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The Uninvited Host: Goa and the Parties not Meant for its People

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Text

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Illustrations

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Graphic Design

KEYWORDS

Goa
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Colonialism
Pleasure Periphery

ABSTRACT

Despite its history as a favored destination for hippies from the West in the 1960s and 1970s, present-day party tourism in Goa largely attracts Indian travelers. This is a product of the post-1990s liberalization of the Indian economy, coupled with the exoticization of Goa, which has rendered it a pleasure periphery to the subcontinent. Such difference, and attraction, occurs because, unlike most of the rest of the India that annexed Goa, the region was a Portuguese colony until 1961. Goa's Lusitanization suggests a more liberal milieu, social gatherings with music and dancing being commonplace culturally, for example. While tourism has become an economic mainstay in Goa, the party economy pays little heed to Goans and their culture, treating the land as a place where fun is paramount and local concerns, including environmental ones, are sidelined.

1. See Nina Rao, "The Fourth Periphery and the Two Conventions," *The Eye* 2, no. 4 (1996): 16–18; and Paul Routledge, "Consuming Goa: Tourist Site as Dispensable Space," *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 30 (2000): 2647–56.
2. See Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar, "Consuming Goa Portuguesa: Vacationing in a Postcolonial Colony," *Journal of Human Values* 26, no. 3 (2020): 266–76; and Pamila Gupta, "Goa Dourada, The Internal Exotic in South Asia: Discourses of Colonialism and Tourism," in *South Asia and its Others: Reading the "Exotic,"* ed. V. G. Julie Rajan and Areyee Phukan (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 123–48.
3. See Trevor Getz, "Issue Focus: Comics and Graphic Novels in the World History Classroom," *World History Bulletin* 88, no. 2 (2022): 8–9. For pedagogical uses of the graphic textual form in the Goan context, see R. Benedito Ferrão and Vishvesh Prabhakar Kandolkar, "Vamona Navelcar's Lost Suitcase: Drawing (from) the Impossibility of Nation in The Destination Is the Journey," *World History Bulletin* 88, no. 2 (2022): 10–16.
4. Pramod K. Nayar, *The Indian Graphic Novel: Nation, History, and Critique* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 8.

The Party in Our Backyard (The One We Weren't Invited to...)

R. Benedito Ferrão, Angela Ferrão, and Maria Vanessa de Sa

While the title of our comic may suggest that the situation could be remedied by Goans being invited to the party in their homeland, we hasten to clarify otherwise. The very notion that Goans would need to be included in events in Goa already demonstrates the exclusionary nature of these occasions. Besides, a local culture of festivity has long been part of the region's custom, a tradition varying from the party scene inculcated by mass tourism of the post-liberalization period. Party tourism, as our comic illustrates, is a problem in Goa not only because it is contrary to local interests, but also due to the "afterparty" effects: the anguish caused to residents and damage to the environment. Long after the music fades and the revelry dies down, it is Goans who are left to pick up the pieces. It is such local disquiet that we aim to apprehend in our offering here, one that brings together artistic and academic efforts in a critical vein to reflect upon the specificity of party tourism in one of South Asia's most desired holiday destinations.

Centering a local Goan perspective places the concerns of these communities at the forefront. These include distress about noise pollution and environmental degradation, anxieties that run alongside how residents experience the effects of mass tourism as infrastructural failure. The common thread informing these troubles is the issue of how tourism has contributed to the ongoing colonial relationship between India and Goa. Since the 1961 annexation of the formerly Portuguese territory, when India circumvented Goan self-determination, tourism appears to have become another form of occupation.

Accordingly, one of the key concepts we employ is that of the "pleasure periphery." Coined in the era of neoliberalism, this is a term that encompasses tourism destinations in the developing world that cater to travelers from more affluent parts of the globe, as well as holiday sites created to be segregated from, and assuage the cares of, the quotidian.¹ Similarly, and as our comic indicates, Goa's role as a contemporary pleasure periphery is one in service to India, primarily because of Goa's Portuguese colonial heritage and coastal setting, thus making it productively other, or exotic, to the rest of India.²

Even as we rely on scholarly research about tourism generally and Goa more particularly, we have additionally looked to articles from the regional and Indian press to incorporate news of present goings-on, local voices, information about contemporary laws, and travel and tourism data of the current moment. Because we bear testament to matters faced by local communities, we seek to make this information available in an accessible medium, one that does not simply take community concerns and then serve them up for delimited perusal.

Our use of the visual-verbal format of a comic attempts to encourage a varied readership across the divide of academic and public audiences. Graphic novels and comics have lately been deliberated upon in their pedagogical ability, and especially in foregrounding voices from the margins.³ Writing on the subject, Pramod K. Nayar deciphers how such textual forms "[mix] and [match] multiple strategies.... [T]he visual adds a layer to the [verbal] social commentary..., [creating a] freedom of representation ... [and] opening up an array of story-telling strategies."⁴

We endeavor to do as much here in bringing the uninvited to the party.

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In late November 2022, a court ruling declared that no loud music could be played after 10 p.m. in Goa.⁵ A constant complaint by residents has been the level of noise in their communities, especially in the months of November and December when the party scene in Goa is at its height.⁶



5. See Times News Network, "[Ensure Silent Nights, HC tells Goa Govt](#)," *Times of India*, December 1, 2022,.

6. Ibid.



What becomes apparent from such grievances by Goan people is that party events occur without consultation with local communities and without deference to their concerns.

Further, such events are not meant to attract a local audience, geared as they are toward a largely Indian clientele.⁷ These partygoers descend upon the coastal state of Goa from New Delhi, Mumbai, and elsewhere. Goa thus becomes a site for the purpose of the entertainment of others.⁸

7. See Amalia Mora, "[Where the River Meets the Sea: Music Tourism and the Production of Westernness](#)," *Ethnomusicology Review* 19 (2014).

8. Kandolkar, "Consuming Goa Portuguesa," 266–76.

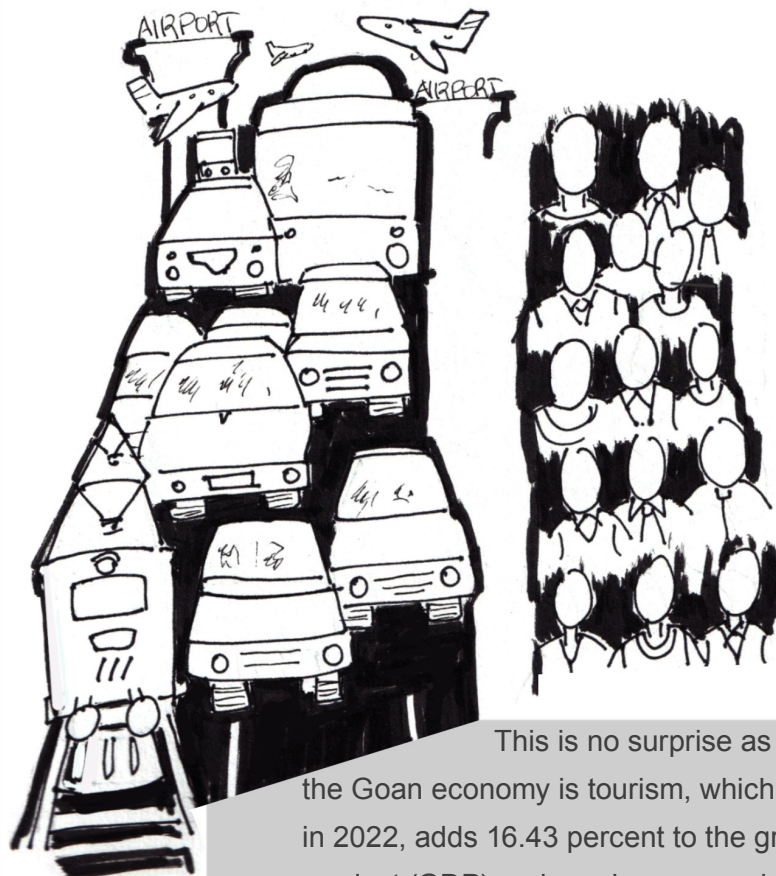


However, even as the High Court's ruling appears to protect the interests of Goan people, it must be pointed out that the ban on late night music is not absolute. Rather, the restriction only extends to events that occur without the permission of the authorities!⁹ This loophole makes it so that legally permitted parties may still be held with loud music playing after 10 p.m.



9. See Times News Network, "Ensure Silent Nights, HC tells Goa Govt," *Times of India*, December 1, 2022.

10. See India News, "Goa Braces for 'Unprecedented' Numbers in 1st Tourism Season after Covid," *Hindustan Times*, November 13, 2022.



This is no surprise as the mainstay of the Goan economy is tourism, which, by an estimate in 2022, adds 16.43 percent to the gross domestic product (GDP) and employs approximately 35 percent of the state's populace.¹⁰

The tourism season is at its height at year's end and is characterized by large parties that are often held at beach sites, such as Candolim and Anjuna, among others.

11. See R. Benedito Ferrão,
"Running Naked and
Unmasked in Goa: Pleasure
in the Pandemic," *eTropic:
Electronic Journal of Studies
in the Tropics* 20, no. 1 (2021):
134–56.

The tussle this creates is between the employment possibilities that arise out of tourism (precarious as these are given the whims of the economy and, recently, the COVID-19 pandemic) and the detriment to the well-being of Goan people and the environment of their coastal land.¹¹



12. See Chari Bindiya, "Goa: 'Tourist Arrivals may be 40 Per Cent More than Govt Data,'" *Times of India*, May 29, 2020.

Consider, as well, that in a small place like Goa (approximately 3,700 kms), its infrastructure is overwhelmed by the mass influx of tourists. Between 2018 and 2019, it is estimated that thirteen to fifteen million people visited the holiday destination.¹² Compare this to the state's population of just under two million residents as per the last national census of 2011.



Road traffic chokes up local highways and roadways in the month of December, an already busy time in a state where Christmas is celebrated across communities. This cultural nuance is due to the presence of a large Catholic minority in Goa. Catholicism came to the region with the Portuguese, who colonized Goa between 1510 and 1961.

13. See Raghuraman Trichur, *Refiguring Goa: From Trading Post to Tourism Destination* (Saligão: Goa 1556, 2013), 101–2.

14. *Ibid.*, 105–6.



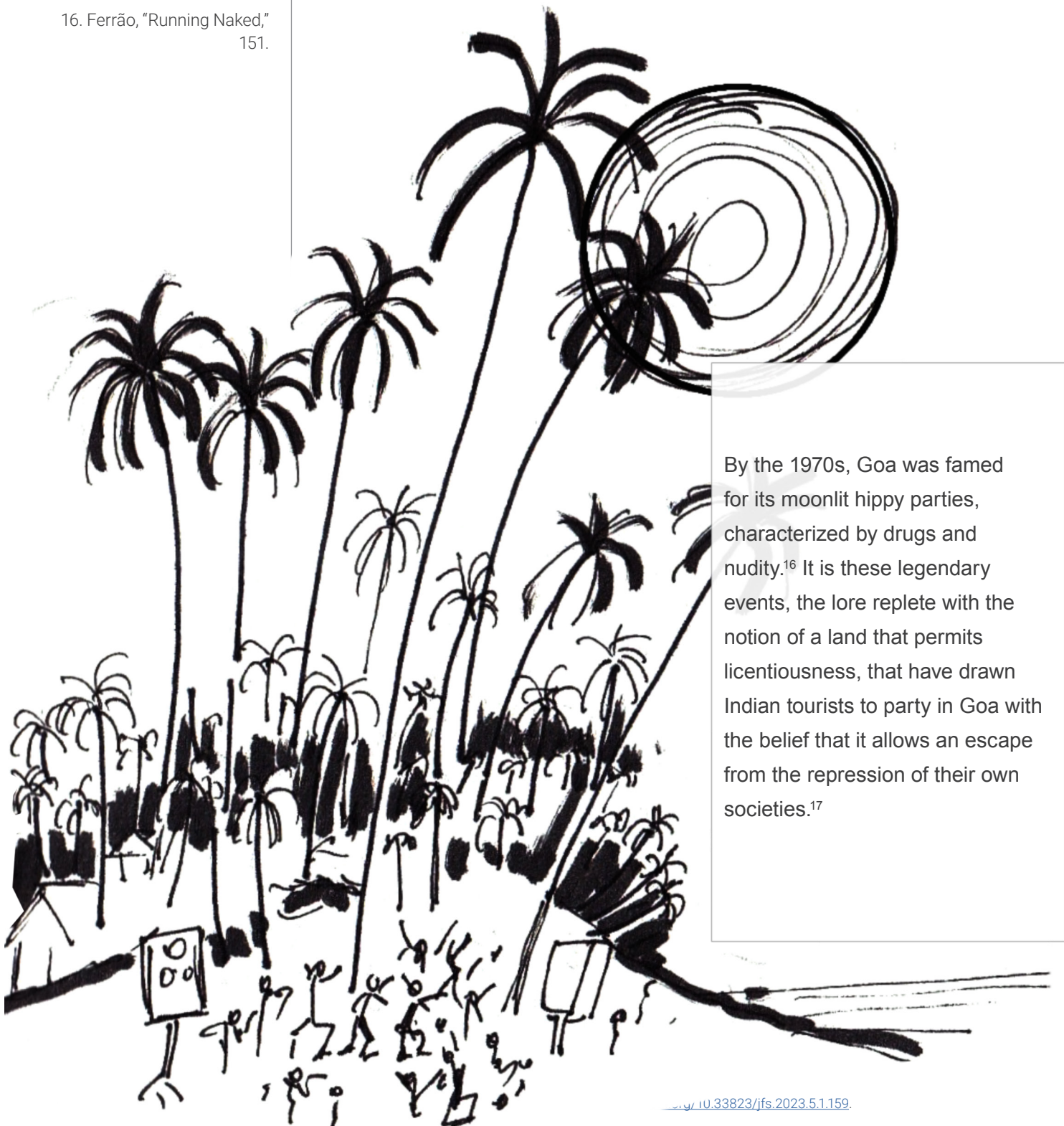
Mass tourism as Goa witnesses it now is vastly different from the humble roots of the industry in the 1960s when Kharvis, a tribal community of Catholic fisherfolk, first rented out rooms in their seaside homes to European and American hippies who had traveled to Asia to escape their growing disenchantment with the West.¹³

The success of these modest indigenous businesses did not go unnoticed. The Indian government, and corporate investors, became involved in developing Goan tourism, which was now seen as a viable, national economic opportunity.¹⁴



15. Arun Saldanha,
*Psychedelic White: Goa Trance
and the Viscosity of Race*
(Minneapolis: University of
Minnesota Press, 2007), 3.

16. Ferrão, "Running Naked,"
151.



By the 1970s, Goa was famed for its moonlit hippy parties, characterized by drugs and nudity.¹⁶ It is these legendary events, the lore replete with the notion of a land that permits licentiousness, that have drawn Indian tourists to party in Goa with the belief that it allows an escape from the repression of their own societies.¹⁷

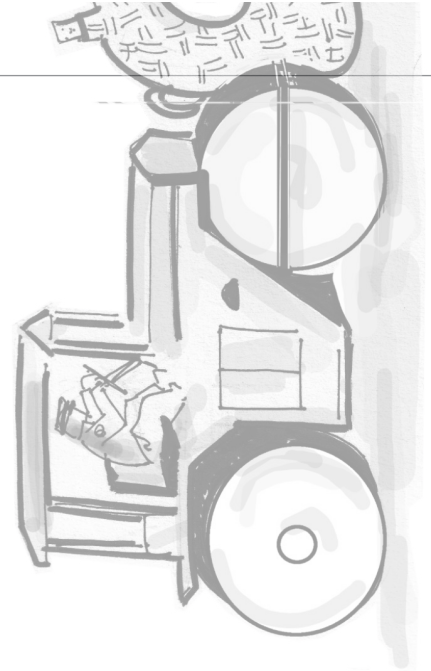
It is noteworthy that tourists who come to Goa from various parts of India find the cost of alcohol lower in comparison to their home states; it would appear that parties and the bar scene are thereupon even more of a draw than Goa's beaches or its local culture.¹⁷

17. Shweta Kamat, "Tourists in Goa Say Cheers with Beer, Whisky," *O Heraldo*, July 22, 2021.

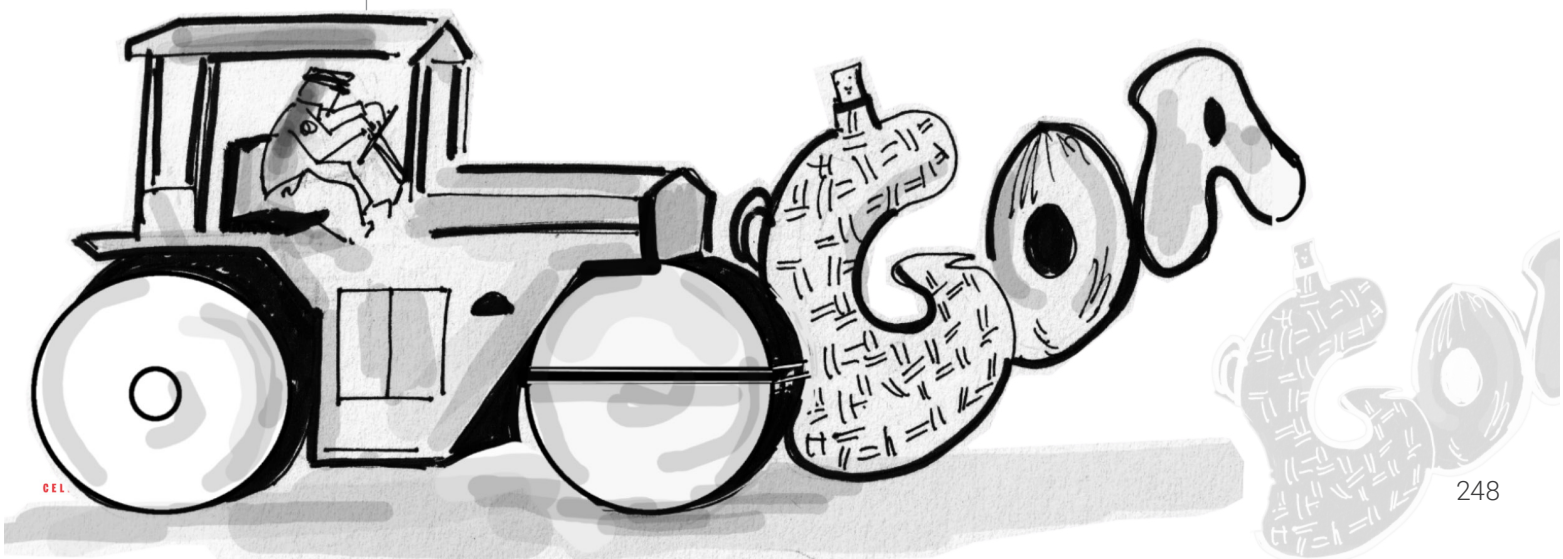
18. See Rao, "The Fourth Periphery," 16–18; and Routledge, "Consuming Goa," 2647–56.



The development of tourism in Goa since the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 has dramatically changed the industry; more Indians take holidays in Goa, which serves as a pleasure periphery to the rest of the country.¹⁸



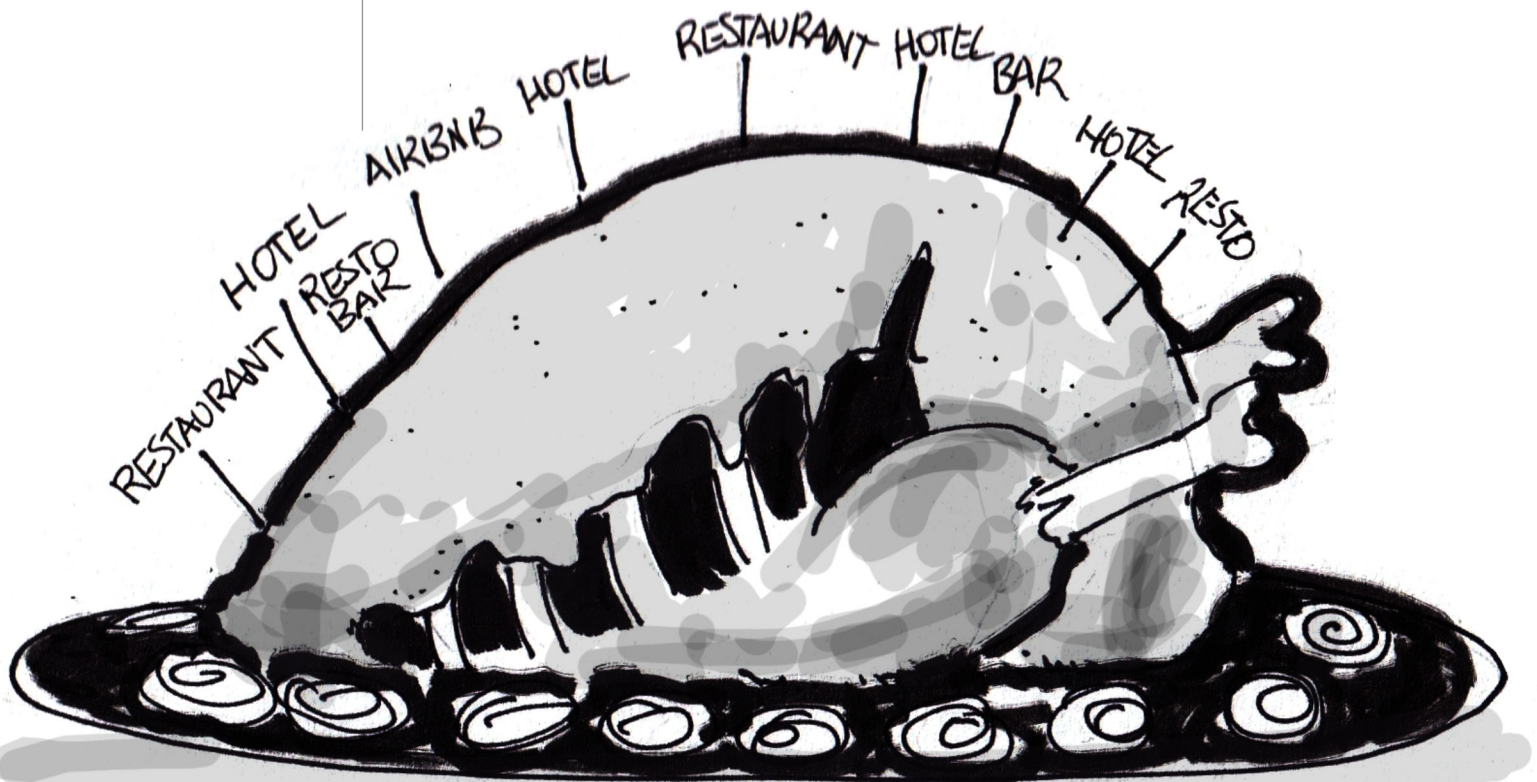
Such a relationship suggests coloniality and is in keeping with the militarized annexation of Goa by India in 1961 that ended 451 years of Portuguese colonialism. Nevertheless, Goa went from being a Portuguese colony to an Indian one, because Goan political self-determination was curtailed. Essentially, Goa became a colony of the postcolony of India, which was itself under British rule until 1947.



19. See Mora, "Where the
River Meets the Sea."

Because of its historical difference from the rest of India, Goa represents the opportunity for Indian tourists to transcend or escape India while still being within it. Partying in Goa, especially given its liminal location geographically and culturally, provides Indians with the chance to experience a temporary otherness.¹⁹

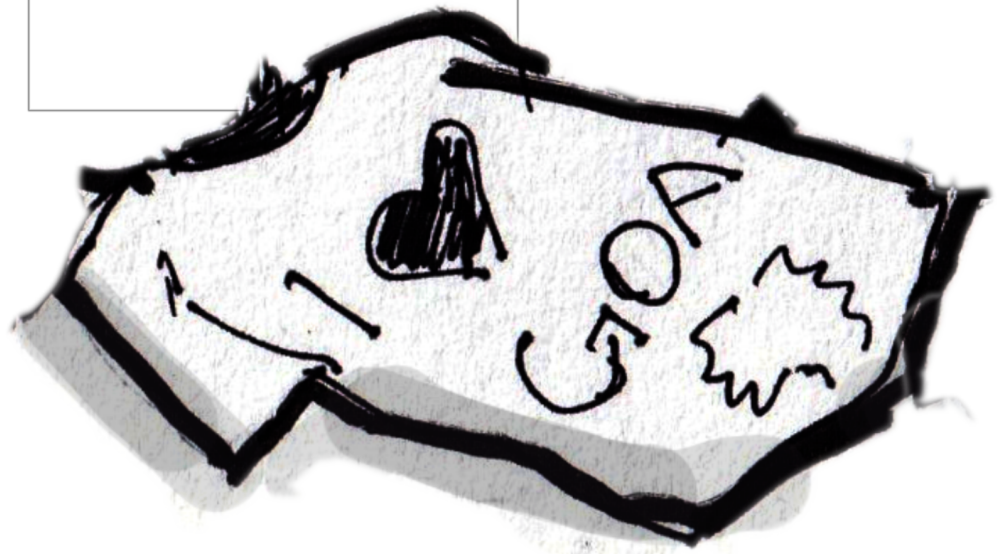
Just as the hippies of the previous century looked to India for an alternative to the West, Indians look to Goa as a reprieve from the ostensible strictures of tradition and even contemporary life in congested Indian metros. Goan tourism caters to this clientele within the conjoined purview of the globalized economy and being a pleasure periphery to India.



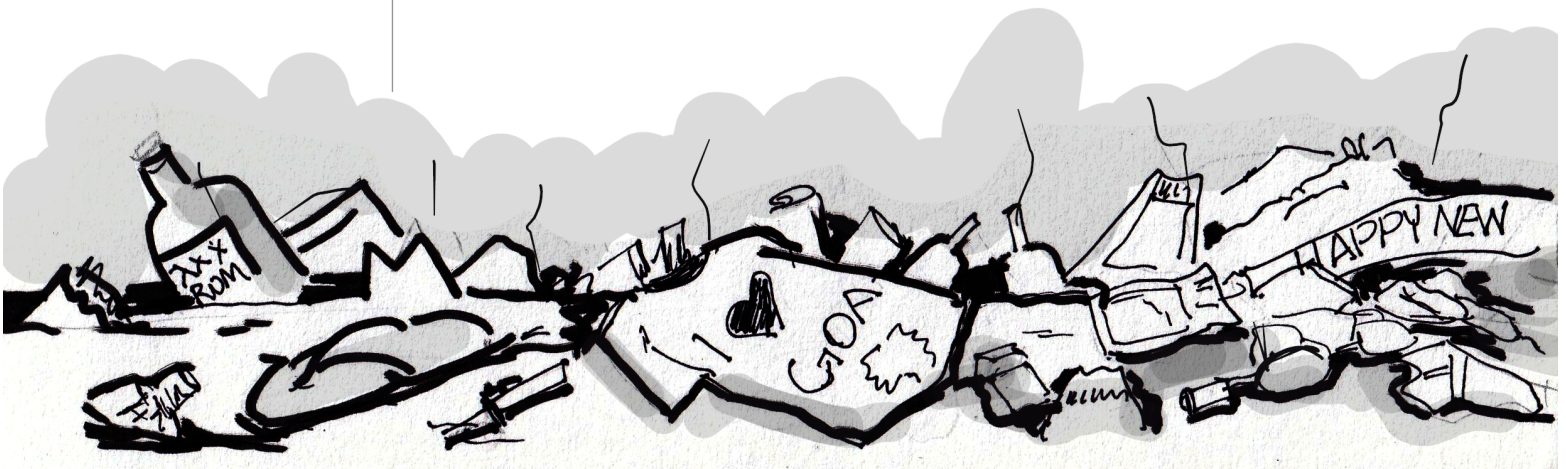
20. See Nisser Dias and Joseph Zuzarte, "[After Night-long Revelry, Goa Wakes up to Trashed Beaches](#)," *Times of India*, January 2, 2021.

21. Kandolkar, "Consuming Goa Portuguesa," 267.

In the meanwhile, the "hosts" who made the culture of their homeland possible find themselves the bystanders at the parties in their backyards, events their presence is not sought at.



Evidence of the parties persists even after the curtain comes down on them: debris on the beach,²⁰ as well as an influx of settler-colonial Indians who have made second homes in Goa.²¹ The fun over, Goans have to contend with the aftermath, and that is no party.



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R. Benedito Ferrão is an Assistant Professor of English and Asian & Pacific Islander American Studies at William & Mary. He has been the recipient of fellowships from the Fulbright, Mellon, Endeavour, and Rotary programs, the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies, and the American Institute of Indian Studies. Curator of the 2017-18 exhibition *Goa, Portugal, Mozambique: The Many Lives of Vamona Navelcar*, he edited a book of the same title (2017) to accompany this retrospective of the artist's work. His scholarly articles appear in *Research in African Literatures*, *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, and *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* among other journals.

Angela Ferrão is an illustrator and satirical cartoonist. She has published a book for children titled *Fuloos Plays with the Sun* (2013), illustrated a book of Goan stories for children, and been part of an anthology of gender-based stories, where her narrative deals with women's employment. She has worked in different media, from animation to instructional design. Her main interest is humor, through which she attempts to show the irony of social and political life in her home state of Goa and the world. Her work appears in several publications, including *Countercurrents.org*, *Tehelka*, *eTropic*, and others.

Maria Vanessa de Sa is an architect, urban designer, and artist. Her art explores stories from the everyday world, on being a woman, a mother, and a Catholic in Goa. She is conversant in multiple media and has also collaborated with other artists and writers. Most recently, she provided art direction for the graphic novel *The Destination Is the Journey*, which features the artwork of Vamona Navelcar and a story by R. Benedito Ferrão, and was published in *Goa/Portugal/Mozambique: The Many Lives of Vamona Navelcar* (2017). She also collaborated with Fernando Velho on the art direction of *Song Sung Blue* (2019), a hybrid illustrated novel by Savia Viegas.

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