teach Tamil language and cultural activities, but they are widely recognized to have a pro-Eelam political stance. In line with pervasive concerns of LTTE resurgence from the diaspora, this 2014 article from the Sri Lankan newspaper Asian Mirror proclaims:

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are running “Madrassa⁴⁸ type” indoctrination schools in European Union countries in which there is a substantial population of Tamils from Sri Lanka, a top Lankan diplomat has revealed.

⁴⁶ I use the term Tamil Chola⁴⁶ as the English translation (essentially a simplified transliteration) of “Tamizhchoolai” from Tamil script, which combines the two terms, doubling the “c” according to the sandhi rules. It is worth noting that the Chola materials also make use of the French translation “Tamoulchola⁴⁶,” incorporating the French word “Tamoul” in a translation, rather than simple transliteration, of Tamil/Tamizh.

⁴⁷ I am borrowing the term 1.5 generation, which I encountered in Asian American studies, where it is used to indicate generations born outside the US, but, having arrived as young children, primarily acculturated into US society.

⁴⁸ Of course “madrassa” is merely an Arabic term denoting “school,” and is more widely used outside Arabic-speaking regions with the connotation of Islamic religious educational institutions. Yet its usage here is clearly in line with the narrow connotation of schools which promote fundamentalist Islamic ideologies in support of terrorism.

Speaking at the Ministry of Defense conclave here, Sri Lanka's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Ravinatha Aryasinha, said that the LTTE has established 'Madrassa-type' schools called 'Tamil Cholai' to 'ferment the radicalization of Tamil youth, and glorify terrorism and martyrdom.' (Asian Mirror 2014).

Fears of diasporic Tamils—particularly from Europe—stem from their historical role as backers and financiers of the LTTE well past the point where it enjoyed the general support of the civilian population in the areas it controlled, and in spite of mounting evidence of human rights violations against civilians committed by the LTTE. And yet, as Jaffna-based political writer and poet Nillanthan has argued, invocation of a diasporic threat five years after the end of the war, when the LTTE had been decimated militarily within Sri Lanka, and their international financing networks (including within France) dismantled, can also be seen as a way in which the government refuses to accept its *victory*, rather than its defeat, choosing instead to portray a continuing overseas threat to justify policies of continued militarization in Tamil-majority areas of Sri Lanka (Nillanthan 2014).

The Tamil Cholai in Paris, are headquartered in the northernmost part of La Chapelle, and also active in a range of suburban towns with Sri Lankan Tamil populations, for example La Courneuve, Garges, and Sarcelles, in which competitive sports meets have been put on by the Tamil Cholai in recent years. Unfortunately my own attempts to get in touch with leadership of the Cholai proved unsuccessful, after an initial response stating that they would get in touch with me soon, my follow-up message went unreturned, and I felt at that point that it would be intrusive to continue to contact them. However, the Cholai entered into my fieldwork in other ways—first, in my conversation with Elodie, and later, in an interview with a leader of an alternative Sri Lankan Tamil heritage language program, who invited me to come to their center and

spoke with me at length about the motivations of parents who choose to send their children to his language program, rather than the larger network of Tamil Cholai classes.

The Tamil Cholai in Paris also have a fairly well-established online presence, with a detailed Tamil site, and a simplified French version of their web page, and in local (Tamil medium) broadcasts of its events which are shared on both local and global Tamil news and social sites (and other sites like YouTube—where I accessed a video of the Cholai language exams, which I discuss below, as well as videos of their various sports meets, in which the ceremonial raising of the Tiger flag opens each event).

The Tamil Cholai web site has a header at the top of all the linked pages which features the round logo of the Tamil Cholai, in which are featured a traditional brass oil lamp (lit during prayer), the Eiffel tower, and a palm leaf manuscript, of the kind used for classical Tamil literature, with Tamil writing (unfortunately at a resolution where I cannot make out the text) on a green background, encircled by a brown border with the white Tamil text, which I translate as, “Our Tamil language is our life and our prosperity.” On a tan banner across the bottom of the logo the name of the school appears in both Tamil, and French (Tamoulchulai—France). The background of the header, on which the logo is superimposed, is composed of two photos, on the left, the Jaffna library (which was reconstructed according to the original plans during the ceasefire in 2002), and on the right, and the Eiffel tower. At the bottom of the page different photos of the same two monuments appear again, split on the right and left with the same Tamil text as featured in the logo, and below it a loose translation into French as “Our mother tongue is the root of our well-being.” Immediately, the symbolism of the palm leaf manuscript, and the overt references to “our Tamil language” and “our mother

tongue” as essential to well-being, and life itself, make clear the extent to which Tamil’s literary and linguistic heritage are essentially important. The importance of the Jaffna library itself is quite poignant, but it also stands in as emblematic of a place, in the same way that the Eiffel tower serves as a synecdoche for Paris, and even all of France (there is also a Tamil bookstore in La Chapelle which has a photograph of the Jaffna library printed on its storefront). The Jaffna Library and the Eiffel Tower are given equal visual weight, symbolically rooting the organization in both Jaffna and Paris.

The website contains a link to an “about us” section—while the link in the French version is dead, in the Tamil version it leads to a short page of text, which begins:

In Ilangai [note: this is Tamil name for the island of Sri Lanka], Sri Lankan Buddhist Sinhala racism very cruelly unleashed repression on the people of Tamil Eelam, sharply strengthening the Tamil nationalist struggle. Due to this situation, hundreds of thousands of people went to live all over the world.

In this manner, with the highest goal of teaching our mother tongue Tamil to the generations in French soil (maNNil), the Tamil Cholai Head Office was created for this purpose. On 11.11.1998 the head office of the Tamil Cholai began its work in an excellent manner. Today the Tamil Cholai Head Office is thriving with more than 63 schools and 350 teachers who provide a storehouse of wisdom in Tamil language and Tamil arts to more than 5000 students who are taught there. (Tamoulchulai-France 2013, my translation)

Note that rather than simply saying “in France,” the text uses the Tamil phrase, “French soil,” making use of the idiomatic reference to soil as a semantically rich index for place and belonging in Tamil. The link to the history of civil-war-induced diasporization of Sri Lankan Tamils could be seen as a simple nationalist retelling, but it also shows that the conditions of war and displacement are intimately tied to the desire to transmit Tamil inter-generationally, creating not only the desire to counter the foreign influence of French “soil,” but also as a response to the fear of a disappearing Tamil.

The text goes on to explain a bit about teacher training, and that the classes extend through 12th grade, as well as mentioning the annual sports meets and annual competitions to recite verses from the Thirukkural (this centrally important classical Tamil “moral code” is also discussed in the previous chapter), which “inspire and encourage students.” The font and formatting of the text then change and within quotation marks appears the Tamil text, of kural 399 from the Thirukkural which translates as, “The learned will long (for more learning), when they see that while it gives pleasure to themselves, the world also derives pleasure from it.”⁴⁹ Lastly, the page expresses the pride felt by the office of the Tamil Cholai for their work towards the efforts indicated above, and in closing, the same text (in Tamil) appears in quotation marks and on the banner at the bottom of the page: Our Tamil language is our life and our prosperity.⁵⁰

I want to highlight that while the Tamil Cholai are by far the largest network of Tamil schools in Paris, they are also just one choice in a rather vast menu of options for parents looking for Tamil language classes. These are in fact offered by almost all Tamil cultural associations that I encountered during my research. I turn here to a discussion of one such competing center. Though this center presents itself as “non-political,” by shifting my focus away from the dominant LTTE-aligned Tamil Cholai in my fieldwork

⁴⁹ Translation and kural number are taken from Thirukural-World.blogspot.com (the Tamil Cholai website does not attribute the phrase to the Thirukural, because the style of the language and the construction of the phrase—perhaps even the kural itself—would be recognizable to most Tamil literate audiences as indicative of this fundamental cultural heritage.

⁵⁰ “Nam vaazhvum vaLamum tamizhmozhi enboom.” Though this phrase is in both cases presented in quotation marks I can’t find any other attributions of it online other than the French Tamil Cholai itself.

and analysis, I also wish to highlight an internal plurality of political orientations in regards to the shared goal of Tamil linguistic transmission.

Our Language Must Remain

I contacted this school, which I'll call the Tamil Center, around the same time as the Tamil Cholai, interested specifically in getting in touch with a Sri Lankan Tamil cultural association which offered language classes. The director of the center, who I'll call Arumugam, invited me to the space they rent, which is also shared with other non-profit groups when they are not using it. The location of the main Tamil Center, which I visited, is south of La Chapelle, and a bit further east. It is interesting to note that it thus lies outside the conglomeration of Tamil businesses and cultural associations, a spatial displacement that seems to mirror its status as outside the dominant framework of nationalist Tamil diasporic politics, as well. Though it lies outside of La Chapelle, it too, became embedded in the local urban space, with the name of the metro station closest to it often taking over for its "official" name; because of this place-based link, when the center shifted buildings in 2005, they decided to stay close to the same metro station (this is similar to the account provided by Soumya, of the Ganesh Temple, who noted the desire to stay by the same metro station—in that case La Chapelle—as a key criteria in choosing the temple's new location as well). Today there are 4 affiliated centers in the greater Paris region, with around 300 members.

The Tamil Center was founded in 1986, during the earliest wave of Sri Lankan Tamil arrivals in France. Arumugam himself arrived in Paris in 1991, with his father, as a refugee from Northern Sri Lanka. He told me that the original goal of the center was to help Tamil adults to learn French, which was difficult for them to do in non-Tamil

medium courses (such as those offered by city halls and French non-profits). Through the center, those who had been in France longer than the new arrivals organized to teach French ‘through their mother tongue of Tamil.’ The center’s second goal, from the beginning, was to help others in the community of new arrivals through doing various volunteer work. According to Arumugam, ‘nearly everyone who was here at the time started coming.’ These goals shifted somewhat about three years into the functioning of the Center, when there started to be ‘problems—even in the family—with communication with the children who were born here,’ leading to the development of Tamil courses for children, which now form the bulk of the Tamil Center’s activities. Having heard anecdotally from many people that Sri Lankan Tamils were more successful in teaching their children Tamil because they avoided (or were unable to) speak French at home⁵¹, I asked whether teaching Tamil to children at home had worked. Arumugam replied, ‘In general, no. It does work for some,’ he mentioned one child who, though born in France, didn’t learn to speak French until he was seven years old, but he concluded, ‘With one child it is easy to transmit Tamil, but with two they will speak French between them.’ This dynamic between siblings is an interesting one, and often not deeply explored in models of immigration and acculturation which tend to configure families in a linear temporality across generations, without considering how sibling relationships, alongside parental and grandparental influence, affect linguistic competency. Arumugam made it clear that the example of the seven-year old monolingual Tamil speaker was both an

⁵¹ Note that this remark draws a comparative discrepancy between Pondicherry/Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil linguistic transmission strategies, in which Sri Lankan Tamils are said to be more successful in transmitting the language in the home. As Arumugam suggests, this normative model does not always hold up to reality.

exception to the rule, and did not represent the ideal outcome. Anyone who has lived—or even traveled—in France is well aware of the massive social and economic disadvantage that lack of French fluency poses. Like Elodie’s or Rohini’s and Krithika’s parents, or Kavita, Arumugam and the parents who enrolled their children in the Tamil Center wanted Tamil fluency *in addition to* French fluency. Though linguistic strategies of promoting Tamil fluency are a challenge to French monolingualism, they are in no way a challenge to the hegemonic role of French in public life, even if Tamil communities are often stigmatized (along with other immigrants) for not speaking sufficient French. Arumugam expressed the Center’s goals for French-born generations as this: ‘They must live like the French, but feel Tamil on the inside.’

Having discussed the shortcomings of a purely home-based approach to transmitting Tamil, our conversation then turned to the different possibilities parents faced in selecting a Tamil school for their children. Arumugam recounted that, in the mid-nineties, more “major” Tamil organizations began, chief among them, the Tamil Cholai (whose website states that they began in 1998), I paraphrase his remarks below:

The Tamil Cholai are much larger. We were the first, but we are small. We have stayed non-political. We have kept our values. In 2001, the Tamil Cholai started to make the textbooks for our children. Before, we had used books from India, which were not well-suited to diasporic learner’s needs. The Tamil Cholai also began to give the same exams throughout Europe. We Sri Lankan Tamils give a lot of importance to education, and the ability to be able to compare results through exams, so this appealed a lot of parents.

Yet while Arumugam spoke appreciatively of the Cholai curriculum, ultimately they chose not to participate in their international exam system, and instead developed their own exams unique to the Center. But if the loss of scale and comparability granted by the

larger structure of the Cholai is a disadvantage, the Tamil Center also provides its own advantages in comparison:

For us, there is a group of parents who come here even from a very long way off. For us, first of all, it's the discipline. We choose instructors who are trained (formé). It's more strict, like a private school. People come from Paris, but they also come from a long ways off because it's like a Sri Lankan school here.

Also modeled on the Sri Lankan school system, are the kinds of judged and ranked competitions in sports and Thirukkural recitation, which Arumugam described as giving parents 'the possibility to know their children's talents.' Again, like the language classes themselves, these extra-curricular activities run parallel to the program of the Tamil Cholai, and are based in pedagogical models familiar—and thus appealing—to parents from their own educational experiences. The students participate in an annual competition in General Knowledge, and are given report sheets for each of the three trimesters, and parents are convened to discuss the results with the teachers.

In addition, the Tamil Center goes on guided outings to cultural spots ("endroits culturels") in France, such as the World War II material. I asked for clarification of whether he meant French or Tamil cultural spots—thinking in particular of efforts to memorialize the participation of soldiers from Pondicherry on behalf of the free French army in World War Two that were being taken up by a Pondicherry-linked cultural association I'd met with in my research. Arumugam specified that he was referring to French cultural sites, and explained, that the objective was 'to help those who might not have the opportunity to know France (connaitre la France),' as well as for the enjoyment of the students.

While ethnic-based associations are often simplistically presumed to impede "assimilation" of immigrant and refugee communities, as Arumugam's formulation—

‘They must live like the French, but feel Tamil on the inside’—makes clear, for educators and parents who support the Tamil Center, the Tamil activities are not meant to withdraw their children from broader participation in French society, but are rather seen as a way of promoting it. Though Arumugam told me the French language courses for adults were still being offered, due to the scheduling restraints of the Tamil Center (open only on the weekends), and competition from other French language classes (from both within and outside the Tamil community), the Tamil Center does not have a large number of adult French learners. Similarly, they had previously offered classes in sewing for women, but they stopped because it was too difficult to transport the needed materials, including sewing machines. Instead, they now concentrate on children’s education. Primarily in Tamil, but also in English classes, and to ‘help our children in other domains like information technology.’ English and I.T. are widely viewed (not just by Tamil diasporic communities) in France as vehicles of professional success and upward mobility. There are 12 Tamil language teachers at the Tamil Centers, and six teachers for the other subjects, such as English and I.T. Among the teachers are two former students. Though the students do pay a “minimum” fee which is put towards the rent for the center, and food, the teachers are all unpaid volunteers.

Though Arumugam was proud of the accomplishments of the Center to date, he was anxious about its future, noting, ‘Now we have passed into the third generation. After the first generation is gone, who will continue [to teach Tamil]?’ This was the first clear articulation of the fear of disappearing Tamil, this time in the context of the diaspora, and the particular challenges faced by both the students and teachers.

It is difficult to balance the work of the Center with school work of the children, and the challenge is to make them *want* to learn. Two to three students have

continued to give classes after the 12th standard [and thus to take over the role of the first generation as linguistic transmitters], but it's too difficult for them when they begin higher studies. There are some teachers who work and come for the weekend to volunteer, like me, but it's difficult.

Yet it later became clear that for Arumugam, the fear of disappearing Tamil was not only a response to these logistical challenges which threatened its transmission in diaspora, but linked with a sense of an existential threat against Tamil which carried over from the experience of war.

After Arumugam's remarks about the difficulty of balancing studying and volunteering at the Tamil Center with school and work responsibilities, I asked him how parents decided which center to take their children to learn Tamil. 'Even with public schools, parents look for the best school. We [Tamils] are known for that!' he said with a laugh. But then, on a more serious note,

The Tamil Chalai are political institutions. The children who are a bit afraid of that, they come here, because we are independent. The teachers at the Chalai are people who have come from politics, the ex-LTTE. To maintain our language, it's good, but people are a little afraid. And also a little confused. But it's thanks to them that we are well organized.

We survived the war. We are afraid that our language will disappear. Our quote unquote enemy will succeed⁵². In India Tamil is half English; with us [Sri Lankan Tamil speakers], it's better.

Our language must remain (*Il faut que notre langue reste*).

Here, Arumugam's fear of a disappearing Tamil is of course tied to the war he endured, and the marginalization of Tamil within Sri Lanka. But, this anxiety also extends outside of Tamil-majority areas of Sri Lanka, and to a larger Tamil political and linguistic

⁵² Note that his actual phrasing was "notre enemi, entre guimets"—equivalent to the English use of "quote unquote" to denote a distancing from the term being used.

territory which includes (Tamil speaking) India, in which, rather than war and Sinhala dominance, English is presented as the “quote unquote enemy” of Tamil.

My next question pushed back against notion of disappearing Tamil, noting that there are more than 70 million speakers of Tamil, but before I could finish the thought, Arumugam objected, ‘But it’s not the real Tamil! They mix in English words. On that matter, we’re better in Sri Lanka. In India they can’t distinguish between Tamil words and English words. They are losing Tamil vocabulary.’ Though Arumugam’s division between “pure” Sri Lankan and “mixed” Indian Tamil seems to be creating a division in linguistic ideology between the two communities of speakers, it is in fact an ideology that is shared by many Indian Tamils as well—including Kavita, who stated very similar concerns about the encroachment of English, not only as a language replacing Tamil, but rather *infiltrating* it. Nor are such distinctions exclusive to Paris, or to diaspora settings in general. Rather, they reflect linguistic ideologies that are quite transnational in scope, and which I explore further in the following section.

Semmozhi Tamil (Pure Tamil)

I return here to a discussion of one of the Pongal events I attended January 2016 (which is also discussed in the previous chapter). This event was put on by an organization whose membership is mainly Sri Lankan Tamil, nevertheless, there is a conscious effort to establish a broader Tamil community in diaspora and across Tamil homelands irrespective of other points of division be they caste, religion, or nationality. Such an orientation also brings this festival into the orbit of a few self-made Tamil journalists in Paris. The first of whom, a young man who founded a French-language Tamil news site called the Tamil Journal, which I will discuss below, was present at the

Pongal festival, with the goal of providing coverage of a variety of Tamil Pongal celebrations throughout Paris. I saw him shortly after arriving at the Pongal festival; it was the first time we'd met in person again since I had met with him and the co-founder of Tamil Journal for an informal interview in a restaurant in La Chapelle. This young man introduced me to some of the festival's organizers, a husband and wife who I guessed to be in their early thirties. The wife of the couple told me that she was born in France to Sri Lankan parents. We were standing in a part of the hall in which a display for Tamil language had been set up, I pointed out the Kriya dictionary—a text I'd become intimately familiar with during my year-long Tamil studies program—and this led to a discussion of language. She told me that though she could speak Tamil, she had never learned to read or write, which she regretted, and praised me for learning to do so. This shows a particular emphasis on literacy (as well as certainly being a way for her to be both polite and welcoming to me through offering a compliment), since her spoken Tamil was doubtless far more fluent than mine, and yet, she identified her overall Tamil fluency as lacking since she did not know how to read and write in Tamil script. She said that out of her two daughters, the older one basically spoke better Tamil because she had spent more time in the care of her grandmother, but the younger one, who had spent more time with her mother, rather than grandmother, in her pre-school years, had not learned much Tamil. She told me that she would like to sign her daughters up for Tamil classes, and we began to discuss the different schools just as her daughter joined us, interrupting the topic. This interaction shared some similarities with part of a conversation I had, at another point in my research, with a young man who grew up in both Chennai and Paris, with Sri Lankan Tamil parents. We had already chatted a bit in basic Tamil, but he was

visibly surprised when I mentioned I had studied reading and writing in Tamil. ‘I know Tamil from speaking with my mother, but I can’t read or write. Tamils would be astonished to see white people speaking Tamil because the culture is so different,’ and he added, ‘you speak more Tamil than most Tamils born in France. They don’t see the value of it.’

Back at the Pongal festival, my conversation with the young woman organizer ended as her husband led me away to introduce me to the event’s two main guests of honor, a professor from Canada, and a radio journalist from Sri Lanka. I greeted them in Tamil, and suddenly found myself in the middle of a small circle of cell phones recording the conversation, of those apparently pleased and surprised to see a white woman speaking in Tamil, however imperfectly. The radio journalist took out a recorder of his own and asked me to answer a few questions for his listeners: how had I learned Tamil, how did I find the language, and what was my advice to Tamil youth born abroad, who lacked Tamil fluency, about their Tamil “identity.” A little nervous and tongue-tied, I struggled a bit to understand his questions, but was able to formulate my replies in Tamil, however full of errors! The last question was a particularly interesting one to me, as I think it contained a kind of implicit critique through the juxtaposition of Tamil youth who have “failed” to learn Tamil, against me, and my unexpected desire to do so. Also, interesting, though it purportedly addressed a non-Tamil speaking audience, both his question and my response were in Tamil, revealing that the actual intended audience was not Tamil youth in diaspora who did not speak Tamil, but rather fluent Tamil speakers around the world who listen to his radio program (which indeed has a global audience, amplified by the internet). I was nervous at this unrehearsed performance (having entered

the event anticipating being on the asking, not answering, side of the questioning dyad), and as I formulated my reply I focused as much on the form as the content of my answer, but from what I recall of my answer, I believe it amounted to praise of the language's beauty, and encouragement for the youth of diaspora to learn Tamil. Perhaps with more advanced warning I might have strayed a bit from this kind of boilerplate, but my remarks hew rather closely to the expected format of what I would argue has become itself a kind of discursive model, widely circulated in Tamil online media: the (usually Western/white) foreigner speaking—and praising—Tamil. Though Tamil has over 70 million speakers, it remains low-profile as a language of study on the global stage (indeed, my own university, Princeton, does not offer Tamil courses), meaning that there is a kind of novelty to hearing a foreigner speak Tamil. But there is also, more uncomfortably, a kind of prestige conferred by foreigners (at least those with privileged national/ethnic status) who speak Tamil. Indeed, on the Tamil language social media sites that I follow, profiles of foreigners who take an interest in Tamil language and/or culture are a regular occurrence. Most recently the profile of a Japanese woman who became totally fluent in Tamil, and pictures of a white family of tourists at Madurai's Chitterai festival were posted, and greeted with much praise, by members of a Madurai-based online group. Even Kavita herself, though she identifies as Tamil and learned the language from her Tamil mother (making it her mother tongue), found that when she was perceived as a light-skinned foreigner speaking Tamil in Pondicherry, it 'made people think about the value of Tamil.'

But in many cases such praise of those who learn Tamil is also a condemnation of those who fail to honor it through acquiring fluency (or literacy), as the question posed to

me, the remarks by the young man who contrasted my Tamil abilities with those of French youth of Tamil origin, and the hostess's self-deprecating remarks about her own Tamil show. Such criticism neglects other linguistic talents that diasporic youth may develop—their own conversational fluency in Tamil, or ability to code-switch, or even simply the ability to gain fluency in a language (French) *not* spoken at home. Instead, these kinds of remarks align with a broader ideology of Tamil identity in which linguistic, and particularly literary, mastery of Tamil is the ultimate index of Tamil cultural identity.

Returning to the space of the Pongal festival briefly, I will use another example to explore the reverberations of this notion of language-based identity throughout Tamil spaces, both “homeland” and diasporic. The journalist from the Tamil Journal introduced me to a man who runs a website on “Indian” news, events, and culture in Paris. Like many speakers of French, this man used “India” (*Inde*) less in relation to the borders of that country, and more as a short-hand for the entire sub-continental region. He himself is from Réunion, and though he told me he was Tamil in origin, he said his website focuses on India (broadly) rather than Tamil, specifically. He gave me his card, and in checking his website a few weeks later, I found a link to a video he made of the Pongal event at the Mairie. The video, which showcases the main events and speakers begins with a soundtrack of the song “Semmozhi.” Semmozhi is a compound of the words “pure” (*sen*) and “language” (*mozhi*) and will immediately be understood by Tamil speakers as a reference to the form of Tamil known as “sen” or “pure” Tamil—an elevation and praise of literary Tamil as an ancient but still-living cultural inheritance (and as opposed to spoken, or “vulgar” Tamil) (Ramaswamy 1991; Das 2016). I

immediately recognized the song, having previously watched the music video, and noted the extent to which it articulates the themes of what Ramaswamy has termed “language devotion” of Tamils (Ramaswamy 1991). And this is not by coincidence, the song’s musical score was composed by the pre-eminent Tamil composer A.R. Rahman, and the lyrics were composed by then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Karunanidhi, in honor of the 2010 World Classical Tamil Conference, which was held in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The video, directed by Gautam Menon, has been uploaded to YouTube by a number of different users, including the channel entitled “TheArrFans” (referring to A.R. Rahman), who uploaded it around the time of its release (on May 30, 2010) adding the English phrase “Tamil Anthem” after the romanized title “Semmozhi” (SemMorzhi 2010). As near as I can tell from comparing this video to others⁵³, this is the original music video. This same song was also used as background music in a report done by a Tamil-medium French-based television channel on the annual France Tamil Cholai language exams in 2017, which was uploaded to YouTube (*Tamil Exam 2017 France*). Almost the entirety of the song was played while the camera panned over hundreds of students awaiting their Tamil language exam in suburban Paris. I argue that the song and its music video illustrate important articulations of a contemporary Tamil identity that is portrayed as modern, technologically competent, and cosmopolitan, while rooted in an ancient and unbroken tradition, and in which Tamil language itself is the central component. The use of this song in Tamil media produced in the diaspora shows the continuing influence of such linguistic ideologies in Paris.

⁵³ This song has been uploaded to YouTube with a variety of videos—including a couple which take portions of the original video, and splice in additional scenes.

The song begins with a screen with the Tamil text, “அ (a) is the first letter, god is first in the world” and then the shape of the letter அ is traced across the screen—this act of drawing the first letter of the Tamil alphabet is also a traditionally done by young children at Pongal festivals, and is shown in the video of the Paris Pongal celebration, set to this same song as well. The first words of the song are, “All living things are born equal,” followed by the oft-repeated Tamil proverb “Every place on earth is our hometown,” these ancient proverbs are sung as the video shows rock-carvings with early Tamil script, and then a large hoarding on the beach which spells out the song’s chorus, “semmozhiyaana tamil mozhiyee” (Classical language, Tamil language). The song is sung by a veritable who’s who of major Tamil vocalists from a range of styles and generations, and they are shown against a sky-blue background in which individual Tamil letters float by. These shots of the singers are interspersed with the other vignettes, such as a child being led by his mother into a classroom where a female teacher is writing on the chalk board in Tamil, more stone carvings of early Tamils scripts, the massive Thiruvalluvar statue on the island off the coast of Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu, a young woman entering an office, sitting down to a computer at a cubicle and selecting Tamil out of a menu of Google language choices, and then navigating to the Tamil language Wikipedia page “kaNiniyi Tamil”—Computer Tamil, a young couple receiving a blessing, children in a classroom where a teacher is showing them how to write Tamil letters by sketching the Tamil letter “o” as an elephant, boys playing cricket, a group of girls riding a tractor, tracing Tamil letters in their dusty tracks, a woman performing Bharatha Natyam in front of a stone temple, children swimming in a river—the music builds at this point and A.R. Rahman is shown on the stage in front of the “Semmozhi”

hoarding, accompanied by a rock band, then a mother preparing vegetables while her young son practices writing the Tamil letter A, next, a scene of murukku (a kind of fried snack made from dough piped into oil) in the shape of Tamil letters, karagam dancers in front of a temple, a fire-spinner in front of an Alagar temple, now a shift from both classical and film style singing to hip hop vocals, scenes of a church, Hindu temple, and mosque, the early medieval paintings from Sittanavasal in Tamil Nadu, a field being plowed in the shape of Tamil letters, a mother walking in on a little girl who is drawing on the walls—the child briefly looks ashamed before her father smiles and motions the mother in, to reveal a large children’s drawing captioned with the word “amma” (mother) in Tamil script. More scenes of stone carvings of early Tamil script, ancient paintings, and cave carving, as well as the Thiruvalluvar statue, are then followed by footage of an old man in a rural looking house who picks up a cell phone, and a young man in a city who receives the old man’s text, in Tamil script, which translates to “Happy New Year, Karthik, from Mom and Dad (Amma Appa).” Next we see a museum with stone carvings of ancient Tamil on display, followed by a group of women in an upper-class home drawing kollam (chalk drawings, also an iconic Pongal activity shown in the Paris video), karagam and fire-spinner dancers again, parai attam (drumming), then-Chief Minister Kurunanidhi (author of the lyrics and patron of the conference) writing a letter in Tamil, and finally, a large group of school children who run towards all the singers and dancers from throughout the video who are now assembled together on the stage below the hoarding with the massive text, “Classical language, Tamil language.” To close out the video, a kite flies over the frame, and the logo of the World Classical Tamil conference Coimbatore 2010--the image of Thiruvalluvar’s statue in front of a cresting

wave—is shown on a black screen before the credits. The imagery chosen accompanies the spirit of the lyrics as well, which praises Tamil as “the mother tongue of Thiruvalluvar⁵⁴” and references major works of classical Tamil literature like (of course) the Thirukkural, the Tholkappiyam and work of several Sangam poets. Yet the lyrics also repeat “naam mozhi”—“our language,” and describes the affective draw of the language which is qualified as “peaceful,” “lovable,” “sweet” and “golden”—all strategies for drawing the viewer into the spirit of language devotion. Like the images chosen in the video, which oscillate between references to a glorious past, and contemporary moments which both reflect the enduring practice of traditional art forms, and the expansion of Tamil into newer technologies like cell phones and computers, the lyrics emphasize the historical depth and literary importance of Tamil, but also its intimate appeal in the present, as well as projecting it into the future, ending with the line, “Tamil language, our Tamil language, long life to Tamil!” The video also emphasizes the importance of written Tamil specifically, both in the premise of Tamil as the “semmozhi”—itself a reference to a specific, literarily-rooted form of the language—and through the repeated imagery of Tamil letters and writing, and in particular the transmission of Tamil literacy from an older to younger generation.

The choice of this song to accompany the videos of the Pongal festival and language exams in Paris therefore draws on the messages of the original song. In the case of the Pongal video in particular, it also ends up paralleling the original video in many ways, as the Paris Pongal film also features vignettes of key scenes from the

⁵⁴ I was greatly assisted in translating the lyrics by an English translation posted by a translation posted by user “Sarvana” on the blog “Navanivashini.blogspot.com.”

celebration—many of which overlap with the art forms shown in the original video: bharatha natyam and karagam dancing, parai attam (drums), tracing the letter A as part of the Pongal celebration, and drawing kollam, for example. But while the original video is firmly rooted in the natural landscapes and heritage monuments of Tamil Nadu, its use by a Réunionais Tamil filmmaker to portray a largely Sri Lankan Tamil-origin Pongal festival in Paris draws out the mobility of these cultural practices—and the shared language which is presented as foundational to them. Similarly, in the French report (by and for a largely Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic audience) on Tamil Cholai language exams, the song is played over footage of the location, the “Maison des Examans”—Exam House, a location used for all kinds of organized exams, in a Paris suburb linked by the suburban RER trains, and large groups of students and their families as they await the start of the exam. In the end, the song is less about a territorialized homeland than it is about a deterritorialized cultural heritage—the mother tongue, Tamil, which resides within the speaker, in line with the historical shift of identification of Dravidian languages from landscape to linguistic community documented by Lisa Mitchell (Mitchell 2009).

Diasporic claims to being guardians of Tamil culture are supported by the ideology of Tamil linguistic nationalism in which language becomes progressively deterritorialized (Mitchell 2009), making migration not necessarily a rupture with an “authentic” homeland space, but rather suggesting that language itself, both as a personified entity and through its capacity to adhere to its speakers, rather than (exclusively) to national landscapes, is capable of migrating (or more troublingly, being rendered a refugee). Cheran (2007) suggests that diaspora be viewed as a progression of,

rather than rupture from, Tamil intellectual and ontological traditions, while Thiranagama suggest that historical memory of earlier, high-status Tamil migration (particularly from the Jaffna peninsula throughout the British Empire) animates a “critical tension...between a cultural memory of elite transnational migration as social mobility and the contemporary migration of more class- and caste-fractured (as well as often deeply traumatized) Tamil communities” (Thiranagama 2014, 267). Taken together, these factors create a diasporic Tamil self-image which pushes back against many of the negative stereotypes of immigrant and minority communities in France. Efforts to transmit Tamil thus become part and parcel of performatively enacting a successful and respectable Tamil community in France, Tamil and French linguistic competency are seen as complementary, not in conflict. Fully bilingual French-Tamil youth represent a dream of a migration in which there is only gain, and no loss.

Part II, Being Tamil, Speaking French

And yet, while all the individuals I have discussed in the first part of this chapter were significantly invested in carrying on the specifically linguistic aspect of their Tamil identity to future generations, Appasamy Murugaiyan suggests that they may be exceptional in this respect, rather than representative, since he identifies a “regression” in Paris, and indeed throughout Europe, from previous practices of intensive “transmission and maintenance of Sri Lankan Tamil identity” (Murugaiyan 2014, 14, my translation). He notes that “Tamil children who go to French schools tend to speak to each other in French...In addition, as second generation Sri Lankan Tamils become progressively more

bilingual, they risk becoming passive speakers” of Tamil (ibid, 14-15).⁵⁵ Yet as we will see below, the loss of linguistic mastery of Tamil does not necessarily mean a loss of investment in Tamil cultural identity, or political projects, or even in the sense of Tamilness as a linguistically-rooted category. In this section I examine French-medium Tamil texts produced and circulated in Paris. I argue that while they may show the limits of an enduring Tamil linguistic community in practice, they also show the endurance of the ideology of a linguistically-based Tamil community.

Second Generation Anxieties, and the Francophone Tamil Journal

The Tamil Journal⁵⁶ was founded as a Tamil news site in French in September 2011 by two journalism students in France, Arun and Suresh, who were both born in Pondicherry and raised in France. I met with them in an Indian Tamil café in La Chapelle (the Paris location of a transnational Tamil-Nadu-based chain). I spoke first with Arun, mainly about the functioning of the web site, and then with Suresh, who joined us later, about his more personal motivations for participating in the Tamil Journal.

Arun told me that the Journal has ‘lots of partnerships,’ ‘especially in politics, concerning the genocide of Tamils.’ Though I didn’t press him to specify who the contacts were, the reference to politics and genocide is likely to indicate several influential and inter-related pro-Eelam organizations based in La Chapelle which are

⁵⁵ Murugaiyan notes that this is part of a general tendency for progressive loss of language in diaspora—not unique to Tamil communities. Canagarajah (2013) has examined this phenomenon from a linguistic perspective across several sites of Tamil diaspora.

⁵⁶ This is a pseudonym.

highly visible in the public space of La Chapelle, including through annual demonstrations commemorating the massacres which marked the end of the Sri Lankan Civil war on May 18th, a day of publically observed mourning in La Chapelle recognized as “Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day,” discussed more below.

Though there are many international and even local (Parisian) Tamil media, the founders of Tamil Journal felt there was a need for a specifically French medium site in order to reach their target audience of French youth of Tamil origin. Speaking of other Tamil news sources, Arun noted, ‘they are either in Tamil or in English and the youth [in France] won’t read in those languages.’ Whereas in the French press, ‘they don’t talk about Tamils, there is really a deficit of information.’ The situation of Tamil youth in France he said was that, ‘90% of the youth here don’t bother about what is happening back there.’ The goal of the Journal was to make them care.

At its peak, Arun told me the newspaper had 35,000 readers a month, and shortly before our interview in October 2014, the Tamil Journal site boasted 20,000 readers a month. This, Arun noted, was a considerable share of the total Tamil population in France, which Arun placed at 300,000⁵⁷. He described the readership as a mix of Sri

⁵⁷ This figure would include the overseas departments and territories of France, and is thus about double the figure that I myself have used in this dissertation (which is restricted to metropolitan France, for reasons outlined in the Introduction), though all statistics relating to linguistic/ethnic identity in France are provisional because the collection of ethnically-specific statistical data is legally prohibited. Appasamy Murugaiyan suggests 125,000 Tamil speakers in metropolitan (mainland) France, 126,000 in La Réunion, 36,000 in Guadeloupe, and 15,000 in Martinique, for a total of 302,000 (Murugaiyan 2013, 883). Note that implicit in the generation of this kind of statistical figure is a definition of what (or rather whom) precisely constitutes a single Tamil community. The figure of 300,000, given by Arun (and supported by Murugaiyan’s scholarly work) includes multiple generations of Tamil migration, from multiple locations across India, Sri Lanka, and third locations of diaspora aggregated into a maximally-inclusive ethno-linguistic community which includes both overseas and mainland France.

Lankan and Indian Tamil French youth, saying on the one hand, the site attracted Sri Lankans because they are more personally invested in Tamil issues (*plus impliqués*), but on the other, since (many) Sri Lankans can read Tamil, they had alternative new sources available as well. In describing his readership Arun was drawing divisions in a larger imagined Tamil community in two different ways. First, generationally, in which the second generation Tamil “youth”—regardless of the national origin of their parents—are contrasted against their more Tamil literate parents. But secondly, from within this group, along lines of national origin in which Sri Lankan Tamils were presented as both having greater Tamil literacy [than Pondicherry Tamils], and as being more invested in Tamil political causes. These beliefs about Sri Lankan and Pondicherry Tamil communities came up again later in our interview.

Arun estimated that three quarters of the readership, if not more, was in the 18-35 year old range, noting that this is the generation that needed the French press; the older generation preferring to read the Tamil press. 85% of the views came from readers in France, and the other 15% was drawn from Switzerland, Quebec, and then India, in that order. Yet Arun noted that their readership in India tended to be more non-Tamil French living or traveling in India than a Tamil readership from Pondicherry (which was contrary to his initial expectations).

Though the site started as a volunteer project, driven by ‘cultural desire,’ its creators began to make money from ads, particularly through promotion of Tamil films showing in Paris, but also ads purchased by other Tamil businesses. Lastly, they gained revenue from online obituaries. Arun described these ‘death notices’ as ‘a Tamil cultural concept, which has gone online now.’ In fact, they are quite prevalent offline as well,

often pasted in the streets and shop windows of La Chapelle, sharing the news of the passing of both international figures and local Tamil residents. Arun noted that the major European Tamil-medium news site Lankasri was the first to take the practice online, but that the Tamil Journal provided a cheaper alternative, with obituaries costing 50 euros on the Tamil Journal versus 80 euros on Lankasri.

At the time of our interview, Arun told me that they were planning to change their business model, hoping to ‘stabilize’ the ‘uneven’ ad revenues, and capitalize on the demand of a ‘niche market’ for Tamil news in French, they planned to turn Tamil Journal into a subscription only site. Yet, Arun specified that all of the articles about ‘the Tamil cause’ would not be put behind a pay wall, and nor would the obituaries, because ‘we don’t want to make money off of this cause because we really support it.’

It seems that the effort to turn the website into a subscription service never came to fruition, shortly after our interview, the domain name lapsed, and today the Tamil Journal exists as a Facebook page with around 10,000 “likes” (indicating subscribers), and though they regularly post links to French-medium articles and information about Tamil cultural and political activities in Paris, they do not seem to create any of their own content or articles. Though the Facebook page’s description still has a link to the Tamil Journal site, it produces only an error message. When I ran into Arun again, at the Pongal event discussed above, in January of 2016, he said that the shift from student to full-time worker had meant that he and his colleagues, who ran the site during their college days, no longer had time for it. Yet our interview in 2014 also revealed some of the difficulties they faced in skirting the line between attracting readers and provoking controversy, including one fairly recent case which had escalated to threats against Arun

and Tamil Journal from someone who was angry about his coverage in the paper. I later wondered whether this experience had also been a factor in the Tamil Journal's transformation (and decline in visibility).

The Tamil Journal at times tended towards the sensational, which Arun admitted to as a conscious strategy to recruit youth viewers. Arun said, 'crime stories' about local Tamil gangs brought the most viewers. For example, he told me, 'There will be about 600 views for a political story, and 5,000 readers for a crime story.' The 'political' stories could also bring critical attention—noting they had faced criticism from the Sri Lankan, and 'even Indian' embassies. 'Our press activity can even be lumped in with terrorism--but we're not terrorists, we're students!' To try to avoid this, they published their articles anonymously, rather than with by-lines, and tried to 'tone down' the 'openly pro-Tamil position' that they began with. Arun felt these efforts had given the site more credibility, particularly for recruiting Indian readers, and developing contacts with mainstream French newspapers. Indeed, Tamil Journal had made considerable progress towards its goal of being 'the voice of the French Tamil community' and was regularly contacted by French newspapers for assistance with stories about India, or, in one instance, a series of stories about gang violence (including Tamil gangs in the area of Gare du Nord/La Chapelle) published by the major French newspaper *Libération*. Arun noted that many readers criticized the way that the paper publicized violence and political scandals from the Tamil community, but Arun noted, 'they still read that.' In fact, he saw this focus as a way to pull in the youth audience, noting, 'People like scandal.' And that, beyond that, he felt it was the role of the press to 'unveil these things.' Still, such unveiling can carry a cost, Arun referred vaguely to an article about a photographer

which was removed after people managed to find out where he lived and came to his home threatening him. He dealt with the threats by taking it down—though he added that he republished it after a month had passed. He mentioned this event in passing, but returned to it later in our conversation, leading me to search for it online as I transcribed my notes. As noted, the Tamil Journal website was inactive at that point, so I could access the original article, but rather an “open letter to the Tamil Journal” published on the Facebook page of the photographer himself. The controversy amounted to critical press coverage of the fact that a Sri Lankan Tamil photographer had participated in a charity fundraiser Miss Sri Lanka pageant held in a Paris suburb, which had both Tamil and Sinhalese participants, but which was hosted by Sinhala organizers who later engaged in public support of Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa, who carried out the deadly final phase of the war. The anecdote reveals how the embrace of a multi-national, mono-ethnic “Tamil” identity is tied to the rejection of a multi-ethnic, mono-national “Sri Lankan” identity. In this case, it is backed by a political ideology which involves suppressing distinctions between Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils, as well as rejection of possibility of a Sri Lankan Tamil identity in favor of Eelam Tamil identity.

Arun told me that in the Journal, ‘we don’t use the words Indian and Sri Lankan, we only use the word Tamil,’ because their goal is ‘to work to unite the two communities.’ Yet at the same time, while this shared Tamil identity was meant to unite, Arun remarked that he spoke only Indian Tamil, and could not understand Sri Lankan Tamil. Claims of incomprehensibility are also a way of claiming incommensurability. Interestingly, here the French language, rather than the ostensibly shared Tamil language, becomes the medium through which to try to “unite” Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils.

Indeed shifting the linguistic medium from Tamil to French actually mutes the linguistic differences within the supposedly unitary Tamil (linguistic) community. Arun went on to lay out other ways in which the communities differ, in so doing made a second reference to the incident with the photographer. ‘Our own mental picture of the two communities [as Tamils]—and I think it’s true’ is that ‘Sri Lankans are seen as violent people who fear nothing. This is used as an explanation for their success in business. The stereotype of Pondicherry Tamils is that they are cowards,’—and here he said, his reaction to the threats following the article, to concede and take it down, (and presumably the attitude of those making the threats as well) could be seen in this light. He contrasted this intra-Tamil viewpoint with a general French gaze, of which he said, ‘we have an image as “communitarian” people who stay amongst themselves but who don’t pose any problems’ (*gens communautaires qui restent entre soi mais qui ne posent pas de problèmes*)⁵⁸. From this perspective, there are no distinctions between “tamouls.”

The co-founder, Suresh, came and joined us, and perhaps because I’d already peppered Arun with all my questions about the functioning of the news site, with Suresh, our conversation focused more on his own motivations, stemming from the experience of migrating from Pondicherry to France at the age of 10. He had recently returned from Chennai, where he had completed an MBA program. He pursued this masters degree in India, rather than France because he felt ‘a lack’ (*une manque*), and ‘a feeling of sitting between two chairs,’ when one is French, but also Indian. The Tamil Journal is for other

⁵⁸ Though there is also another more negative stereotype I encountered during my research, in which gang violence—albeit here, too, characterized as “entre soi” (amongst themselves)—is associated with the Tamil community, in part due to the mainstream media coverage of such activity discussed above.

people like him, those ‘sitting between two chairs,’ and can serve as ‘a link between what happens here and back there’ (là-bas). Because, he said, ‘here there is not too much knowledge about India, outside film and tourism.’ He felt the Tamil Journal could ‘give Indian-French a better idea of India.’ Suresh also told me that in 2009 an Indian journalist self-immolated ‘for the Tamil cause.’ This event made a big impression on him, and was linked to the way in which he saw the Tamil Journal as ‘a duty of memory/memorialization’ (*un devoir de mémoire*).

I hoped Suresh would expand a bit on the questions of identity, and asked if there was a generation gap between Tamil parents and their French-born children. His reply was very similar to Kavita’s, saying those like him had ‘a feeling of not being totally French, and the same in India. ‘We are treated as foreigners here and there.’ In the second generation there are ‘lots of young people who forget the Tamil language, or who have a critical perspective towards the culture—who make fun of it a bit.’ According to Suresh, issues within the first generation only compounded the problem: ‘The parents here have ideas from the period of their migration—twenty or thirty years ago. They don’t even go back home anymore.’ Suresh gave the examples of caste, which he felt was more repressive in Paris than in India, and of language, ‘The Tamils here speak 1980s Tamil without English, while the language over there has changed [with more English loan words incorporated into everyday Tamil speech].’ For these reasons, unlike many of the accounts above in which parents—particularly mothers—were presented as the ideal transmitters of Tamil language and culture, Suresh suggested that parents were unable to fulfill that role because of the past-oriented mentality described above, and because ‘most of the migrants here are people who don’t do a lot of studies.’ Unlike, say,

Rohini and Krithika, who recounted how their mother had pushed them into Tamil cultural practices, Suresh recounted that when he asks his mother why something cultural is done she doesn't know. The Tamil Journal, he said, is intended to provide some of this missing cultural knowledge. This formulation defies the logic of intergenerational transmission—instead of parent to child, it is peer to peer—and also challenges the normative model of Tamil language as the exclusive authentic “voice” of Tamil people since, for the Tamil Journal, French is the medium of this cultural transmission.

Yet, even as Arun and Suresh were making the case for being Tamil while speaking French, they, too, shared in the fear of disappearing Tamil. I followed up Suresh's explanation with the question, “Are the young people interested?” and Suresh's response was bleak. ‘Mostly, no. After two generations they won't speak Tamil.’ Arun added that Tamils are ‘more and more integrated,’ a process which in his view was synonymous with losing ‘language, culture, and even religion.’ Yet he added, ‘But that is less true for Sri Lankan Tamils.’ Suresh agreed. Arun had mentioned Sri Lankan Tamils who worked on Tamil Journal as well, and the remarks reflecting the belief that Sri Lankan Tamils in Paris were better guardians of cultural heritage (and thus less integrated)⁵⁹ led me to ask more about the role of their Sri Lankan Tamil colleagues. Had they recruited Sri Lankan Tamils to their website?, I asked.

Suresh: Of course. Because they [Sri Lankan Tamils] were more motivated by cultural preservation. They understood the idea of volunteer-based work like this.

They are more motivated. More serious.

Arun: Indian Tamils say it's too communitarian.

Suresh: I've noticed that Indians are less serious about the work.

Arun: Sri Lankans understand Indian politics better than Indians themselves.

⁵⁹ Though as discussed in Part I, Tamil parents and teachers seek to enable French-Tamil youth to be simultaneously “integrated” into France *and* Tamil cultural guardians.

The Tamil Journal sought to be the voice of the Tamil diaspora in Paris—a voice which spoke, uniquely, in French. Because of this, it gained considerable scope and influence as a mouth piece for and intermediary contact of a larger Tamil community, one which was taken for granted as “tamoul” from the outside, but in fact, internally conceptualized as two separate communities uneasily “united” through the work of the Tamil Journal. The news site disrupted certain linguistic ideologies by using French as a language for transmitting Tamil culture, and by inverting the balance of cultural knowledge so that youth became the transmitters, but such strategies were more a product of necessity (reaching a non-Tamil literate population) rather than an expression of an alternate diasporic identity which might decouple Tamil identity from Tamil language.

Before concluding I turn to a political poem posted in La Chapelle on May 18th, 2016—Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day. Like the Tamil Journal, which strategically used French in order to interpolate non-Tamil literate French Tamil youth into a Tamil identity aligned with ‘the Tamil cause,’ the following poem illustrates that shifting the linguistic register away from Tamil does not necessarily mean rejecting the ideology of Tamil linguistic nationalism.

What is my duty today? French medium Tamil nationalism

In Paris, as in locations of sizeable Tamil diasporic community throughout the world, May 18th is observed as a day of mourning, in remembrance of the enormous loss of civilian life in May 2009, in the last days of the war. Tamil shops in La Chapelle hang black balloons, put up black banners, hang posters, display the Tiger flag, and close their shutters for a period of several hours as a sign of mourning. These materials are published in both French and Tamil, some monolingually in Tamil, some with both Tamil

text and its French translation, and some in French exclusively. On May 18th, 2016, I saw a table set out in front of a Tamil-run cell phone shop in La Chapelle on which were fanned out dozens of printed copies of a flyer with the following poem, positioned under a larger banner.

The text of the poem is printed over a background image of a crying mother and baby. It is entitled “Journée de Commémoration du Génocide Tamoul” (Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day), and then *Mai 18* (May 18). The French text in italics appears on the poster, I have provided English translations below each stanza:

*Les années s’écoulent,
mais mes devoirs n’ont jamais cessé*

The years flow by
But my duties have never ceased

*Mes proches ont été tués par milliers
Je ne les ai pas oubliés*

My loved ones were killed by the thousands
I have not forgotten them

*Je n’étais jamais séparé de ma mère ni de mon père,
Là-bas, les parents de plusieurs personnes ne sont plus en vie*

I have never been separated from my mother or my father
Back there, many people’s parents are no longer alive

*Je n’ai jamais souffert de faim,
Là-bas, la famine est une série quotidienne*

I have never suffered from hunger
Back there, famine is an everyday occurrence

*Je n’ai jamais vu la mort de près,
Là-bas, il n’y a personne n’ayant pas vu la mort.*

I have never seen death up-close
Back there, there is no one who has not seen death

*Je souffre,
Je souffre également.*

I suffer
I too suffer

*Quel est mon devoir aujourd'hui?
Quel est notre devoir?
Je vais demander à la communauté internationale
Quelle est la justice pour nous?
Quelle est la justice pour nous?*

What is my duty today?
What is our duty?
I will ask the international community
What is justice for us?
What is justice for us?

Viendrez-vous aussi?

Will you come too?

At the bottom of the flyer there is a logo of “Mai/May 18” transliterated in Tamil script, with the image of a fetus curled into the Tamil letter “ee” and blood spraying over the “m” which follows (in certain consonant/vowel combinations in Tamil, the letter denoting the vowel sound proceeds the consonant), and the words in Tamil script, “Tamizharin taakam tamizhizhat taayakam,” (The thirst of the Tamil is Eelam motherland). The poem sets up a series of contrasts intended to show the diaspora’s position of relative privilege over those suffering in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka. This is in line with Sharika Thirangama’s argument that for Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto:

LTTE celebrations and the civic network of LTTE activism unites different fragments into a cohesive actor—“the Tamil Diaspora”—toward which all can donate and become part of a privileged authentic Tamil culture as opposed to the needy, suffering Tamils in Sri Lanka. (Thiranagama 2014, 275).

In the first part of this chapter, I argued that by creating a contrast between the threatened Tamil language in homeland spaces, versus a commitment to “semmozhi” (pure Tamil) in the diaspora, diasporic subjects sought to push back against the notion that migration entailed a lack of cultural authenticity by taking on the role of guardians of Tamil language—and by extension, culture. Though the specifically linguistic component is absent in this French-medium appeal to Tamil community action, it too seeks to cast the diasporic community as legitimate Tamil cultural—and in this case, political—agents, on equal (or even higher) footing than victimized Tamils back (home) in Eelam/Sri Lanka.

The poem doesn’t draw a strict separation between the period of the war, and the “post-war.” The refusal to acknowledge the end of the war is a common feature of the discourse of many Tamils who are critical of the government’s post-war policies, which they see as in continuity with human rights abuses perpetrated by the government of Sri Lanka during the war. While the poem highlights the relative privilege of the French diasporic youth it addresses compared to those “back there” (*là-bas*) in Sri Lanka in stanzas two through five, in stanza six it abruptly switches to the suffering of the diasporic subject, “I suffer, I too suffer,” a strategy which enhances the sense of the diasporic youth’s “duty” described in the first stanza, and draws them into the community of the victimized, such that they are not only fulfilling what is described first as “my duty,” and then—again building a bridge from the individual addressed to a wider community—“our duty,” but also seeking “justice for us.” The last line shifts from first person to second, “will you join us too?” Breaking the first-person identification with the poem’s narrative voice, and instead asking for explicit participation and identification from the reader.

Though the poem's French language text deals with themes of suffering and the quest for justice without explicitly nationalist references, the single line of Tamil text expresses an Eelam separatist slogan, putting this poster in line with other May 18th political posters and flyers distributed by LTTE-aligned political groups. The poem's reference to the "international community" is almost certainly a reference to Geneva court of human rights, since a major focus of Sri Lankan Tamil politics at this point—following the total military defeat of the LTTE, shifted to seeking redress and recognition from the United Nations for human rights abuses carried out by the Government of Sri Lanka against Tamils. But the larger question, "I will ask the international community/ what is justice for us?" could also refer to the international community of Tamils who must respond to Tamil suffering in Sri Lanka, and indeed the poster is meant to mobilize precisely such a community from within Paris. Many of these posters are monolingually Tamil, others are in both Tamil and French, seemingly to reach both Tamil readers and the wider French public. Other monolingual French signs seem targeted at a non-Tamil French audience, for example, the signs on many shops announcing their closure make only third-person references to "le peuple tamoul" (the Tamil people), as though addressing a reader who is not included in this community. But the poem is in another category, clearly addressed to a Tamil audience, but making the address exclusively in French. The stanza, "I have never been separated from my mother or my father /Back there, many people's parents are no longer alive" in particular seems to address a youth audience, suggesting that the poster's makers understand a declining lack of Tamil literacy to be a feature of the next generation. Overall, the appeal is consistent with

Kalyani Thurairajah's findings in her comparative study of second-generation Sri Lankan Tamil-Canadian youth in Toronto and youth of the same age in Sri Lanka:

...although the Tamil ethnic identity is named for a language, among the diasporic community, knowledge of the language is not a prerequisite for being able to claim this identity. In fact, while language was recognized by the diasporic community as an important part of the Tamil ethnic identity, the majority of participants did not speak Tamil. (Thurairajah 2017, 120).

I identify the notion of linguistic identity without linguistic fluency in both the French-medium Tamil cultural texts produced and/or published by Tamil Journal and the May 18th poster. Suresh Canagarajah in a comparative study of linguistic practices of diasporic Sri Lankan Tamil youth (in the US, UK, and Canada) found a shift in youth linguistic practices away from full fluency in Tamil to an indexical use of Tamil in limited domains to reinforce a strong sense of Tamil ethnic identity in second generation Tamil diasporic youth (Canagarajah 2013). For Canagarajah such a shift is both generational (with older generations seeing loss of language as a loss of culture—an anxiety expressed by many of the first generation Tamils I spoke with in France as well—but also geographic, as he contrasts diasporic youth linguistic practice with a (territorially-rooted) Tamil linguistic nationalism in Sri Lanka:

In Sri Lanka, especially in the context of heightened linguistic nationalism, Tamil proficiency is treated as eschewing any mixing from other languages. It involves full proficiency in receptive and productive skills, in both oral and literate modalities. Language attitudes and policies in the Tamil homeland are currently influenced by the dominant ideologies of “Tamil Only” and “Pure Tamil” (see Canagarajah 1995). It is clear that the migrant community has detached itself from these ideologies in diaspora contexts to define Tamil language and proficiency in new ways. (Canagarajah 2013, 149)

Yet alongside the geographical split (homeland/diaspora) Canagarajah proposes, there is also an interlude of almost twenty years (1995/2013). Thurairajah's more recent

comparative study between Sri Lankan Tamil homeland and diasporic youth eliminates the generation gap through a comparison with same-age-cohorts, and finds that Sri Lankan Tamil youth express different conceptions of Tamil identity, including some who contest a purely linguistic notion of Tamil ethnic membership:

Although the diasporic community argues an ancestral connection – one which allows them both a right and responsibility to engage in homeland politics and to share in the Tamil ethnic identity irrespective of time and distance – there are homelander who oppose this conceptualization of ethnic identity. Instead, they argue that to be Tamil is bound not only by language, but also by physical space and intentions – one must demonstrate their dedication to the homeland by being in the homeland, and being with the homelander. (Thurairajah 2017, 130).

Thus, in the May 18th poster, the statement, “I too suffer,” is a not just an affective strategy to recruit political support from the diaspora, it is also a claim in support of the legitimacy of the diaspora’s *existing* political participation, which is highly contested from within Sri Lankan. Highlighting “I too suffer,” is a rebuttal to claims that the diaspora is both insulated and isolated from both the everyday violence, and the on-the-ground realities of areas they claim as a homeland—Eelam—but no longer call home. Casting the diasporic condition as itself a form of suffering that can only be ameliorated by the eventual independence of Tamil Eelam is a way of staking a continued claim to Eelam, without being territorially present.

I wish to suggest that the use of French to politically mobilize an ethnic community forged through an identity of shared linguistic patrimony (if not actual linguistic practice) may thus not be a diasporic departure from a more normatively nationalist ideology in which territory-language-nation all map cleanly upon one another. Instead, it may be a *continuation* of Tamil nationalist projects which are themselves shaped through the particular form of linguistic nationalism which emerged in South Asia

throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. For as Lisa Mitchell notes in relation to another Dravidian language (Telugu):

...the actual use of the Telugu is no longer essential to representations of the Telugu language, people, and territory. What matters is the idea of Telugu. By the twentieth century the relationship to language in southern India had undergone a shift from its earlier usage as a medium of communication to its representation today as a marker of cultural identity. Indeed, it is not uncommon today for individuals with no knowledge of Telugu at all—children of Telugu-speaking migrants to the United States, for example—to consider themselves ‘Telugu.’ Actual knowledge of a language is not essential for language to be seen as an attribute of someone’s identity power. (Mitchell 2009, 93).

Mitchell also evokes diasporic subjects as the final stage of this process, but she sees it not as a rupture with the linguistic identity forged in South India, but rather as an extension of the “shift” she describes (centered within linguistic homelands themselves) “from shared usage of a specific, named linguistic medium...to the explicit invocation of a language as a marker of one’s identity” (ibid, 48). Thus, French-medium political organizing from the second-generation youth does not suggest a breakdown of Tamil linguistic nationalism but is rather an expression of it. Advocating for a Tamil linguistic homeland—in French—does not present a contradiction in terms since the challenge to such political organizing, as expressed by Thurairajah’s informants, at least, is not the denial of shared ethno-linguistic community membership between diaspora and homeland Tamils, but rather through the notion that such shared identity is, absent a local investment in homeland spaces and relationships, insufficient.

Conclusion

I have argued that the concern with transmitting Tamil language seeks to reproduce Tamil subjectivities in subsequent generations of diasporic Tamil French youth, but also responds to broader anxieties about Tamil's viability not only in the diaspora but also in its ostensible homelands of India and Sri Lanka, where it is seen as a threatened minority language (though to different degrees and in quite different contexts between those two nations). In this sense, the act of learning, teaching or speaking Tamil in France becomes linked to political concerns beyond the variously defined Tamil communities of Paris, to a transnational, and transcendental, category of Tamil language itself.

I wish to highlight a few other points made in this chapter. First, that when Tamil parents focus on transmitting the Tamil language to their children, they are not sidestepping concerns for French fluency, but rather promoting bilingualism. Here Tamil linguistic nationalism does not challenge the dominant place of the French language in French nationalist discourses, in fact, in some ways they share similar anxieties around the introduction of English loan words and the language's relative prestige on a global scale. In general, Tamil parents in France have a deep investment in French fluency as a means of promoting their children's upward mobility; for some parents, this is worth the price of subordinating Tamil in favor of French.

Secondly, I have also highlighted throughout this chapter the ways in which Tamil unity in France is a contested unity, and that the differences between Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil communities are often spoken of through a linguistic register—that is, by highlighting differences in modes of speech, and also attitudes towards language

preservation. But I have also shown that such concerns about relative “purity” of Tamil among differently identified Tamil speakers (be it regional differences within a country, or international differences between Sri Lanka and India) are also a feature of pre-diaspora linguistic politics as well.

Yet in spite of these “linguistic rivalries” (to borrow the term from Das, 20016), I have made the case for a deeper shared linguistic ideology in which speaking Tamil is intimately tied to the sense of being Tamil, and Indians and Sri Lankans claim a shared linguistic patrimony with overlapping invocations of figures like Thiruvalluvar, showing that in spite of significant divergences between (and within) different Tamil communities in Paris, there is a shared “tamoul” identity, rooted in pre-diasporic linguistic and literary heritage, as well as externally ascribed by the wider French population. In some cases, Tamil individuals I spoke to adhered to a narrative in which the diaspora itself becomes a kind of fire-keeper for traditions lost in homeland spaces—in this view, Paris is more hospitable to Tamil than Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, where the quality of the language is claimed by some to have deteriorated away from “real” Tamil, or Sri Lanka, where the Tamil language—and its speakers—are seen as continually under attack, in spite of the war’s end.

Others are less optimistic, seeing the loss of Tamil fluency in the diaspora as an inevitable tragedy. In face of this linguistic shift towards French, new forms of French-medium Tamil political and cultural expression are both emanating from and being addressed to French-speaking Tamil youth. Yet shifting away from Tamil language does not necessarily entail shifting away from ideologies of Tamil linguistic identification, which remain pervasive in this diasporic location.

CHAPTER SIX—Can Paris be Tamil? Tamil Diasporic Cultural Production in Paris

This chapter examines the production and consumption of Tamil film and literature in Paris. It considers how the specific diasporic context of Paris shapes modes of Tamil cultural production and consumption which are both locally influenced and part of multidirectional, transnational Tamil cultural networks. I show how Tamil cultural activity in Paris is shaped by and shapes simultaneously local-urban, national, and transnational locations and networks in which it is emplaced. I argue that taking an ethnographic approach to Tamil cultural production and consumption in Paris reveals the extent of mutual French-Tamil influence, but also the mutual relationships between both homeland and globally diasporic Tamil populations. Ethnographic analysis also makes clear that diasporic cultural exchange is multidirectional, rather than bilateral, as is presumed in traditional models of cultural exchange between homeland and diaspora, in which the homeland alone is taken to be the space of authentic cultural production which is belatedly consumed by diasporic audiences. Indeed, through analysis of the consumption of a major Kollywood (the Tamil language film industry based in Chennai, Tamil Nadu) film opening in Paris, I argue that staging an act of cultural consumption is also a performative and *productive* act of Tamil community formation which is at once distinctively emplaced in Paris and part of a transnational Tamil cultural community of film-viewers. Focusing in particular on the film and literary career of the author/actor Anthonythasan Jesuthasan (who writes under the name Shobasakthi), I analyze the representation of a distinctively Tamil Paris which emerges from his texts. Through analyzing these cultural texts, which affirm that one can be Tamil in Paris, I argue that

Paris, too, can be a Tamil space. And yet, in opposition to the anxiety that migrant cultural expression challenges or dilutes a supposedly singular French national identity, I suggest that Tamil Paris is not a space in which Paris's cultural identity has been lost, but rather forms part of the capital's cosmopolitan cultural identity, and is thus not a departure from, but rather a part of, the city's mythicized self-identity.

Tamil Paris as Doubly Cosmopolitan

In August, 2015, Tamil protagonists graced the silver screen of French cinema's most iconic venue when the film *Dheepan*, a story of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees struggling to rebuild their lives in the disadvantaged suburbs of Paris, made its début—and won the highest honors—at the Cannes Film Festival. It was a rare moment of visibility for a community that remains in many respects a somewhat unexpected site of the Tamil diaspora. For if debates about immigration and asylum have become a defining feature of postcolonial France, Tamil migrants in France have held a more muted presence in a political and media landscape dominated primarily with discussions of migration from France's former colonies in Africa, and more recently, the massive European refugee crisis. Likewise in dominant visions of Tamil diaspora, Paris is eclipsed by two distinct geographies of Tamil migration: first, the colonial-era migrations following British colonial plantation labor networks in the 19th century, and the resulting Tamil diasporic communities, particularly in Singapore, where Tamil is a national language, and Malaysia, where “Malaysian Indians”—overwhelmingly of Tamil ethnicity—are the third largest ethnic group and constitute 7% of the national population (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2016); secondly, when it comes to the post-conflict refugee migration of Sri Lankan Tamils in the late 20th century, Toronto, and secondarily

London, have taken on the role of the preeminent sites of Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. Yet as Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud shows through the analysis of UNHCR data, France was a major—if second choice—site of Tamil asylum from the 1980s through the post-war (2009) period; as of 1999, after India, France was home to the second highest number of Sri Lankan asylum-seekers (Goreau-Ponceaud 2011). This chapter shows that the importance of Paris as a site of the global Tamil diaspora extends beyond its demography. Indeed, the Tamil community in Paris plays an important role in 1) defining the identity of contemporary France as a site of global migration, 2) in retelling a particular post-colonial relationship between France and India that is often marginalized in France's (post)colonial legacy, and 3) as a location of Tamil diaspora within a global network of Tamil cultural production, in which Tamil Paris sustains and develops Tamil identities which are both locally and globally defined.

As has been shown throughout the previous chapters, both discursive and performative iterations of “Tamil” identity in France are in fact multiple. They are also, importantly, made within a local context in which neither Tamil nor French are given, but rather are constantly being produced. This chapter extends the analysis of French Tamil identity to an analysis of film and literature as forms of Tamil cultural production in Paris. I focus in particular on the literature and film work of first-generation Sri Lankan Tamil refugee Anthonythasan Jesuthasan (nom de plume: Shobasakthi), and a Pondicherry Tamil entrepreneur's hosting of a global Tamil film event. Taken together, I use these examples to argue that though Paris has been for the most part under-examined in Tamil diaspora scholarship and treated as a (seemingly) marginal site of Tamil diaspora, it actually plays a very important role in not only Tamil cultural consumption,

but in Tamil production which circulates multi-directionally to both homeland and other diasporic Tamil communities. Likewise, in studies of post-colonial France, the muted role of France as a colonial power in India has been largely ignored, resulting in an absence of representation of Indian migration to France. At the same time, this chapter is less concerned with retracing *histories* of migration, as it is in documenting the contemporary and emerging results of such migration. As such, this chapter examines Paris as a site not only of asylum and postcolonial migration—that is, as a place that Tamils *go to*, but as a site of Tamil cultural production, a place that Tamils and Tamilness might also *come from*, or simply *be*.

Migration—and its after effects in generations of French citizens who claim dual, multiple and/or hybrid identities—has been an obsessive concern of French politics since at least the 1980s (Noiriel 2007). This time frame also coincides with the disaggregation of the concepts of community, culture, and place in anthropological theory, and an increasing focus on transnationalism, mobility, globalization, and diaspora from anthropologists (Marcus and Fischer 1986; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Abu-Lughod 1991; Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1994; Malkki 1992). More painfully, this timeline links up with the massive outmigration of Tamils from Sri Lanka. This chapter extends the dissertation's focus on Tamil diaspora in France through a theoretical understanding of the performative and relational aspects of identities once presumed to be primordially ethnic or nationally determined. In contrast, I identify in France (and more widely in a variety of national contexts in which migration is a politicized and fraught domain) a

politically dominant (though not entirely culturally hegemonic⁶⁰) model of migration in which nations and peoples are assigned a singular identity—in France this is quite explicitly articulated in the concept of “l’identité nationale” (national identity) and “valeurs républicains” (republican values). Proceeding from this singular definition is the implication that demographic transformations through migration constitute a kind of zero-sum game in which either migrants must lose their culture of origin, or host nations must lose their national culture through the admission of improperly assimilated alterity into the national body. According to this view, to be more or less integrated into French society means to be more or less Tamil and/or French and that each of these will vary in an inversely correlated proportion to the other. That is, they form a sliding scale of identity in which a move towards one pole necessitates a distancing from the other: to become French, one must no longer be Tamil; to stay Tamil, one must remain at a distance from Frenchness. In this chapter I analyze contemporary Tamil cultural production from within France in order to argue that members of the Tamil diaspora in France are finding ways to claim Tamilness from a space which is—also and simultaneously—shaped by their setting in France, and more specifically Paris. I suggest that such moves are doubly cosmopolitan: enacting a Tamil cosmopolitan community in which diasporic locations are treated as integral, and not as peripheral, belated, or inauthentic, and also enacting a Parisian cosmopolitanism, in which the city space itself

⁶⁰ Indeed, though I contend that dominant discourse about “national identity” in France continues to problematize migration and racialized minorities in France, it is important to remember that those who are discursively—or even legislatively, politically, socially, or economically—marginalized are still themselves members of the nation—not external to it and that, even if they are underrepresented in politics, they still have the power to shape their local communities and social realities.

serves as a global cultural capital. Such doubly-cosmopolitan activity, I argue, muddles the logic of zero-sum migration, and instead leads us to the question, can Paris be Tamil?

“A French Film That Speaks Tamil”

The film *Dheepan*, directed by Jacques Audiard, provides a view into the experience of three Sri Lankan Tamil refugees to France: a man, a woman, and a child, each having lost his or her family during the war, who, by taking on the identity of a family together, are able to make a dangerous journey out of Sri Lanka. The film also highlights France’s ambivalent position as a country of asylum—ultimately, the housing project outside of Paris in which the protagonists are resettled, and try their best to make into a home, explodes into just one more violent territory to be escaped before true asylum—in the sense of peace and protection—is found in Great Britain⁶¹. Indeed the film reflects at least as much on contemporary anxieties about violence, alterity, and the role of the state in France’s peri-urban spaces as it does on the daily lives of the French Tamil community. And yet, the film itself became a medium through which the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora was brought into the general public sphere. The majority of the film’s dialogue is in Tamil—punctuated only by brief interactions in French in which the absence of understanding, the space of the language gap, is on display. For example, as nine-year old Illayaal goes to register for primary school in her new home she explains in halting French that she stopped her schooling in Sri Lanka after her school was burned down. When the school administrator inquires by whom, Illayaal asks Dheepan, who has taken on the role of her father, how to say “government” in French. But even after

⁶¹ The film’s final scene in Great Britain can, I think, be read as literal or symbolic.

finding the word, the administrator, clearly ignorant to the particulars of Sri Lanka's civil war, appears uncomprehending. The scene illustrates the lack of general awareness of the histories lived by Tamil refugees in France. This is a recurring theme in the interactions between the film's protagonists and their interactions with the French, and Jacques Audiard underscored this point in an interview: "Before *Dheepan*, I couldn't place Sri Lanka on a map⁶²" (Audiard August 26, 2015). Interestingly, it was this very unfamiliarity with Sri Lanka, and by extension with the Sri Lankan Tamil community in France that led Audiard and his screenwriters to focus on Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in their film. For Audiard, Sri Lankan Tamils represented radical alterity: "I wanted it to be people who come from elsewhere...who don't come from the former French empire, you see, not French-speaking, really elsewhere, and since they come from the Indian [sub]continent it was really just that...They are foreign foreigners [*étrangers étrangers*]" (Audiard August 28, 2015). Yet at the same time, Audiard stated that his motivation for the film was a familiar, daily scene in contemporary Paris: the migrant men who work as informal (and illegal) vendors who sell products ranging from flowers, to small plastic toys, to souvenir Eiffel towers, to spare cell phone cables, working from table to table in restaurants and cafes, or setting up blankets or cardboard box stands on the sidewalk—always ready to scatter at the first sign of the police. Indeed, this is Dheepan's profession in the film when he first enters France, and reflects the first entries into the (informal) labor market of many migrants, including but certainly not limited to Tamils. Audiard states, "we see these people often" without knowing anything about them, and that he

⁶² This and all subsequent quotations from French language media are my own translations.

wanted to “reverse the gaze” (Audiard August 28, 2015). As Audiard has remarked in several interviews: “It’s a French film. It’s a French film that speaks Tamil. So if that isn’t political! [laughter; whistling noise]” (Audiard August 29, 2015). Indeed, this statement scrambles the logic of one-nation-one-language which has been a defining factor of French nationalism and French national identity—mandatory French classes continue to be a part of the French immigration process, and there is a French language requirement to acquiring French nationality. Audiard makes the claim that French language is not necessary for French film, and in so doing widens the field of “Frenchness” to include Tamil speakers. This invites us to think of French and Tamil not as competing categories of identification, but as potentially coexisting ones, and *Dheepan* is an example of new forms of cultural production which emerge from within this space. And yet, both the narrative of the film itself and the broader political context in which it exists invite us to view the limits of this cultural production: for the characters in the film, France is a hostile, frightening place from which they dream of escape. As I researched the film online, the hostile side of France as a migrant destination was underscored by the fact that I found the interviews I have quoted from above linked, without additional commentary, on two French websites that were dedicated to presenting racist, ethnic-nationalist content. People I met during my fieldwork were reluctant to discuss their experiences of discrimination with me—instead people spoke more generally of a sense of what the French perceptions—and stereotypes—of Tamils were (both negative and positive aspects of this stereotyping), but unfortunately instances of racial, ethnic, or xenophobic discrimination during my fieldwork were not rare, indeed, within my own family and friend circle people of color related racist encounters they had had in Paris.

And yet the press coverage of the film invited reflection on the extent to which Sri Lankan Tamils are and have been present in French society. Beyond the habitual film-review coverage, the movie's release invited many media outlets to report more broadly on political, historical, and sociological aspects of the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic presence in France. These include retroactive coverage of the Sri Lankan civil war, early (1980s) asylum migration to France from Sri Lanka, and even general human interest pieces which highlight the presence of Sri Lankan Tamil individuals and families living in France. Most of these focus La Chapelle, which itself is the setting for several key scenes in the film. One TV segment visited a jewelry shop in this neighborhood where filming for the movie took place and interviewed locals in Tamil-run businesses on their views of the movie. Though the film's director and screenwriters are not Tamil, there was still a significant investment from the local Tamil community—through filming that took place in Little Jaffna, to hiring French Tamil “cultural consultants,” to casting of long-time French resident and internationally known Tamil writer Anthonythasan Jesuthasan in the titular role. I interviewed two young men who had been approached by the film-makers as cultural consultants, they were contacted because of their role as the founders and publishers of Tamil Journal, discussed in the last chapter, which, though now basically defunct, was, at the time (fall 2014 at the time of that interview), a highly influential website documenting news of and for the Tamil community in Paris. Both young men were born in Pondicherry, but raised in France. However, through their pro-Tamil political stance in regards to the Sri Lankan conflict (they did not explicitly align themselves with any particular political movement, but were sympathetic to pro-Eelam Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism), and through the work of their newspaper, maintained

close contacts with Sri Lankan Tamils in Paris. Interestingly, though the young men were raised in France and, during our interview, expressed some criticism of the traditionalism of older generation Tamils in Paris, who they said are carrying on the traditions and practices of the time they left home—now with a twenty or thirty year time-lag—when I asked them what kind of cultural feedback they gave the film-makers, it showed its own cultural conservatism: advising the film-makers to cut an explicit “love-scene.” I don’t know whether the film-makers responded to the suggestion (indeed, the final film *does* contain a love-scene with partial nudity that goes beyond what would be featured in mainstream Tamil cinema of Sri Lanka or India), but I find it interesting that a younger generation of Tamils—from across intra-community Tamil divides—was invested in upholding a certain image of the community which adhered to standards of propriety rooted in Tamil cinematic vocabulary, rather than French media practices of depicting nudity and sexual activity (which are generally more lax than those in the United States).

But while much media emphasized Little Jaffna as a particular location for Tamils in France, strengthening the identification of this district of Paris as a distinctively Tamil space, press coverage for the film was a national phenomenon. For example, a local interest article from the city of Tours was published on August 27, 2015, shortly after *Dheepan* won the Palme D’Or with the headline: “The Tours Tamil Version of the Palme d’Or at Cannes.” The article—somewhat awkwardly, in my view—used the film as a lead-in to profile the first birthday party of a baby girl whose parents are Sri Lankan Tamil refugees stating: “Jacques Audiard’s film ‘*Dheepan*,’ released yesterday in theaters, provides the occasion to talk about the small Tamil community in Tours”

(Bellanger, 2015). Before briefly describing the “Bollywood”-like birthday party, the article gives a short description of “Tamils,” one which is fairly representative of the condensed histories provided as context in similar articles as well:

French people who travel, or take an interest in the news have certainly already heard about the Tamils, a people with two thousand years of history. With a global population estimated at 80 million people, they mainly live in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and in the north-east of Sri Lanka (ex-Ceylan). The Tamil Tigers, Sri Lankan separatists, were also in the news spotlight during the last two decades, notably for acts of violence, including a bomb in an airplane (ibid)

The above paragraph gives a sense of the kind of condensed representations that shape views of the Tamil community in France: Tamilness is put in relation to Frenchness through the dual lenses of travel and (foreign) news, it is also defined in relation to the depth of Tamil history, a homeland-based territorial definition (though the population is given in global terms), and emphasis on Sri Lankan, rather than Indian, Tamil communities (but also an amalgamation of India and Sri Lanka with Indian cultural referents like Bollywood as ubiquitous descriptors—a fact that was reflected in discussions with Parisian Tamils as well), with the shadow of the LTTE’s violence cast over it all.

Some Tamils living in France saw the film’s release as an opportunity to tell their story in their own voices. In the city of Caen, in the region of Normandy, I heard about members of the city’s Tamil community who organized a film screening and conference-debate in which the background of the war in Sri Lanka, and the contemporary situation of global Sri Lankan diaspora were discussed. The film’s release, and its success at the Cannes Film Festival therefore provided a space in which Tamilness was articulated as part of French public culture, both locally, as Tamils in various regions used the film to shine a light on their presence in France, and the personal and political histories that

brought them there, and internationally, as a French film, in Tamil, took the highest award in this high-profile film competition. In general, it seemed that the Tamil reviews I encountered emphasized the value of visibility above specific elements of the film itself, and that most wished this visibility to reflect less on the position of Tamils living in France, but rather back to the situation in Sri Lanka, and the past and ongoing suffering of Tamils “back home.”

Anthonythasan Jesuthasan

Another interesting aspect of the film’s instantiation of Tamilness in France is the casting of Anthonythasan Jesuthasan, formerly better known by his pen name of Shobasakthi, in the leading role. Jesuthasan’s film career had previously been limited to the independent film by Leena Manimekalai, *Sengadal*, or *The Dead Sea*, which focuses on the struggles of Indian Tamil fisherman targeted by the Sri Lankan Navy in the fishing waters of the narrow Palk Strait between India and Northern Sri Lanka. Though his earliest acting work was in the infamous street theater of the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), of which he was a child member in the mid-eighties before deep disillusionment with the organization led him on an extraordinary journey of escape that eventually led him to refugee status in France. I met with Jesuthasan—who I knew of as Shobasakthi⁶³—in

⁶³ For the most part, I will use the name Shobasakthi when discussing the author’s literary production, and Jesuthasan in discussing his film career (with the exception of citations of his French translations, published under the name Jesuthasan). Names and naming are an interesting side-note here, since the layering of names, from formal birth name, to family nickname, to “movement name” (most members of the various militant Tami movements adopted “noms de guerre”), to multiple false names as a refugee, is a theme throughout Shobasakthi’s largely autobiographical novel *Gorilla*. Indeed, at the novel’s end, the main character—introduced at the beginning in a legal petition addressed to the French state as Jakkapu Anthony Thasan—is forced to reveal his “real” name, Rocky Raj Jesurasan, only to have it disbelieved by the French police officer who is violently interrogating him. More broadly, issues due to incompatible Tamil and

August 2014, immediately after arriving in Paris to begin my fieldwork. We had been put in touch by a long-time friend of Jesuthasan's in Jaffna, who I had met earlier that summer while spending a month in the Eastern and Northern provinces of Sri Lanka. At the time we met, a year before *Dheepan*'s release, I was interested in meeting Jesuthasan, not as an actor, but as a writer. Under the pen name Shobasakthi, Jesuthasan is internationally famous as an important figure in Tamil diasporic literature. In recent years, two of his novels and a book of short stories have been translated to English, expanding his audience further. Though, despite the fact that he has lived in France for more than twenty years, his writing was only translated into French following the success of *Dheepan*. First, in an autobiography co-written with Clémentine V.-Baron, which was sold with a red paper banner across the cover noting, "the story of the actor of Cannes Palme-D'Or [winner] *Dheepan*" (Jesuthasan and V.-Baron 2017). Then, in 2018, a book of French translations of short stories⁶⁴, titled *Friday et Friday* was published with an independent press in France; this book, too, bore a similar red banner noting, "After Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan* (Palm d'Or at Cannes) an *oeuvre* to discover." These marketing strategies make clear the link between the success of the film *Dheepan* and the opening of new audiences for Shobasakthi's literary work, which was already well-known among Tamil literary circles. Simultaneously, *Dheepan* was an engine for Jesuthasan's acting career and his choice of projects illustrates the multi-cited nature of

French naming conventions often cause administrative conflicts—with potentially serious consequences—for Tamils in France.

⁶⁴ The stories were previously published in the original Tamil, and for five of the six stories selected in *Friday et Friday*, also in Anushiya Ramaswamy's English translation, along with several other stories under the title, *The MGR Murder Trial* (2015). Anushiya Ramaswamy has also translated two of Shobasakthi's novels into English as *Gorilla* and *Traitor*, both published in India, which is also where Shobasakthi's original (Tamil) books are published.

his artistic engagement. The year after *Dheepan*'s release, Jesuthasan appeared in the film short film *Little Jaffna*, shot in La Chapelle, written and directed by a Tamil-French actor, Lawrence Valin. Of the film, Valin said, "When you're from the Tamil community and you call yourself a director, it's almost a duty to shine a light on the community" (Valin in Lehoussé 2018, my translation). But Valin also noted that his choice to become a director was in fact shaped by constraints he encountered in his first chosen career as an actor. Even after "French-ifying" (*francisé*) his legal name from Visvalingam to Valin, "I was often offered stereotypical roles, based on my Indian⁶⁵ origins: rose vender, chestnut vender. I even had to learn French with an accent to get work in films" (ibid). The rose vendor has indeed become a stereotypically South Asian (informal) profession, during my fieldwork I heard about an Indian stand-up comic whose act was titled something along the lines of, "I'm Indian and I don't sell roses." Nevertheless, it's a role that Jesuthasan elected to step into in the 2018 music video for the song, "Paris Méthèque"—mixed-race⁶⁶ Paris—by the well-known French musician Gaël Faye. Gaël Faye's song is an ode to the méthèque/mixed-raced Paris, connecting to his own background as the mixed-race son of a French father and Rwandan mother, who was born in Burundi and moved to France as a refugee as a young teen; the song's lyrics describe the mixed experience of asylum and exclusion of refugees and immigrants to Paris

⁶⁵ Valin is of Sri Lankan Tamil origin (which is also made clear in the interview itself) but the term "Indian" continues to be used in a broad sense in reference to *all* members of the Tamil community in France, even, as in this case, a self-referent.

⁶⁶ I'm taking the translation "mixed-race" from the official video itself, which is subtitled in English (a fact which itself illustrates the global reach of the song and video beyond a French or even Francophone audience). However, "métèque" is a complex term, with a long history of use as a pejorative, xenophobic term in France, but first reclaimed through song by the Greek-French singer Georges Moustaki in the song "Le Métèque," released in 1969.

through poetic allusions to several different communities across several generations, often enfolding them in complexly intertextual plays on words⁶⁷. The video traces a rose, sold by Jesuthasan's character, as it passes hand-to-hand among diverse Parisians, in a tender portrait of "Paris métèque," largely through the lens of a Chinese sex-worker in Belleville and Jesuthasan himself, shown as he exhaustedly walks below the areal metro line 2 in the 18th arrondissement. If Jesuthasan is taking on what threatens to be a stereotypical role here, the portrayal also imbues it with a particular and poignant humanity, and places it squarely within the cosmopolitan tradition of Paris—as Faye puts it, "Bohemian Paris, mixed race Paris, Paris of writers and exiles" ("Paris bohème, Paris métèque, Paris d'ancre et d'exil," translation taken from subtitles).

Jesuthasan's participation in the tradition of Paris's "writers and exiles" is doubly cosmopolitan. First, in the tradition evoked by Faye's lyrics, of a distinctively cosmopolitan Paris, that is, its role in defining Paris itself as a cosmopolitan space. I see the tradition of Black American artists and writers from within Paris as perhaps most emblematic of this tradition, since these artists not only produced cultural works from the setting of Paris, but in turn, contributed to the production of cosmopolitan Paris itself (see Gilroy 1993 and Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, and Stovall 2012)⁶⁸. The second form of

⁶⁷ As in the following verse:

"Je piaffe l'amour" médite une chinoise à Belleville
 Leonardo da Vinci se casse le dos sur un chantier
 Je vois la vie en rose dans ces bras pakistanais
 Il tourne le gyrophare, petit cheval de carrousel
 Galope après les tirailleurs qui rétrécissent la tour Eiffel
 (Faye 2018)

⁶⁸ This does not mean assuming a perfectly harmonious, cosmopolitan community. Much of the Tamil Parisian cultural production discussed within this chapter runs up against the limits of Parisian cosmopolitanism (as does Faye's song itself), in the form of continued economic and indeed cultural marginalization. And while Paris is proud to claim its position as a cultural

cosmopolitanism relates to Jesuthasan's continued participation in transnational Tamil diasporic cultural spaces, that is, it defines Tamilness as a potentially cosmopolitan identity, as his writing puts forth a double critique of state violence (from the Sri Lankan government, but also within France) and violence within Tamil communities (in a damning critique of the LTTE, but also by portraying intimate violence within the family, particularly against women). In 2018 Jesuthasan had a leading role in the Tamil-Canadian film *Rhooba*, in which he plays a married man who falls in love with a young transwoman, and in early 2019, he was part of an Australian theater piece called *Counting and Cracking*, which takes place both in Australia's Sri Lankan Tamil refugee community, and in Sri Lanka. I propose the idea of double cosmopolitanism, rather than say, dual cosmopolitanism, to highlight that these are not totally separate projects or cultural fields but rather highlight simultaneous engagement in different cultural and political spaces, one of which relates back to France, the specific location of Paris, and the even more specific location of La Chapelle, and the other which extends out to other sites of the Tami diaspora, and back to Sri Lanka. The cultural works explored in this chapter span these all these locations, and, in turn, unite them.

incubator for Black American artists like Richard Wright and James Baldwin, James Baldwin himself made clear that his experience in Paris was not utopian: referring to the “extraordinary perils, different from those of America but not less grave, which the American Negro encounters in the Old World” (Baldwin in Gilroy 1993, page 146). In a more recent account, Janet McDonald, also a Black American writer, explored both the promise and limits of this kind of Parisian cosmopolitanism in an interview on the radio program *This American Life*, noting that as her French got better—and she was perceived more as a Black Frenchwoman, rather than an American—she began to be confronted again by the racism she thought she had escaped, again illustrating the limits of a normative cosmopolitanism in which not all forms of cultural or racial diversity are equally embraced (McDonald 2000).

Shobasakthi

While I have shown in the previous section that Shobasakthi's work only gained exposure within French/Francophone cultural spheres after the spectacular success of *Dheepan*, within Tamil cultural spheres, he rose to prominence with his first published novel, *Gorilla* (2001), which was considered exceptional for both its postmodern literary structure and the force of its critique against the LTTE, particularly coming from a writer in a diasporic location where support for the LTTE was considered hegemonic. Just as *Dheepan* is often the dominant cultural referent for non-Tamils with whom I discussed my research on Tamil Paris, well before the release of the film, from the earliest phases of my doctoral research, Shobasakthi's literature was generally the dominant cultural referent for Tamil-speakers with whom I discussed my doctoral plans.

Indeed, reading Shobasakthi's work was part of how I myself prepared for my field work. During my year of Tamil language study at the American Institute of Indian Studies in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, I read some of his work in the original Tamil⁶⁹, and—with much greater ease—read all of his work available in English. I found it almost hypnotically entrancing and often viscerally disturbing, characterized by unflinching portraits of deeply flawed but deeply human individuals and social environments saturated by the trauma of war, but also with the violence of caste-oppression, sexism, and the unique violence of legal regimes which regard asylum-seekers with hostile suspicion.

⁶⁹ I would like to thank Ms. Nancy Esther and Ms. Soudra Kohila for their assistance in my reading of the original Tamil text of *Gorilla*.

Shobasakthi's writing career speaks to the power of diasporic cultural circulation, in which his texts circulate among a global Tamil-reading audience. Here, the national context of Shobasakthi's position is an artificial notion, the borders of the nation do not correspond with the audience of his prose. This invites one to think of Benedict Anderson's concept of the role of language and the printed text in his famous formulation of "imagined communities" at the heart of the nation. Anderson believed that the rise of print-capitalism led to new forms of expression and shared communication among geographically dispersed groups of people who wrote, read, and grew to identify with particular linguistic communities (Anderson 2006, 36). In regards to the basis of possible membership, Anderson argued that "from the start the nation was conceived in language" (Anderson 2006, 145). In this formulation, languages come to be assigned to nations (and vice versa) such that Shobasakthi's work must exist outside the national space of France. When Anderson considered the circulation of print language—and ideology—beyond national borders through diasporic networks, the link of language and nation remained unbroken, and instead he saw this diasporic circulation as fostering long-distance nationalism (Anderson 1998). This formulation does not capture the complexity of Shobaskathi's work—not only because he is emphatically not an ethno-nationalist, but also because in such a view the diasporic writer exists as if untouched by the local context from which she or he writes.

Shobasakthi's political biography could easily be (indeed is) the subject of an entire book—very briefly, he joined the LTTE as a young teenager, became disillusioned through witnessing—and participating in—the LTTE's abuses of civilian populations, and, after escaping Sri Lanka as a political refugee, joined the 4th International

Communist Party in Paris, the membership of which was Tamil, Sinhalese, French, as he put it in our interview, international (though we were speaking mostly in Tamil, he maintained the word “international” in French). Later, in the late 1990s he was influenced by both Dalit political movements in India, and French post-modern philosophy; when he found the Party unwilling to consider caste issues (beyond class), he left. As he summarized things, in a writerly way, “LTTE chapter over. Party chapter over,” saying he writes now “as a one-man army” (Interview notes, August 2014). Interestingly, the original version of *Gorilla* contains an entire chapter about the 4th International in Paris—which was omitted from the final publication of the English translation with Penguin India. And yet Paris and its surrounding communities form a major location within Shobasakthi’s literature. In just one example, the dominant cultural signposts of Paris are altered to contain references to specifically Tamil Paris within the disturbing hallucinations of the young male Tamil protagonist of one story, a recently arrived refugee from Northern Sri Lanka:

Everything is over. Right at this moment, a point in this city would have been set off—destroyed. As the Eiffel Tower melts down, the Mona Lisa, who smiles with fifty to a hundred expressions, would also be out. The white Church of the Mother⁷⁰, oh dear. The Ganesha at La Chappelle [sic] too would bust his gut and die. All those running around naked will burn to death. (Shobasakthi 2015, location 2274).

Shobasakthi’s work cannot be understood as a diasporic text which floats past the local and national context in which it is produced. Indeed, Shobasakthi turns a keen eye to

⁷⁰ The White Church of the Mother is probably a reference to Sacred Heart (Sacré Coeur) Basilica, an iconic religious monument in Paris’s 18th arrondissement which has a particular centrality to Tamil religious practices in Paris—and not only of Catholic Tamils, of whom there are many. The Cathedral at Lourdes (France) is also a central location of what can be described as both Catholic and syncretic Hindu Tamil religious practice.

French society through his writing; he is invested in depicting the experience of Tamils and others in contemporary Paris and its surrounding areas, and in so doing, paints a contemporary portrait of France from an angle which is often left unexamined. At the same time, Sri Lanka is central to his work, through the themes of memory, history, and enduring bonds to family and homeland which are unbroken through migration. In this way, Shobasakthi's work reveals the false binary between Tamil *or* French; as one of the foremost contemporary writers in Tamil, the context in which he writes does not diminish his identity, it is simply part of his biography as an individual and as an artist. As he told me when we met, ultimately his books are meant to speak to a humanity, which exists beyond ethnic or national labels, and yet is ever caught within those categories. Though his novels *Gorilla* and *Mmm* (published in English as *Traitor*), take as a backdrop some of the defining historical moments of 20th century Sri Lanka, he recounted to me that the real stories are about the intimate relationships between the protagonists. As he put it: 'If people want to know about the war they can read the news. My books speak about human needs' (approximate quotation from my notes; translated from Tamil).

I see in the examples of Audiard's French film in Tamil, and Shobasakthi's aesthetic of distinctively emplaced diasporic literature an invitation to imagine a Tamil Paris, from which we can gain a perspective on Tamil diaspora in France which resists essentializing models of assimilation and its failures.

Articulating Refugee Voices from a Parisian context:

Dheepan is interesting as an interplay between "inside" and "outside" representations of the Tamil refugee community in Paris. It is also an interesting film because of its specific focus on the suburban Ile-de-France context in which it takes place

while also looking at the broader context of the Sri Lankan civil war and its refugees. The first time I viewed the film was at a recently renovated movie theatre in the 18th, in the neighborhood of Barbes-Rochechouart, which screens mainstream new releases, as well as more independent films. This theatre is just a few blocks distance from La Chapelle, which is featured in several scenes of the movie, but the audience on the rainy August afternoon I watched the film was a diverse, Parisian group, which appeared to have no predominant ties to the Tamil community. The second time I watched the film was at a screening at Stanford University, timed to coincide with the 2016 Graduate Student Conference and Workshop on Sri Lanka. Here, the audience was for the most part a group interested in Sri Lanka, including many Sri Lankans—though there were also some general spectators who were not participating in the surrounding conference events. The film received feedback from several Sri Lankan Tamils that the depictions of life in Sri Lanka, and the trauma of the war, felt vividly real to them. For this audience, it was not the French context, but the specifically Sri Lankan and Tamil experience of the war—and of becoming a refugee—that animated the film. Within France, it seems that discussions of the film often seemed to focus almost exclusively on one angle or the other. Most voices that I heard coming from France's Sri Lankan Tamil community indeed used the film as a vehicle for greater visibility—*not* for their daily struggles in France, but for the experience of war and the ongoing struggles for Tamil political autonomy and demilitarization back in Sri Lanka (generally, people expressed to me the view that though the war in Sri Lanka has formally ended, the suffering of Tamil communities there was felt to be ongoing and unresolved, with little confidence in the Government of Sri Lanka's willingness or ability to fairly resolve it). Interestingly, this also refocuses

away from one of the film's more challenging—even unflattering—depictions of the Tamil community in Paris: for after Dheepan and his family attend a temple ceremony and picnic in La Chapelle with the Tamil community, Dheepan finds himself re-recruited by the LTTE he thought he had escaped, forcing a painful mental return to the war in one of the most poignant and powerfully acted scenes in the film, where Dheepan performs a kind of tragic parody of the propaganda songs of the LTTE, alone and drunk in his workshop. Doubtless, such a depiction is possible because of the unique casting choice of Anthonythasan Jesuthasan in the title role. Well known as a critical voice of the LTTE in diaspora, his novels and short stories have emphasized how the challenges of forming a Tamil community in diaspora continue to be shaped by the legacy of life-or-death political loyalties that extend beyond the borders of the conflict zone, and are, in a sense, inescapable. For characters in the stories “Layla” and “The F Movement,” running into a *too* familiar face brings back traumatic memories and incites new anxieties which border on the paranoid (Jesuthasan 2018; Shobasakthi 2015). This emphasis on the double-edge of community solidarity has been an important theme throughout anthropology of the Tamil diaspora. Sharika Thiranagama describes deep political fissures among Sri Lankan Tamils in the diaspora through the figure of the “traitor” (*Traitor* was also used as the translation of Shobasakthi's novel's Tamil title *Mm*—which denotes the vocal interjection of a passive listener—another example of the importance of the figure for Tamil diaspora) (Thiranagama 2010). Oivind Fuglerud describes attitudes of mutual fear and suspicion among Sri Lankan Tamils in Norway (Fuglerud 1999). Anne Gronseth discusses how Sri Lankan Tamils living in a small fishing community in northern Norway experience anxiety at the social relationships impelled by refugee resettlement

patterns that cut across traditional social structures of caste, religion, and social position (Gronseth 2010). Of course none of these accounts, either in fiction or in ethnography, neglect or counteract the very real human bonds, and the positive aspects of Tamil sociality and cultural community, but they do caution strongly against overly simplistic notions of ethnic solidarity, and ethnic identity itself.

Audiard's Depiction of the Banlieues in Dheepan:

While the film provides a harrowing picture of the life of refugees attempting to resettle in France which provokes compassion from the viewer, I argue that it does so in ways which elide dominant repressive forces and in some respects reinforces a stigmatized portrayal of already-marginalized populations in France. One of the film's creative devices is that Dheepan's family moves quickly and efficiently through the refugee processing procedure, from a Centre d'Accueil to a job and housing placement in what appears to be a straightforward and efficient trajectory (though we also see signs of the struggle of this process along the way—after all it is Dheepan's exhausting and illegal labor as a street vendor during this period which opens the film). In contrast, Jesuthasan's biography recounts his arrival in France where, when the (false) French passport he is traveling with was flagged, he was beaten by the police who accused him of being “an illegal” (*un clandestin*) just before another officer appeared who condescendingly tells him (using the informal second-person pronoun “tu” rather than the formal “vous”), “Calm down! you're safe! You'll get your political asylum. We're in France, you have rights here!” (Jesuthasan 2017, 98). Both *Dheepan* and Shobasakthi's writing—the passage of his biography above as well as in his fictional works including *Gorilla* and the story “Gundu Diana”—portray real refugees who are nevertheless using

false papers, which is essentially a structural constraint of the asylum process itself.

However, only in *Dheepan* do the false papers go unremarked by the French state.

While in *Dheepan* various interactions with the French state are shown as spaces of misunderstanding, ultimately this misunderstanding is benign for Dheepan, Yalini, and Illaayal. Instead, what is depicted as the true threat is something that harkens back to the idea of the banlieue as a space beyond the state's reach (see chapters one and two). In reality, the banlieues are spaces of intense police scrutiny, in which youth are disproportionately targeted by police identity checks due to the prevalence of "controle de facies" (racial profiling) by the police. However, for the film to work, the banlieues are reframed as spaces of total lawlessness, in which gun battles can rage on for days unchecked by outside authorities. And the principle actors of this violence in the film are given Muslim names, and largely cast as young men of color (though the leader of the gang is played by white French actor, we know by his character's name, Brahim, and the scenes of his interior family life that his character is coded as Muslim). The violence of the French state towards refugees is in this way made invisible: we do not see refugees sleeping on the streets as is a common occurrence in contemporary Paris, we do not know the overwhelming rate of rejection of refugees, or refusal to process applications in a timely matter to begin with, we do not see the effects of various EU resettlement treaties which limit the choice of country of resettlement for refugees. Though this latter point is repeatedly hinted at in Yalini's dream to move to England, the film is not explicit about what is holding her back: in fact it seems to suggest more of an emotional battle than blocked borders, certainly it is not a direct parallel to the desperate crowds in Calais (Murphy 2017).

The end of the film can be read two ways: literally, as depicting an idyllic future still possible in England, or as a dream sequence or fantasy, in which the improbable elements—Dheepan as a taxi driver, a large house—are clues to the impossibility of this idealized future. But the second reading still poses further questions: whose fantasy is this? Has Yalini's dream of escaping to England come to incorporate Dheepan and Illaayal, and a new baby, finally making real the foundation of fabricated kinship on which all of their journeys were made possible? Or has Dheepan--whose desire to keep Yalini with him in *Le Pré* stemmed from both a refusal to once again flee from his home as a refugee (this time to local gang violence) as well as a desire to turn the fictive husband-wife bond into a real one (best depicted by his shopping for a *thali*⁷¹ in a jewelry shop in *La Chapelle*) and his sense of responsibility to Illaayal, doubtless influenced by the loss of his own children during the war—turned his sights to England as well? Or have, at last, the two characters' fantasies converged, such that a happy future might have been possible for them after all—had they not been caught up, perhaps inescapably, in the violence of *Le Pré* just when they thought they had escaped the violence of war?

In no way does Audiard offer an idealized depiction of France—in fact, quite the opposite, the movie emerges as a damning critique—but it does so by making the French state absent (even if this is portrayed as absence to a fault), and instead positioning a particular, already-stigmatized population of banlieue youth as responsible for the dissolution of the dream of peaceful settlement in France. At the same time, the film does reverse current refugee-stigmatizing rhetoric in a striking way—enough so for many

⁷¹ This piece of jewelry, worn around the neck, is given by husbands to their wives, and is worn daily by married women.

commentators to mention the political relevancy of its Palme d'Or win. In a post-terrorist attack France gripped by fear of refugees, in *Dheepan* it is not France that should fear refugees, but rather the refugees themselves that have to fear France.

Film as Identity

If *Dheepan* was novel in bringing Tamil language and Tamil characters into French film, it should be stressed that there exists, on the other hand, Tamil representations of France in film. Kollywood (Tamil Nadu's film industry) as well as Bollywood have used a variety of European landscapes in film (most famously Switzerland), generally fulfilling the role of a dreamscape in musical sequences. As such, these interludes are not interested in actually telling stories of Tamils (or Indians, generally) in Europe, but rather using European landscapes as a fantastical backdrop, often for stories that unfold "back home." The Tamil film *Engeyum Kadhal* (Love is Everywhere, 2011), for example, takes place in Paris though it is for the most part not even filmed in Paris, but rather in other French cities—namely Lyon—which evidently "pass" to the intended audience as the French capital: one sign that it is intended for audiences with little exposure to life in Paris. *Engeyum Kadhal* continues the traditional dreamscape aspect of European settings in Tamil film; Paris provides an exciting backdrop for a love story between Tamil protagonists, but the film completely avoids depicting actual Tamil communities in Paris (or elsewhere in France), instead constructing a total fantasy of life in Paris. And yet, contemporary film industries in South Asia have themselves taken on diasporic significance, and the films they produce are world-wide, not simply regional or national products. As a result, diasporic stories and settings make their way into both Bollywood and Kollywood films.

I will briefly discuss the role of film as a form of Tamil cultural production which circulates beyond borders, before turning to the example of the screening of the recent Tamil film *Kabali* in Paris. Here I argue that even though watching Kollywood cinema on the surface represents a form of consumption of a cultural text produced “back home,” in reality, the film itself is shaped by diasporic histories and indeed through the knowledge of its diasporic audience. Secondly, the community organization and collective act of watching the film, by Tamils in Paris, creates not only an occasion to reinforce Tamil community and family bonds in Paris (and Ile-de-France) but also situates Paris within an international network of Tamil diasporic spaces which are tied together through multiple forms of cultural, familial, and economic bonds, of which cinema remains an important medium.

I first turn briefly to the international, but *intra-Tamil*, role of films in creating cultural—and political—exchange between Tamil-majority regions in India and Sri Lanka. Because Sri Lanka’s film industry is dominated by Sinhala-language films, there has long been an enormous market for Kollywood Tamil films among Tamil-speaking Sri Lankans. As such, Indian Tamil film has had a profound reach into Tamil populations in Sri Lanka. As in Tamil Nadu, Sri Lankan Tamil film viewers are often fervently loyal to their chosen favorite actors and actresses, and these cinematic preferences can form the basis of real-life sociality (through fan clubs) and cultivation of personal style (see Nakassis 2016), and, because film has so often served as a launching point for many important Tamil politicians, these preferences can also take on significant political affiliations (Dickey 1993). Indeed, Shobashakti’s book of short stories, *The MGR Murder Trial* takes its title from one of the stories which depicts film viewing—and the

declaration of loyalty to a particular actor, MGR—as a central component to social bonds in one small Jaffna peninsula community. MGR (MG Ramachandaran) is an important figure in his own right, a Sri Lankan-born actor who rose to extraordinary fame in the Kollywood film industry and went on to become Chief Minister of the Indian State of Tamil Nadu, from which position he exerted enormous political influence on the course of the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka. According to Manoj Joshi, MGR was “a fourth player in the game between the Union Government of India, Sri Lanka, and the [pro-Eelam] militants,” specifically, facilitating the training of the LTTE in Tamil Nadu, “He established himself as the ‘Anna,’ or elder brother of [LTTE leader] Pirabhakaran” (Joshi 1996, 23). An example of MGR’s enduring influence as a Tamil cultural referent in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is British-Sri Lankan Tamil musician M.I.A. who donned MGR’s iconic hat and sunglasses on the cover of her album, (ironically) taking on one of the most recognizable personas to a Tamil audience, though (also ironically) probably totally unrecognizable to the majority of her audience, which extends far beyond the Tamil diaspora.

Indian cinema is also a cultural influence on younger generations of Sri Lankan Tamils, including in the French diaspora. As Shobashakti jokingly told me during our conversation together, his nephew speaks beautiful Tamil largely thanks to (Indian) Tamil films, wryly praising the popular actor Vijay as a “great Tamil teacher!” Indeed, Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils in Paris regularly seek out new Tamil film releases at a variety of theatres in Paris and its suburbs, which is both a form of leisure cultural consumption, but also itself an industry for Tamil businesses in and around Paris who organize Tamil film screenings and sell DVDs and soundtrack CDs.

As mentioned above, Kollywood cinema has become interested in the diasporic experience—both because stories of overseas Tamils hold interest to audiences in Tamil Nadu (and Sri Lanka), but also because overseas Tamils themselves make up an important viewing market. The film *Kabali*, which I went to see during my fieldwork and discuss in this section, reflects both of these factors. A high-budget blockbuster starring one of the most popular contemporary Tamil actors—Rajinikanth, nicknamed as Superstar or Thallayvar (Leader)—the film had a guaranteed audience worldwide through his loyal legion of fans. Beyond the automatic appeal of Rajinikanth to his fans, the film also appealed in specific ways to a Tamil diasporic audience in Paris. First, it is set in a diasporic context—though the very different setting of Kuala Lumpur, which reaches back to a much older and more established Tamil diaspora in Malaysia. And secondly, Pondicherry plays a central role in the story, which brings the film uniquely into the French Tamil cultural orbit. This Pondicherry connection is also what facilitated its screening in France, where a local business-owner of a franchise South Indian restaurant in La Chapelle, who I had earlier met and interviewed in my fieldwork—himself a fairly recent immigrant from Pondicherry—was instrumental in organizing the film screening in Paris. He was present, handing out flyers for his restaurant alongside the ticket-collectors. Before the film began, too, advertisements were screened for his restaurant, and a variety of other Paris Tamil businesses, many of them Pondicherrian-owned, as well as the Pondicherry tourism board itself with a promotional clip extolling the tourist attractions of Pondicherry, and noting its status as an “ex-French colony.”

When *Kabali* was released in July 2016, premier showings became big business in every city with a large Tamil population—all over the world. Paris, it turned out, was

no exception. Tickets to the opening screening were sold via internet days in advance, the price—20 euros, or twice the cost of a normal cinema ticket, was the cause of some grumbling, but nevertheless the venue was full. The film was screened in a beautiful old cinema in the 10th arrondissement of Paris; on the night of the showing, the enormous, historical central screen was dedicated to *Kabali*, and there were no other movies showing on the other screens. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most people who had spent 20 euros to go see this film on the opening night were not just casual movie-goers, but drawn for the appeal of leading-man Rajinikanth, and also for the Pondicherry-connection in the film, as many of the people I managed to speak to before the film and during the intermission were themselves from Pondicherry. I saw mixed-gender groups of young people (including a group in their late 20s I sat next to during the film, Rajinikanth fans from Pondicherry, who now lived just outside of Paris; and another group I spoke to during intermission, of university students from Chennai and Bangalore studying in Paris), and many families, often multi-generational family groups with everyone from very small kids to the elderly. There were very few film-goers who did not appear to be South Asian, I saw perhaps half a dozen in a very large, full cinema-hall. There were also many groups of young men, many wearing Rajinikanth t-shirts, including one group wearing matching Rajinikanth fan t-shirts which looked to be small-batch, fan-made apparel (incidentally, there are many Tamil-run t-shirt printing businesses in La Chapelle), engaging in the kind of cinema-inspired cultivation of personal style Constantine Nakassis has described as fundamental to (particularly male) youth culture in Tamil Nadu (Nakassis 2016). Some of the young men from these groups had brought confetti to throw in front of the screen during a vignette highlighting

moments throughout Rajinikanth's film career that screened before the film. Young, male fans would also stand to whistle and cheer and throw confetti during the film whenever there were close-shots of Rajinikanth, or dialogue about Tamil pride or combatting caste oppression (Tamil unity was a powerful and explicit theme of the film). Similarly when Pondicherry was mentioned in the film—and during the extended portion of the movie that takes place there—much of the audience would cheer or whistle in excitement. This interactive approach to movie-going, facilitating participation from the audience, but also a kind of interaction with the on-screen actors mirrors cinema-watching in South Asia (Srinivas 1998), though the behavior in this theatre was far more subdued than I have personally witnessed while watching re-screenings of old MGR films in Madurai, Tamil Nadu cinemas (in Paris there was no offering of aarthi—camphor flame—nor were there firecrackers). The film's screening in Paris served as a moment in which a particular Tamil identity was affirmed for the (mostly) Parisian Tamil spectators, one which is simultaneously local, global, and emphatically Tamil. The film's theme of Tamil community organizing in Kuala Lumpur articulates a form of strong Tamil pride which does not position those outside Tamil homelands as being less Tamil, but rather positions Tamil diaspora as itself a site of Tamil cultural richness and pride. Furthermore, the importance of Pondicherry to the film's story (our hero travels there to reunite with his beloved wife—both of them having believed the other was killed more than twenty years ago, but having each remained faithful) highlights a specific French-Tamil connection that does not often take a central role in Tamil or French film. And of course film-going, especially in this context where almost everyone was accompanied by peer-groups or family, is an occasion to reinforce bonds among the Tamil community in

Paris. It is also, as discussed above, an occasion in which film becomes a medium of intergenerational cultural and linguistic transmission, as I saw many families where, based on the children's use of French, they were clearly native-French speakers being accompanied to this Tamil-language (though French-subtitled) film by parents (and grandparents) for whom Tamil is their first language. Lastly, there is an element of international bonding as film-goers in Paris were acutely aware of the film's opening in other cities around the world as well. Unlike many international film releases, in the case of *Kabali* there was no time delay such that cinema-goers in Paris were able to view the film at roughly the same time as cinema-goers in Chennai and Kuala Lumpur⁷². This, too, highlights the way in which Tamil cultural production cannot be seen simply as a delayed consumption of production-in-territorial-homeland followed by the delay of exportation and importation and then consumption abroad, instead Tamil cultural products are being simultaneously produced and consumed in a global network. My own online social network had friends in India, Sri Lanka, The United States, and France talking about *Kabali* at the time of its release: all able to discuss the film over the same social networks during the same time frame. In this respect even the consumption of a Tamil cultural product from "back home" constitutes the *production* and performance of Tamil sociality and Tamil self-identity in diasporic settings. In turn, as the film *Kabali* shows with its Malaysian Tamil protagonist, constructions of Tamilness that stem from diaspora experiences can also filter back into dominant (non-diasporic) narratives of Tamil self- and ethnic identity.

⁷² Joyojeet Pal, the producer of the Rajinikanth documentary *For the Love of a Man* (2015) commented to me when we met at the Madison South Asia conference in 2016 that such synchronous film openings have become a standard feature for the Superstar's films.

Kabali offers a different expression of Tamil identity than that depicted by *Dheepan*'s Sri Lankan Tamil refugees; it is one in which the specificity of the French connection is important in establishing a Tamil identity which is both rooted in a particular place (Pondicherry) and global, cosmopolitan. It incorporates the colonial legacy of France in India—largely missing from both French and Indian national historiography—as an element in Tamil identity which is reinforced through the community event of the film opening in Paris (a simultaneous celebration with Rajinikanth fans throughout the world). Though the different cultural texts discussed in this chapter express a wide range of instantiations of Tamilness and Tamil cultural production and consumption in Paris, I argue that what all of them share is an affirmation of what I call a doubly cosmopolitan Tamil Paris, which is neither inauthentically Tamil by virtue of its Frenchness, nor inauthentically French by virtue of its Tamilness.

Conclusion

The examples of Franco-Tamil film and literature discussed in this chapter are instances of Tamil cultural production in Paris which circulate in unexpected directions—from France back to Tamil homelands rather than vice versa. They also represent Tamil cultural products which “speak Tamil” and are simultaneously French and create their own sets of representations of Tamil Paris. The discussion of the film screening of *Kabali*, on the other hand shows that even the consumption of Tamil cultural products that ostensibly do meet the traditional pattern of homeland-to-diaspora flow is *also* a way in which Tamil cultural identity is enacted in Paris, and that this too is a multidirectional process, not just a time-delayed consumption between countries of origin and countries of residence, but an interplay between a Tamil identity in which ties to territorial homelands

retain a central importance but nonetheless absence from those homelands is not seen as a loss of Tamil identity, but rather as an expression of a distinctively cosmopolitan Tamil identity, which is imagined in global terms. I have argued that the multi-directionality of Tamil cultural production and consumption to and from Paris should cause us to rethink strictly territorial definitions of authenticity such that we recognize the potential of diasporic Tamils to construct Tamil spaces worldwide—including in Paris.

I have termed such activity as doubly cosmopolitan to highlight how the production of a Tamil Paris can be seen, not as a threat to the French capital's urban identity, but rather as an expression of it, affirming Paris's status as itself a global, cosmopolitan cultural capital. As Tamil cultural productions from Paris—such as the films and literature of Anthonythasan Jesuthasan (Shobasakthi) now spread to non-Tamil consumers by virtue of the wider audiences they now reach (and the translations that facilitate their consumption by non-Tamils), those audiences themselves become involved in the production of Tamil space in Paris. Tamil Paris is not a “communitarian” city-within-a-city, it is a cosmopolitan space within cosmopolitan city. Tamil Paris is *Paris tout court*.

CHAPTER SEVEN—Conclusion: Present-ing Cosmopolitanism

This dissertation concludes at a time of mounting anti-migrant sentiment in France, Europe and worldwide. And such sentiment increasingly carries the political backing to coalesce into concrete policies. In 2018, France passed a law allowing stricter regulations on immigration and asylum⁷³, which doubled the legally acceptable periods of detention of migrants—including for families with children (Birchem 2018). Britain’s impending exit from the European Union was largely driven by opposition to immigration into the United Kingdom from the mandated free circulation between member nations of the European Union (Johnston 2017). Meanwhile, at the edges of the Union, the Mediterranean crossing remains the world’s deadliest border (International Organization for Migration, 2017), where, since 2000, at least 25,000 people have lost their lives in the perilous attempt to reach Europe (Albanhari 2016). European governments, instead of responding to these preventable deaths, have instead either refused to lend support to ships run by NGOs conducting life-saving rescues, or blocked them outright (Vaillant 2018). Meanwhile, the USA, under the leadership of its 45th president, is banning entire categories of migrants—including refugees—based on their countries of origin, enacting unprecedented policies of family separation, expanding detention facilities to even the youngest of infants, and declaring a “national emergency” to build a wall to cover 2,000 miles of territory along the nation’s Southern border. Is

⁷³ The law was called, “Immigration maîtrisée, droit d’asile effectif et intégration réussie.” Note how “successful integration” becomes the third legal obligation, after “controlled immigration” and “effective right to asylum”

this, then, an inopportune moment to speak of cosmopolitanism? Amid this list of current events, does cosmopolitanism seem not only out of place, but out of time?

If cosmopolitanism is understood to be only an elite discourse, or if it is understood exclusively as a philanthropic inclination towards “hosting” in the wealthy nations of the Global North, then perhaps cosmopolitanism’s time, is, indeed, up. But I argue that an ethnographic approach tells us something different, as it refuses to let official policy or a single dominant narrative define lived social realities. Through my ethnography of Tamil communities in Paris, I have argued that cosmopolitanism is *present* in Paris—both in *place* (through a focus on the urban territory of La Chapelle) and in *time* (in our contemporary moment; in the present). And in this tense present moment, to conclude this dissertation, I propose taking a quick journey through the tenses of cosmopolitanism—future, and past, before returning, conditionally, to the cosmopolitan present. In doing so, I wish to make a case for cosmopolitan anthropology, and an anthropology of the cosmopolitan, in order to push back against the tide of dehumanizing anti-migrant discourses which lead directly to deadly anti-migrant politics.

Cosmopolitan futures

In anthropology, a new emphasis on transnationalism emerged at the end of the twentieth century as new forms of globalization were facilitated through technological and economic shifts towards greater international circulation between nations. At its apogee, such shifts towards global markets and global exchange led to speculation that the role of the nation-state was receding. Nationalism was viewed as having fulfilled its historical mandate in the Global North and its normative locus shifted to the Global

South, where in some cases it was represented as a belated, indeed, regressive, political model (see Hobsbawm 1990 and Chatterjee 1986).

Now, two decades into the twenty-first century, it has become clear that globalized neoliberalism promotes the unfettered circulation of capital, but not of human beings, with the exception of an elite class whose passports and wealth support forms of mobility denied to the majority of humanity. This sort of glamorous international mobility and its exceptionalism—not subject to strip searches and visa denials, court hearings, and deportation orders—seems to suggest a linkage between cosmopolitanism as a discourse (and a subjectivity) and an elite class. Certainly this linkage animates populist discourses which are finding mainstream political expression—including the deeply troubling resurgence of older forms of specifically anti-Semitic anti-cosmopolitanism which are apparent in the use of the terms “globalist” and “cosmopolitan” as pejoratives by members of the United States presidential administration (Greenfield, 2017). In this view, the border-spanning capacity of cosmopolitanism is inherently suspicious, aberrantly anti-national.

Yet current economic models contain a (sometimes hidden, sometimes outright) reliance on migrant labor. It is well established that France at first openly invited migrant labor, and though such migration was later—and is still today—commonly demonized as a threat to French workers, it remains essential to the nation’s economic functioning (d’Albis et al. 2016)⁷⁴. Thinking beyond the domain of economics, we might consider the words of French rapper Kery James, who, in a scathing “Letter to the

⁷⁴ d’Albis et al. used a macroeconomic approach to illustrate an overall positive economic impact of immigration in France (d’Albis et al. 2016); similarly in 2018 they found that “asylum seekers are not [an economic] ‘burden’ for Western European countries” (d’Albis et al. 2018).

Republic,” in which he draws an unbroken line between France’s colonial past and contemporary racism against immigrants and French minorities, notes: “*C’est vous qui avez choisi de lier votre histoire à la nôtre /Maintenant vous devez assumer*” (It’s you who chose to link your history to ours / Now you have to deal with it) (James 2012). This should push us to understand the seemingly contemporary dynamics of transnational migration not only as a future-oriented trend, but as linked to historical interactions over the long durée which exceed the framework of nationalist histories and contemporary nationalist politics.

Contemporary migration experiences, and the internationalization of urban space they produce, introduce what has been called a vernacular cosmopolitanism (Bhabha 1996; Werbner 2006), alongside its elite form. I hesitate to use such a term because it risks creating a distinction in which “Western” cosmopolitanism goes unmarked, and its vernacular form is treated as derivative. Instead, I seek to highlight a mismatch between the normative understanding of cosmopolitanism as elitist and the ethnographic observation that cosmopolitanism flourishes within working-class spaces shaped by immigrant and minority communities in Paris and elsewhere. Yet while I am suggesting that migration allows cosmopolitanism to flourish in the spaces it shapes, as I have shown in the case of La Chapelle and the Tamil communities who have shaped this urban space, cosmopolitanism does not belong to “host” communities alone. Indeed, in many cases, individuals and communities who migrate carry with them their own cosmopolitan pasts and are invested in creating their own cosmopolitan futures.

The Tamil cosmopolitanism described in this dissertation is a strategy for asserting full belonging in Paris *without* abdicating full belonging in Tamil social and

political worlds which are rooted in homelands but extend across the world into transnational diasporic locations. The first three chapters particularly explore an ambivalent overall embrace of cosmopolitanism in contemporary Paris, looking at how Tamil use of and investment in La Chapelle interacts with two local planning initiatives and with the use of La Chapelle by non-Tamils who are nonetheless attracted to the neighborhood precisely for its Tamil identity.

Cosmopolitan pasts

Thus far I have positioned cosmopolitanism largely within the political field of migrant-receiving cities and nations of the Global North, through the example of Paris. Yet while on the one hand, tracing the history of cosmopolitanism in the metropolises of the Global North means acknowledging the histories of the long *durée* which have linked North and South, often through the exploitative mechanisms of colonialism, on the other hand, cosmopolitanism also serves as a framework for understanding pre-colonial pasts outside (and prior to) the framework of European colonialism.

Understandings of the historical past as cosmopolitan are particularly significant for Tamil diasporic communities, the politics of which were for so long, exclusively represented by pro-LTTE nationalism: that is, a vision of a homogenously Tamil ethno-state, itself mirrored by claims for a Sri Lankan state defined as Sinhala and Buddhist, rather than pluralist or cosmopolitan. While nationalists themselves, and even some historians and scholars not necessarily invested in Sri Lankan/Eelam nationalist projects have read Sri Lankan and Tamil histories as indicating two separate proto-nations in the form of (exclusively) Tamil and Sinhala kingdoms (Kapferer 2012), many scholars of Sri Lanka have instead used the language of cosmopolitanism to describe a historical past in

which categories of “Tamil” and “Sinhala” (and other Sri Lankan minority groups) had not hardened into discreet categories, and in which multilingualism and syncretism characterized cultural, religious, economic, and political life (Tambiah 1986; Obeyesekere 1984; Ismail and Jeganathan 1995). The legacy of the fraught history of claiming Tamil identities from within Sri Lanka, is, in Paris, combined with particularly Indian (and more particularly Pondicherry-based) Tamil political and cultural histories, as well as ideologies of Tamilness as a transnational linguistic-ethnic identity which seeks to subsume differences between Tamil-speaking individuals or communities into a pan-Tamil identity. Though the political histories and contemporary politics of Tamil identity are a theme throughout the dissertation, they are particularly present in chapters three, four, and five, in which the (multiple) performative enactments of Tamilness in Paris are contextualized within a French setting in which French-Tamil identity is expressed through the ambivalently unifying category of *Tamoul*.

Just as cosmopolitanism offers a counter-narrative to exclusionary resurgences of nationalism, it also offers a counter-narrative to nationalist historiography of the nation; in revealing the complexity of our inter-related pasts, it illustrates the brittleness of our contemporary borders. In the urban spaces of Paris, an ethnographic eye for cosmopolitanism traces a map of Paris not defined by its great monuments or administrative borders, but by its living populations, their daily movements, and their quotidian activities. While each of the chapters seeks to add detail to an emergent map of Tamil Paris, chapter six underscores the extent to which Tamil Paris is positioned not as a departure from, but rather as constitutive of, Paris’s identity as a mythicized global city.

Conditional Cosmopolitanism as Anthropology of the Present

Does cosmopolitanism then offer us a way forward? Might it hold forth a form of social belonging which acknowledges differences but is premised on co-presence and co-creation of urban, national, and indeed, global spaces in a hopeful vision of a cosmopolitan future? Might such a discourse challenge the notion of migrant subjects as interlopers into national territories to which they (purportedly) do not “belong”, and who must only accept what they are given with gratitude; instead reframing migrants as equal stakeholders with legitimate demands—and creative capacities—of their own? Could we draw on cosmopolitan pasts to reject the pernicious myth of a homogenous, hermetical national past which never existed (certainly not in France, nor in Tamil spaces of Sri Lanka or India), and instead acknowledges the presence of multiple traditions *as* our tradition?

Perhaps, but it would be a mistake to imagine cosmopolitan spaces as utopian. First, cosmopolitan belonging in local urban spaces doesn’t translate to full national membership or legal equality—especially where legal status remains unsettled or flat out denied (witness the many deportations of undocumented migrants who were fully “integrated” into local communities). Secondly, we must be careful not to romanticize acts of migration which are in so many cases experiences of violence, exploitation, and racism, motivated by poverty, conflict, and oppression. Thirdly, an anthropology of the cosmopolitan must frankly acknowledge that many cosmopolitan encounters—including at times ethnographic research itself—are structured around consumption, leading to lopsided social and economic exchanges which reproduce existing inequalities around wage labor and living standards, and commodify ethnically-marked urban spaces as

“exotic.” And lastly, because we must remain attentive not only to how structures of power and oppression shape interactions between “communities” who come to be ethnically-identified, but also within them. Ethnography makes clear that being Tamil in a Tamil space is not always a welcoming experience—indeed it can be fraught along a variety of axes, from gender to caste to political allegiances.

Thus, my support for a cosmopolitan anthropology is conditional: for *if* cosmopolitanism is the way forward, it must also work to attain more equitable living conditions, to subvert the frame of consumption, and to acknowledge the challenges faced by residents of “marginalized” urban spaces without stigmatizing the users/inhabitants of those spaces themselves. Throughout my ethnography of Tamil spaces in Paris, I have tried to capture what I see as Paris’s status as an ambivalent cosmopolis: on the one hand, proud of its role as a global city, and on the other, longing to represent a more narrowly defined national community. I have argued that Tamil Paris emerges from both distinctively Tamil and prevailingly French discourses of cosmopolitanism which enact and inscribe Tamil identity *as part of* the cosmopolitan setting of Paris. Thus my ethnography of Tamil Paris is not *in relation to*, but rather *integral to* ongoing debates about French national identity and Parisian urbanism. Simultaneously, I argue that situating this diasporic community within Paris should not entail losing sight of its complexly transnational composition, both in relation to “homeland” spaces which are not given, but rather complexly configured, and to a sense of interconnectedness between global sites of Tamil diaspora which enables a self-image as part of a global, cosmopolitan Tamil identity.

This conclusion, in turn, ambivalently proposes cosmopolitanism as an anthropological lens for understanding our post-globalization world. The ambivalence, in this case, stems from the limitations of cosmopolitanism to necessarily address structural barriers to equality within the city, or between city and nation, and between nations themselves. Still, I am drawn to cosmopolitanism's dream of spaces which belong equally to all who inhabit them, and to which we are free to come and go as we choose.

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