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*O corpóreo e o carnavalesco: a exposição de S. Francisco Xavier em 2004 e o consumo da história na Goa pós-colonial*

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# The corporeal and the carnivalesque: the 2004 exposition of St. Francis Xavier and the consumption of history in postcolonial Goa

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*Pamila Gupta*

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To enter Old Goa during the 2004 Exposition of St. Francis Xavier’s “Sacred Relics” is to experience a world where the corporeal and the carnivalesque coalesce. It is a ritual and religious space wherein the corpse of a 16<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit missionary-turned-saint takes center stage: pilgrims and tourists stand in the same line to “see” Xavier’s corpse and “touch” his glass casing, Goa’s (Portuguese) colonial legacy is exhibited for public consumption, Catholic religious services and lectures on this missionary’s biography in a variety of languages take place at regular intervals, makeshift stalls sell numerous iconic objects associated with the saint, and finally, the uncertainty of Xavier’s fate is exposed. In this article, I explore the many facets of this exposition of Goa’s patron saint, suggesting that by taking part in these highly ritualized acts focused on Xavier, tourists and pilgrims simultaneously transform the space of Old Goa, consume its “Portuguese” past, and become part of history-in-the-making in the face of the increasing fragility of his corpse. Although this paper is based on ethnographic research conducted in 2004, its themes remain relevant given that Xavier’s last decennial exposition was staged in 2014-2015, and will continue to take place at ten-year intervals.

KEYWORDS: Goa, India, St. Francis Xavier, Portuguese colonialism, Jesuits, Goa tourism.

O corpóreo e o carnavalesco: a exposição de S. Francisco Xavier em 2004 e o consumo da história na Goa pós-colonial ♦ Entrar em Velha Goa (Old Goa) durante a exposição das “reliquias sagradas” de S. Francisco Xavier em 2004 significa experienciar um mundo onde o corpóreo e o carnavalesco se unem. Trata-se de um espaço ritual e religioso onde o corpo do jesuíta missionário do século XVI, transformado em santo, adquire destaque: turistas e peregrinos esperam na mesma fila para “ver” o corpo de S. Francisco Xavier e “tocar” o seu túmulo de vidro; o legado colonial (português) de Goa é exibido para consumo público; serviços religiosos católicos e conferências sobre a biografia do missionário são realizados em diversas línguas a várias horas do dia; bancas improvisadas são montadas para vender numerosos objetos icônicos associados ao santo; é exposta a incerteza sobre o destino de S. Francisco Xavier. Neste artigo exploro estas várias dimensões desta exposição do santo patrono de Goa, sugerindo que os turistas e os peregrinos, ao participarem nestes atos fortemente ritualizados, simultaneamente transformam o espaço de Velha Goa, consomem o passado “português”, e passam a fazer parte de uma história em processo de construção, face à crescente fragilidade do corpo do jesuíta. Apesar de o artigo ser baseado numa pesquisa etnográfica conduzida em

dezembro de 2004, os seus temas mantêm-se atuais, já que a última exposição de S. Francisco Xavier ocorreu em 2014-2015, prevendo-se que continue a realizar-se de dez em dez anos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Goa, Índia, S. Francisco Xavier, colonialismo português, jesuítas, turismo em Goa.

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## INTRODUCTION

To enter Velha Goa (Old Goa as it is now called) during the 16<sup>th</sup> Exposition of St. Francis Xavier’s “Sacred Relics” is to experience a world where the corporeal and the carnivalesque coalesce. Not only does it operate as a ritual space wherein the 450-year-old decaying corpse of a Jesuit missionary-turned-saint takes center stage – an event that takes place only once every ten years –, but a diverse group of people come together – including Goans, Catholic pilgrims from both India and abroad, and local, national, and international tourists –, all standing in the same lines to “see” Xavier’s corpse and “touch” his glass casing. In this article, based on ethnographic research conducted in Goa, I explore the many facets of the last exposition of Goa’s patron saint that took place between November 21, 2004, and January 2, 2005, by way of the experiences of individual members of the public.<sup>1</sup> I will suggest that by taking part in a set of highly ritualized acts centered on Xavier’s corpse and image, participants simultaneously transform the space of Old Goa, consume its “Portuguese” past even as they have differing relationships to that past, become part of history-in-the-making in the face of the increasing fragility of his corpse, produce and disseminate postcolonial images of Goa that are indelibly shaped by Xavier, and finally, reinterpret Goa’s colonial history for future generations. Even as this article is based on ethnographic research conducted ten years ago, its themes remain relevant given that Xavier’s last decennial exposition was staged in 2014-2015 and will continue most likely in the future to take place at ten-year intervals.

1 This article is based on fieldwork conducted in Old Goa from November 20, 2004 to January 4, 2005.

## THE PRODUCTION OF “GOA” AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

Within the imaginary of India as a postcolonial nation-state, Goa is a popular tourist destination. Precisely because of its distinct history, its representation today is imbricated in its past position as a Portuguese colony, the main attraction being its unique Indo-Portuguese heritage as it is manifest in food, architecture and religion. Moreover, Goa increasingly draws both national and international tourists, its proximity to Mumbai, its miles of pristine beaches, and the availability of inexpensive charter flights from Europe all being contributing factors. Postcolonial Goa increasingly promotes itself as a tourist site that is “culturally distinct” from the rest of India (Gupta 2009), a discourse that relies on, and explicitly showcases a history of Catholicism (over its Hindu or Muslim past). Absent from the celebration of this Indo-Portuguese heritage is the recollection and representation of the politics of Portuguese colonialism that of course accompanied the Catholic conversion of Goa. As anthropologists Lina Fruzzetti and Rosa Perez suggest, economic change has taken place “too quickly and too dramatically, especially when the impact of tourism on Goan society is concerned” (Fruzzetti and Perez 2002: 52). In other words, Goa today is very much grappling with tourism and its (unforeseen) consequences (cf. Gupta 2014a).

The expositions of St. Francis Xavier play a curious role in the production of postcolonial Goa as a tourist site. Proto-tourists and pilgrims, many from neighboring British India, had been visiting Xavier’s corpse and mausoleum since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Xavier 1861; Anonymous 1890), wherein a colonial pattern of exposing his corpse at regular ten-year intervals was established, and by way of what the Estado da Índia labelled “exposições” [expositions]. The first postcolonial exposition was staged in 1964, three years after the end of Portuguese colonial rule (1961), thereafter continuing the colonial practice of decennial expositions to coincide with the Saint’s Day, December 3<sup>rd</sup> (1974, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2014). Throughout the postcolonial period, Xavier’s expositions have continued to develop into distinctly “Goan” festivals that are simultaneously local and global, religious and secular, their continued success relying on their ability to simultaneously harness a ritual pattern established during colonial times and incorporate new practices. These festivals not only bring Catholics from near and far to worship at the feet of Xavier and renew their faith, but also global tourists, and members of Goa’s global diaspora.<sup>2</sup> In the discussion and analysis that follows, I pay attention to both for as João Leal reminds us, we need to be “more attentive to the actual processes of critical appropriation and creative transformation of culture” (Leal 2011: 318), particularly in the realm of religion and ritual.

2 Xavier’s shrine operates alongside Our Lady of Health in Velkananni (Tamil Nadu), these being the two main sites for Catholic religious veneration on the Indian subcontinent.

Xavier's postcolonial expositions then are less about colonial and missionary power and the symbolics of it as was the case during earlier historical periods (Gupta 2014b), but rather about the production of Goa as a multi-layered hybrid festival space that promotes Goa as a tourist destination by way of its religious and cultural difference ("a taste of Europe" in India as it is often described in tourist brochures).<sup>3</sup> Just as in colonial times, the "public" that forms around this festival is made up of members with widely varying attachments to Xavier, and hence to Goa's imperial and missionary past. However, increasingly, those individuals who participate in Xavier's ritualization are part of a globalized world wherein the flows of people, culture and values have not only "multiplied and intensified" but are also "linked to the rise of unprecedented and novel kinds of flows" that we have yet to fully contend with (Leal 2011: 329).

#### THE CORPOREAL AND THE CARNIVALESQUE

Old Goa in its everydayness is a quiet and reserved historic district located ten kilometers from Goa's capital city of Panjim (or Panaji as it is also called) that sees the occasional tourist wandering past the many fine examples of baroque Indo-Portuguese architecture, the lone Catholic pilgrim paying homage to Xavier, or group tours learning about Goa's Portuguese past, a few entering the Church of Bom Jesus<sup>4</sup> to catch a brief but distant glimpse of Xavier's casket located high up inside his Italian mausoleum.<sup>5</sup> However, once every ten years, Old Goa is transformed into a ritual space (Turner 1974) almost unrecognizable save for the visible presence of the many religious buildings dotting the

3 See, for example, "Villa Paradiso" advertisement, Indian Airlines in-flight magazine between Mumbai and Goa (December 2004).

4 Built between 1594-1605, designed in the baroque architecture style, and originally called the "Casa Professa de Jesus" (House of Jesus), the Jesuits later changed the name of the Professed House to "Bom Jesus" in the 17th century. In Portuguese, "Bom" (Good or Holy) Jesus refers to the Infant Jesus whose statue was added next to those of St. Francis and St. Ignatius, founders of the Society of Jesus. This basilica was conceived for the explicit purpose of showcasing the Jesuits; it later became the site of veneration for Xavier after his corpse was moved there in 1610 and his subsequent canonization in 1622. See Rayanna (1982: 162-168) and Gupta (2014b: chapters 2 and 3). It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1986 alongside Old Goa itself, and remains one of the finest examples of baroque architecture in India.

5 Inside the Bom Jesus, even if one stands on his/her tiptoes, one can barely see the actual corpse of Xavier as it is housed inside an elaborate casket and mausoleum. His Italian mausoleum, on the top of which is placed the silver casket of the body of St. Francis Xavier, was the gift of the last of the Medicis, Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1696, and a devotee of Xavier. Commissioned by the Duke, and designed by the 17th century Florentine sculptor Giovanni Battista Foggini, it took ten years to complete. See Rayanna (1982). Xavier's decennial exposition is the only time that the public is allowed access to his corpse, a move that authenticates and revives interest in him.

landscape:<sup>6</sup> the main street is filled to capacity – some 15,000-20,000 persons from all walks of life filing past to see Xavier’s corpse on a daily basis –,<sup>7</sup> the air fragrant with the smell of burning candles and incense, and fresh food – omelets, samosas, etc. – busily being prepared in makeshift stalls built on all sides of the festival, and a cacophony of noises – church bells ringing, children singing, men hawking items, and police whistles – envelope the crowd. After Old Goa was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1986, the expositions of St. Francis Xavier took on a more central role in promoting tourism to Goa. Organized jointly by the Archaeological Survey of India, the Department of Goa Tourism, and the Archdiocese of Goa, preparations are generally underway one year in advance of the actual event to complete the makeover of Old Goa, a makeover that resurrects its past image of “Golden Goa,” echoing earlier (colonial and postcolonial) expositions which were also always occasions for showcasing Goa to the world and itself (Gupta 2014b).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, when one leaves the hustle and bustle of Panjim to attend the 16<sup>th</sup> Exposition of St. Francis Xavier in Old Goa, one viscerally enters a world of corporeality, a place where one is not only confronted with the materiality of Xavier’s corpse, but also all its various fragmentations, embodiments and reproductions (Douglas 1973). Further, it is the very materiality of Xavier’s corpse that allows for its history to be registered at two levels: the religious and the carnivalesque, that is to be interpreted, appropriated, and sentimentalized by its participants in personalized, yet highly ritualized ways.<sup>9</sup> Inside the Se Cathedral of St. Catherine, the designated area where Xavier’s corpse has been positioned throughout the duration of his exposition is a place of origins, authenticity, singularity, religiosity, and history. It represents Goa’s Portuguese Catholic past in all its golden glory and asserts the official power of church and state.

Outside the Se Cathedral, on the festival grounds, the carnivalesque is constituted by and feeds off of Xavier’s corporeality: it is a place of pluralities and proliferations, copies, and history in the making. It allows the present and future to take over the past, operates as a space of equality, laughter, madness,

6 Tourists visiting Old Goa typically visit the Arch of the Viceroys, Basilica of Bom Jesus, Church of St. Francis of Assisi, Convent of St. Monica, Se Cathedral, and St. Augustine’s Tower, amongst other historic landmarks.

7 This approximate number was generously supplied to me by the “Exposition office” that was in charge of the day-to-day operations in Old Goa, as well as the following additional figures provided (December, 2004).

8 The Archdiocese of Goa is in charge of scheduling and overseeing Catholic masses and accommodating pilgrims to Goa, while the Goa Tourism Department is in charge of advertising, marketing, security, overseeing the market stalls, etc., and the Archaeological Survey of India is in charge of the buildings in Old Goa itself, making sure that no damages occur during the exposition.

9 By highly ritualized, I mean to say that participants take part in a series of actions that are both historically and culturally prescribed.

play, and sensorial pleasures (Bakhtin 1984; Parker 1991), and finally, leaves open the possibility that the grotesque body might take on new audiences and social meanings. Thus, the corporeal and the carnivalesque conjoin during Xavier's exposition to encompass a larger physical and temporal space and allow for a wider range of images, participants, and dispositions. A liminal space and time is created, one that both allows Xavier's corpse to operate at two different registers, that of officialdom (and solemnity) inside the Se Cathedral and playfulness on the outside, and produces the simultaneity of the past, present, and future in a place normally reserved for showcasing the past. In other words, throughout the ritual days, it is by way of these two conjoined discourses that a diverse group of participants are invited and encouraged to have a sensory embodiment and engagement with Xavier and Goa's history.

The opening ceremony, which takes place on the morning of November 21<sup>st</sup> to inaugurate the exposition, involves the ceremonious – it is full of the pomp and pageantry characteristic of Roman Catholic religious services (here the funeral of Pope John Paul II, which took place on April 8, 2005 and was aired on live television comes to mind as an apt comparison) – and historic removal of Xavier's corpse from his mausoleum inside the Jesuit Basilica of Bom Jesus<sup>10</sup> in a procession that moves through the main street of Old Goa. It is attended by some 5,000 people, including Goa's most important dignitaries of church and state, and ends inside the main altar of the Se Cathedral where Xavier is placed and readied for public veneration, after which a Catholic mass is performed by the Archbishop of Goa to bless his safe arrival and ritual display. It is only then that Xavier's corpse is exposed for public viewing.

A feeling of excitement mixed with anticipation permeates the long line of people waiting to enter the Se Cathedral on any given day of the Exposition. The diversity of those in line is apparent: one sees Goan Catholics with their rosaries and candles standing alongside Western tourists with their backpacks and cameras. When one finally reaches the inner sanctum of the cathedral, twenty minutes on a "good" day, two to three hours on a "bad" day, a place where silence is proclaimed and a ban on photographs is strictly enforced, one is rushed along by the attendants, typically a group of three to five people that carefully guard over the glass and gilded casket that encases Xavier's corpse, making sure that only proper acts of veneration are performed, and in a timely fashion, in front of Goa's most popular patron saint.

Allowed by these same attendants to sit on the sidelines, I observe multiple acts of veneration inside the Se Cathedral, some clearly deemed less

10 Since the beginning of the 20th century, the practice of transferring Xavier's corpse from his "home" of Bom Jesus to the Se Cathedral to accommodate more people during his decennial expositions has continued. For additional details, see Fernandes (2014) and Gupta (2014b).

“appropriate” than others by the officials in charge. I witness the lighting of candles in honor of Xavier, the crowding around his casket by people intent on getting as close as possible to his corpse, some even peering into the glass to look at his priestly vestments or particular body parts out of a sense of curiosity, as well as the quiet touching and kissing of the glass by those who seek his blessing, and finally, the bewildered look, usually of tourists unfamiliar with his history of veneration, who file past his casket without so much as a touch or a kiss. A priest circles the coffin three times, inspecting the corpse from all angles, before he is motioned to move on by the attendants for spending too much time in front of Xavier. A man presses his rosary to Xavier’s glass case while praying with his eyes closed, and a woman, tears running down her cheeks, bends down to touch her gold necklace to the glass casing before being moved along by the attendants. These observations not only suggest the range of intentions of those who patiently stand in line to see the decaying corpse of a 450-year-old saint, but also serve as a reminder of the deeply personal (and personalized) nature of religious devotion.

Outside the Se Cathedral, I speak to members of the public in an effort to gain a sense of why they have come to Goa; what, if any, is their relationship to Goa as a place; and finally, what their reactions are to Xavier’s corpse and image.<sup>11</sup> A family of devout Catholic Goans has traveled from a small village in the south of Goa. While it is the second exposition for husband and wife, it is the first for their eleven-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter who are both dressed in their Sunday best. The entire family is on its way to attend a Catholic mass, scheduled, according to the exposition program, to take place in their native language of Konkani in ten minutes.<sup>12</sup> A pregnant Catholic pilgrim from Bangalore (in the neighboring state of Karnataka) has come to pray for the health of her unborn child, and a newly married Catholic couple seeks Xavier’s intercession in helping them to start a family,<sup>13</sup> both of them continuing a devotional (and often gendered) practice originating in colonial times when the saint was associated with powers of fertility. A Hindu Goan, now living in Mumbai, proudly tells me that he attended St. Xavier’s College, one of several Jesuit institutions in India named in honor of Goa’s patron saint, and well known for its high

11 I point to different testimonies as representative of different experiences by a variety of pilgrims and tourists to Goa. All the following observations, interviews, and conversations with visitors took place in Old Goa, during fieldwork between November 2004 and January 2005.

12 Catholic masses are scheduled at regular times and in a variety of languages (English, Portuguese, Konkani, Marathi, Hindi, and Tamil) to accommodate a diversity of participants.

13 People come to Goa seeking Xavier’s intervention for a variety of reasons, including the healthy birth of a child, the cure of an illness, the securing of a job, etc. Others come to give thanks for all kinds of successes (Gracias 2004).



educational standards.<sup>14</sup> This same visitor regularly plans his annual trip to Goa to visit family and friends to coincide with Xavier's yearly feast day of December 3<sup>rd</sup>. Yet another Hindu Goan I speak with explains to me the reason why all Goans, both Hindu and Catholic, pay homage to Xavier, stating that "it [Xavier's exposition] marks a sacred place where both Catholics and Hindus come together to celebrate Goencho Saib, their 'Lord of Goa' as he is called in Konkani" (interview, December 7, 2004). A Catholic Goan now living in the US is less reverent towards Xavier, arguing that his exposition should be discontinued since he is a symbol of a colonial past rife with oppression and racism. Informing me that it was Xavier himself who started the Inquisition in Goa, he is appalled that he is venerated at all at this time and in this place.<sup>15</sup> A young man visiting Old Goa from Mapusa, a bustling market town in the north of the state, decides that the hours long bus trip to Old Goa was well worth the effort to see Xavier's corpse, possibly on the occasion of his last exposition.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for many Goans, Xavier is associated with certain types of devotional practices and educational institutions throughout the Indian subcontinent. At the same time, and in spite of their differing religious affiliations and attitudes towards him, Xavier represents and serves as a reminder of their shared past of Portuguese colonialism and Catholic conversion, and finally, helps maintain a fluid sense (often diasporic) of identity as simultaneously Goan alongside Portuguese, Indian, American, British, etc.

The public of Xavier's postcolonial exposition also includes international tourists, many visiting Goa for the first time; they respond to Xavier and Old Goa in their own distinctive ways. A young British couple, taking advantage of the inexpensive charter flights available between London and Goa during the holiday season, had booked a two-week beach vacation.<sup>17</sup> They express their surprise at the fact that the Portuguese outlasted the British in India, the "oldness" of Old Goa, the "small" size of Xavier corpse inside his casket, and

14 St. Xavier's College in Bombay is highly regarded in India for its quality of education. The naming of schools and academic institutions after Xavier is an extremely common practice that has contributed to his popularity. While the Jesuits were known for their innovative teaching methods, Jesuit schools today carry a reputation in India as being respectable institutions of higher learning.

15 This is a controversial topic as Xavier had written a letter to his fellow Jesuits in 1545 in support of initiating the Inquisition in Goa. However, he himself did little to install the Inquisition, what was not realized until 1560, eight years after his death (see Gupta 2014b).

16 The rumor that this is the last exposition of Xavier's corpse is commonly spread with each of his expositions. I will return to this point in the last section of the article.

17 The Goa Tourism Department maintains strict quotas at the same time that it promotes Goa's tourism industry. During the holiday season (December-February), inexpensive charter flights (historically from London, but more recently from Moscow) enable tourists to fly directly to Goa, without having to stop off in Mumbai, and often involve inexpensive package deals that are all inclusive of hotel accommodation, food, local travel, etc. (see Gupta 2014a).

the fact that his right arm is “missing”, the historical bits of information all gleaned from a guidebook they purchased upon entry. An Argentinian tourist has come to Goa specifically because of the exposition, Xavier being a familiar icon to him because of his Catholic upbringing in Buenos Aires. While he finds the Indo-Portuguese architecture of Old Goa distinct, he is particularly saddened by the “grotesque” state of Xavier’s feet, going so far as to say that he feels sorry for him for not being able to rest in peace after death. Yet another tourist, a man of Goan origin who grew up in Uganda but now lives in Toronto, expresses his viewpoint that the corpse of Xavier is obviously a “fake” that is used to dupe the people of Goa, and that it is only (Roman) Catholicism that continues to perform such archaic rituals, an opinion that was also expressed by visitors to Xavier’s expositions during colonial times (Gupta 2014b). On numerous occasions, I come across individuals who, dragged to Old Goa by a friend or family member, refuse to enter the Se Cathedral to touch or kiss Xavier’s casket, choosing instead to wait outside having a cold drink or shop in the nearby stalls.

In the end, I come away from my conversations with this diverse group of participants, individuals who cannot be strictly labeled “Goans,” “tourists” or “pilgrims” for none of these categories is mutually exclusive, with a sense of the uniqueness of each person’s perspective on, relationship to, and experience of Old Goa and Xavier. In other words, public festivals like this one are important for allowing very particular motivations and relations to remain and be experienced personally while also giving people a sense of collectivity, of participating in something larger than themselves. At the same time, these ethnographic encounters reinforce the point that Portuguese colonialism and Catholicism were simultaneously local and global processes, and expose the complexity of Xavier’s role in Goa, past, present, and future (Gupta 2014b).

Xavier’s corporeality, displayed with such solemn reverence inside the Se Cathedral and the centerpiece for acts of devout religious faith, is taken up in a carnivalesque mode outside this same space. In the central square, one is besieged on all sides by men selling wax arms, feet, hearts, and other body parts, the Catholic belief being that one tries to cure a particular ailment by burning a wax replica of that same body part in honor of Xavier, who will then intercede on one’s behalf, a ritual practice once again reminiscent of colonial times (Xavier 1861). Countless stalls sell wax and plastic figurines of Xavier and his corpse, and up-close color photos of Xavier’s body parts, the most popular images being those that are the most macabre: those of his face, hand and feet. While the fixation on body parts, Xavier’s corpse, and his death is clearly a legacy of a form of corporeal religiosity and devotional practice that goes back centuries in colonial Goa (Gupta 2014b), strikingly today, it is the international tourists who are buying the wax and photographic body parts,

largely, it seems from my conversations with them and multiple vendors, out of a sense of morbid curiosity. As one vendor points out, the religious pilgrims visiting Old Goa tend to buy the Catholic paraphernalia – that is, the rosaries, crosses, and images of Xavier as a missionary (i. e. images of Xavier in life), as compared to the tourists who tend to buy the kitschy items – that is, the wax body parts, photographs of his body parts, and miniatures of his corpse (i. e. images of Xavier in death), a ritual detail that suggests differing attitudes on the part of the participants towards how one chooses to “see” and “remember” Xavier. While these same ritual items were also associated with his colonial expositions, this time they are available for a very different consumer audience. That is, they have found a new social life and appeal amongst Goa’s international tourists. Finally, the abundance of imagery of the saint in both life and death reinforces the pleasures of the body and its acceptance as a concrete symbol (Bakhtin 1984; Douglas 1973), the history of his corpse and the corporeal focus on the part of these ritual participants being examples of deep history and constant transformation (Foucault 1979; Dirks 1993).

#### THE CONSUMPTION OF HISTORY

Just as Michel-Rolph Trouillot suggests that commemorative ceremonies typically “package” history, Goa’s colonial past is “packaged” in multiple ways for a range of participants during this commemoration of Xavier’s death (Trouillot 1995: 5). For example, one of the many guide books available for sale in Old Goa describes an itinerary that “will help you walk in the imaginary footsteps of a sixteenth century visitor to the city, and drink of times past” (Noronha 2004: 24). In a similar manner, the ritual space of Xavier’s exposition promotes the public consumption of Goa’s colonial history. Even as one enters the grounds of the exposition, one is struck by the “archaic nature” of the place; it is almost as if one had stepped back in time save for the visible presence of ritual’s accoutrements such as lights, metal detectors, and hi-fi stereo systems that serve as reminders of the temporal present. Fittingly, it is India’s national heritage organization, the Archaeological Survey of India, that is put in charge of setting up Goa’s history for consumption throughout the duration of Xavier’s exposition, a ritual detail that serves as a reminder of Goa’s integration into the larger Indian nation-state in spite of all the visual markers that suggest a more disparate history as well as the fact that it is clearly invested in Goa’s status as a UNESCO world heritage site. Specifically, this organization oversees the readying of Old Goa prior to the exposition; this includes sprucing up the churches and museums on the inside and out, protecting the unique Indo-Portuguese architecture from any irreparable damages during the days of the exposition, and finally, after the closing ceremony, cleaning up Old Goa in

order to return it to its original pristine state,<sup>18</sup> the past (and its hedges) taking over once again. But more than the physical space of Old Goa, it is Xavier's biography that becomes the organizing discourse for consuming Goa's past, a colonial history that is very often confusing and complicated. Here I employ an analytic of consumption to suggest a constant oscillation between the personal and the social, the private and public. On the one hand, visitors to Old Goa take part not only in a collective event but also a collective act wherein they all gather together in this historic city, stand in the same lines, and buy the same Xaverian items. On the other hand, these same ritual practices simultaneously foster personal and particular experiences and interpretations of history, religious and secular.

Visitors can either choose to take a three hour guided tour of Old Goa conducted by an official tourism operator, or wander by oneself through the numerous churches and buildings that make up Old Goa, and which are filled with enough historical dates, facts, and figures to give a sense of the longevity of the Portuguese colonial presence in Goa. Moreover, the numerous guide books that are available not only promote the self-guided tour, but also inform the public of the rich history of Xavier's colonial expositions, and ensure that every visitor to Old Goa, even if he or she does not step foot inside the Se Cathedral to bear witness to Xavier's corpse, leaves with some (limited) sense of Goa's rich Portuguese past.

In my conversations with the official tour guides of Old Goa, I encounter a wide range of responses to the "packaging" of Goa's colonial past for public consumption. I meet several guides who pride themselves on their vast knowledge of Goa's history which necessarily includes Xavier, one going so far as to narrate Xavier's entire biography to me, from birth to death (interview with Goa tour guide, December 13, 2004). Another guide tells me the infamous story of Dona Isabel de Carom who was rumored to have bitten off two of Xavier's toes during his first public reception in 1554.<sup>19</sup> Here the tour guide serves the role of local historian. More importantly, by tapping into Xavier's remarkable biography in death, he makes the figure of Xavier (in spite of the obvious deplorable condition of his corpse) come alive in the present for a diverse audience.<sup>20</sup> The majority of these tour guides feel that Goa's colonial past must not be forgotten, several of who highlight, once again, its difference

18 Interview with an employee of the Archaeological Survey of India, December 13, 2004, Old Goa.

19 This is probably one of the most popular Xaverian stories, one that is repeated often. The retelling of past events such as this one in the present is an important aspect of the consumption of history as it keeps the figure of Xavier alive in the minds of the audience. It is not just a dead corpse, but rather a corpse with a rich and quite remarkable history. For more details on the retelling of this narrative throughout Goa's history, see Gupta (2014b).

20 It struck me as significant that all of the Old Goa tour guides I encountered were male, suggesting that the role of local historian/tour guide was very much a gendered profession.

(both historical and cultural) from the rest of India. Not only do they see the occasion of Xavier's exposition as an appropriate venue for reviving and re-enacting Goa's Portuguese past, but they recognize, and take pride in the importance of their own positionality in retelling that past.

The participants I encounter have differing and often complicated relationships to Goa's history. I speak to international tourists who, armed with guidebooks, curios, and souvenirs, are invested in learning about Goa's past, as well as those who express little interest in learning about Goan history beyond witnessing the spectacle of Xavier's corpse. An Indian couple visiting Goa for the first time from Delhi expresses both their shock at the length of Portuguese colonial rule in India, and the "non-Indian" feel of Goa. A Japanese traveler knows little about Xavier beyond the fact that he was the founder of Catholicism in Japan.<sup>21</sup> I speak to an elderly Goan couple currently living in Portugal, having immigrated to Lisbon under the status of "refugees" after India's so called "invasion" (a term still used by many Goans today) of Goa in 1961,<sup>22</sup> their biographies suggesting that their fate remains bound up with the former colonizer. A group of young Portuguese tourists were attracted to Goa for a holiday precisely because it is a former colony, but their knowledge does not go beyond this fact, at least not until their visit to Old Goa where they find themselves immersed in its past, as well as their own.

Each ritual participant is encouraged to "consume" Goa's past through the figure and corpse of Xavier himself. Throughout the days of festivities, the biography of St. Francis Xavier is brought to life through a variety of ritual measures. The official 2004 Exposition Guidebook (Rodrigues *et al.* 2004) includes not only useful information on hotel accommodations, timings of events, and additional attractions in and around Goa, but a chronology of Xavier's life, a brief history of his "past expositions," and extracts from letters the missionary wrote while in residence in Goa during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Xavier's feast day of December 3<sup>rd</sup> (the official date of Xavier's death in the year 1552) witnesses a record attendance – some 65,000 people file past his corpse –, and is celebrated with a Catholic mass and speech, the theme of which is the "relevance of Xavier in our times."<sup>23</sup> Lectures on the life of Goa's patron

21 Xavier arrived in Japan in 1549 to set up the Jesuit mission. Even though his efforts were largely unsuccessful he did manage to create a small Catholic population in southern Japan that continues to celebrate Xavier. See Gupta (2014b).

22 Many Goans of an older generation refer to the end of Portuguese colonial rule as an "invasion" by the Indian Government. Goans were immediately given "refugee status", and allowed to immigrate to Portugal as a result. It was not until the early 1990s that Goa and Portugal re-established diplomatic ties. For more details, see Rita Cachado (2004).

23 Reverend Pedro Lopez Quintana performed the service and speech. See "St. Xavier's Feast," in *The Navhind Times*, December 4, 2004, pp. 1-4.

saint are scheduled at regular intervals throughout the days of Xavier's exposition in a variety of languages, including English, Portuguese, Konkani, Marathi, Hindi, and Tamil (Rodrigues *et al.* 2004: 7-8). In addition, numerous biographies and hagiographies on Xavier are available in the same stalls where the guidebooks are sold. Stall after stall sells posters, framed pictures, and laminated wallet-sized images of Xavier, the narrative of his biography (in life and death) told through a standardized series of pictures and labels: "Crab with crucifix", "Shrine", "Baptizing", "Chapel of St. Francis Xavier", "Basilica of Bom Jesus", "The body of St. Francis Xavier", "Preaching", and "Right Hand." Each image signifies a particular "moment," "object," or "practice" that defines Xavier's importance for Goa, and unwittingly tells the story, albeit in a very basic form, of Goa's Portuguese past. Not only are reproductions of the saint's figure labeled "souvenirs" available for tourists to take home with them,<sup>24</sup> but a newly released DVD on the life history of Xavier, with a catchy title (in English) nonetheless (*Grace, Guts, and Glory: A Movie on the Life of St. Francis Xavier*) is also available for sale. Throughout my wanderings on the grounds of the exposition, I find that a discourse on Xavier's biography (importantly, in life and death) permeates the festival space and serves as a way to enter Goa's labyrinth of history. Participants are encouraged not only to consume Goa's past through a variety of books, images, and new media centered on Xavier that are readily made available to them, but to carry home souvenirs, often representations of his body, which in turn, following Susan Stewart (1993: 134), sustain the ritual's presence long after it is over, and move history into the private realm by individualizing its experience.

There is one last lesson of history that the participant consumes upon leaving Old Goa. Lest one forget, upon exiting the exposition space, that Goa is no longer a Portuguese colony, one walks past the highly visible statue of Mahatma Gandhi which stands at the epicenter of the stalls, and which replaced the statue of Vasco da Gama, Portugal's famed explorer who first landed in India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, shortly after Goa's decolonization and integration into India as a Union Territory at the end of 1961. Even as many Goans point out to me that Gandhi vacillated on the issue of Goa's freedom struggle against the Portuguese, his statue serves as a fitting reminder of Goa's emplacement within the Indian nation.<sup>25</sup>

24 These souvenirs are labeled with the words: "Souvenir of Solemn Exposition of the Sacred Relics of St. Francis Xavier, Goa, 2004-2005".

25 Gandhi vacillated on the "Goa Problem" as it was referred to, at one point saying that the newly established Indian Government (post-1947) would help Goa gain its independence from Portugal, on another occasion saying it was up to the Goans to decide their own fate. In the end, many Goans perceive Gandhi as failing them and their drive for self-rule (Gupta 2011).

## HISTORY-IN-THE-MAKING

In October 2004, a fire broke out inside the church of Bom Jesus, in close proximity to Xavier's mausoleum. Many Goans, including a Jesuit priest I spoke with, declared it a "miracle" that Xavier's corpse was not destroyed in the fire.<sup>26</sup>

Others I spoke with were less fantastic in their assessment, suggesting that it merely pointed to the lack of an adequate security system to protect the valuable monuments of Old Goa. Fortunately, the situation was rectified immediately by those in charge and in time for Xavier's 2004 exposition (Noronha 2004: 41). I point to this incident to highlight a larger point; part of the wider appeal of attending the exposition of St. Francis Xavier is that, as a ritual event, it promotes the idea that one is participating in a process of history-in-the-making. Visitors to Old Goa on the decennial occasion of his public exposure rarely leave Goa without a sense of the fragility of Xavier's "sacred relics", and as a result, the historicity of the present moment. There is always a sense of imminent foreclosure, a horizon just ahead, a sentiment that promotes an emotional charge amongst the participants. Moreover, in the case of Xavier, this idea of the imminent end has been around for centuries, always animating desire and producing the fragility of the body while emphasizing its age and value. At the same time, this sense of imminence is also tied to the desires and discourses of modernity that animate tourism, a tourism that increasingly encroaches on the expositions of St. Francis Xavier as a site of religious pilgrimage.

In my conversations with participants about their experiences of being part of history-in-the-making in Goa, I encounter a range of responses. More generally, for the many religious pilgrims who travel to Goa from within the Indian subcontinent as well as abroad, their Catholic faith has been renewed. Many of those tourists who have come to Goa for some rest and relaxation alongside some heritage tourism recognize the fact that they have witnessed a remarkable event, the majority of them telling me that Xavier should be put to rest, one participant confirming the widespread opinion that his bones look "tired and old."<sup>27</sup> The majority of Goans (again, local, national, and international) inform me that his decennial exposition is a "tradition" that brings Goans together, from both near and far. Precisely because the Goan experience under Portuguese colonial rule was by nature an itinerant one as so many moved for economic opportunities within an empire that spanned Asia, Africa, and South America, cultural events like this one are important for gaining a sense of one's past, however distant one may be temporally or spatially from that past. Interestingly, for this diasporic Goan community, the condition of Xavier's corpse is

26 Interview, Xavier Centre of Historical Research, Porvorim Goa, December 10, 2004.

27 Interview, Old Goa, December 12, 2004.

largely incidental to the staging of his exposition; rather it is his enduring historical role and popularity that keep these global Goans coming back to visit on the occasion of his expositions. Thus, Xavier's corpse continues to provide a sense of community for a group of people (both Catholics and Hindus) that share a common history, and that is devoted to their patron saint.

The sense of imminent end is fueled by rumors that are widely circulated via word of mouth and newspapers prior to the event that this might possibly be the last exposition of Xavier's "sacred relics" due to their fragile state, a practice that also played a role in attracting participants during colonial times (Gupta 2014b). However, in the postcolonial period, it has become a more pressing issue as many officials – of both church and state – question the validity of his continued display. One Jesuit priest I spoke with voiced the opinion that many in the Archdiocese of Goa have shared since the end of colonialism: that "they should quietly bury Xavier" given the poor condition of his corpse and the changing socio-political context.<sup>28</sup> This same Jesuit priest also pointed out to me that it is largely the Tourism Department in Goa that does not want to see the end of Xavier's expositions, as it has the most to gain from its continuation. In other words, this rumor not only ensures a large number of attendants that, as a result, visit Old Goa partly out of a desire to be part of this soon-to-be historic moment, but it helps boost Goa's position as a tourist destination both locally and globally, Xavier's endangered and thus highly valued corpse being its continuing "main attraction." However, I would also suggest that his postcolonial expositions, as part of a larger historical tradition of venerating his corpse, serve as a reminder of the power of history, and the uncertainty of the future, particular at a time when Xavier, much like Christopher Columbus, is being re-evaluated as a controversial historical figure in both private and public arenas. Here I point to one such incident: at an academic conference organized in 1994 to coincide with Xavier's 15<sup>th</sup> exposition, an event at which I was in the audience, a Hindu Goan scholar presented a paper entitled "St. Francis Xavier: an anti-view," in which he argued that Goa's patron saint should be buried, and his veneration discontinued based on the "facts of colonial history" (Shirodkar 1994). His paper was not received without controversy; it provoked long editorials defending both sides of the debate in the local newspaper, *The Navhind Times*, and reinvigorated the way Goans today not only understand their colonial and missionary past, including Xavier's role in these historical processes, but interpret it for future generations.<sup>29</sup>

28 Interview, Xavier Centre for Historical Research, Porvorim Goa, December 10, 2004.

29 See editorials of *The Navhind Times*, December 3, 4 and 5, 1994.



## CONCLUSION

To visit Old Goa during the exposition of St. Francis Xavier's "Sacred Relics" is to take part in a remarkable event that only takes place once every ten years. As one Goan historian has suggested: "Today, four hundred and fifty years after his death, Xavier is still very [much] alive" (Gracias 2004). In this article, I have attempted to analyze the public display of a saint's corpse as a ritual event wherein the corporeal and carnivalesque join forces to create a temporality where the present and future take over a space reserved for showcasing the past. Moreover, it is Xavier's biography (in life and death) that becomes an organizing discourse for not only re-enacting Goa's colonial and missionary past, renewing Catholic faith and confirming Goa's place as a center of religiosity, but also packaging it for public consumption, and exposing the uncertainty of his fate in the hope of attracting more visitors to Goa, religious as well as secular. Nor can the role of the participants go unrecognized in these ritual processes. Together, this diverse group of individuals – local and diasporic Goans, Catholic pilgrims, and global tourists – take part in the transformation of the space of Old Goa, consume Goa's "Portuguese" past, become part of history-in-the-making, and as a result, play a continuing role in determining the fate of Xavier. Most importantly, by participating in Xavier's exposition, these individuals make meaning in their own lives out of the public display of the decaying corpse of a 450-year-old Catholic saint.

I end my exposition on the topic of Xavier with the reflections of a well-known postcolonial Indian writer who reinforces the persistent "problem" of Goa's representation within the Indian nation-state, and which helps us to better understand the complex legacy of Portuguese colonialism in India. V.S. Naipaul in his travelogue, entitled *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, dedicates one mere paragraph to the subject of Goan history. He writes:

"History in Goa was simple. In the long colonial emptiness the pre-Portuguese past had ceased to matter; it was something to be picked up from books; and then the 450 years of Portuguese rule was like a single idea that anyone could carry about with him. To leave Goa, to go south and west along the narrow, winding mountain road into the state of Karnataka, was to enter India and its complicated history again" (Naipaul 1990: 143).

Unlike Naipaul, I urge Goa's present and future visitors to seek out its historical complexities and curiosities, the corpse and sacred relics of St. Francis Xavier being perhaps a good place to start.

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