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'Let us Live as Hindus': Narrating Hindu Identity Through Temple Building Processes in Amsterdam Zuidoost (1988-2015)

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CHAPTER 1: HINDU 'GROUPNESS' IN AMSTERDAM ZUIDOOST

Migration Trajectories of Hindu Groupings into Amsterdam Zuidoost



1: Current map of Amsterdam's districts (Source: instantamsterdam.com)

There are four migration trajectories of Hindu groupings that are represented in this dissertation: Hindustanis, direct migrant working class Indians, Afghan Hindus and Professional transnational Indians. I concentrate mostly on migration of Hindustanis from Suriname from the 1970s-1990s, not only because they make up the overwhelming majority of the Hindu community in Amsterdam Zuidoost, but because specific conditions of their migratory experience—particularly that of being indentured labourers from India—will re-surface in Part II in relation to the construction of a strategic Hindu identity in the neighbourhood.

Ethnic Group Breakdown (2015)	Amsterdam	Amsterdam Zuidoost
Surinamers	66623	26016
Antillianen	12125	4489
Turkish	42358	893
Morroccan	74210	1744
Other Non-Western non-Autochtonous	90100	20912

2: Breakdown of Amsterdam Zuidoost according to ethnic group (source: Gemeente Amsterdam 2015)

In general¹⁴, quoting numbers relating to Hindu community in the NL is a difficult task. There exist discrepancies, particularly between insider and outsider sources. For example, a 2006 WRR report (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid) on religious belief in the public domain estimates about 100,000 Hindus, which includes non South Asian ‘Western’ adherents. The Hindoeraad organisation based in the Hague, however, estimates that there are 215, 000 Hindus in the Netherlands nationally, and Choenni & Adhin (2003) estimate there are 128,000 Surinamese Hindus (Nugteren, personal communication, November 11 2015.)

What is more, statistics often include and exclude different groupings in their calculations. Often, recent Indian migrants are left out of these statistics, as well as Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus. To account for such discrepancies, I therefore put forward a relatively large range, estimating 100,000 to 215,000 Hindus in the Netherlands today, the majority of which are of Surinamese Hindu background.

Hindustanis



Figure 3: Current map of Suriname (Source: surinameconsul.com)

¹⁴I am grateful to Dr. Albertina Nugteren for her advice on estimating numerical figures of Hindus in the Netherlands. My estimate reflects her comments on the subject, given to me in personal correspondence.

The majority of Hindus in the country are of Surinamese-Indian descent. After the abolition of slavery in 1863 in the Caribbean, there was a labour shortage in plantations. Although ex-slaves were still employed by plantation owners, they were considered undesirable workers. At the same time many ex-slaves refused to continue their work at plantations where there was no possibility of pay increase or improving work conditions¹⁵ (Hoeft 1998, 1).

Instead, plantation owners turned to immigration to fill the labour shortage: Beginning in 1873, labourers from British India were exported to Suriname after Dutch officials signed an agreement with British authorities to purchase labour in 1870, known as the ‘Recruitment Treaty’ or ‘Coolie Treaty’ (Choenni 2011, 5, Hoeft 1998). Ships left from Calcutta and docked in Paramaribo¹⁶, Suriname’s capital city, where labourers were assigned work on a plantation. This resulted in what Tinker (1974) calls ‘the new system of slavery’, as stipulations in contracts were unclear, payment unfair and the living situation on plantations and on boats on the way to plantation sites crowded and unsanitary¹⁷ (Tinker 1974, 156-78).

Scholars have also noted that beyond the more evident problems with indenture as a system of control and slavery, potential labourers were misled about plantation locations: Suriname was often described to labourers as ‘Sri Ram’, or the island where lord Rama, the god and hero of the sacred text the Ramayana and the vernacular text *Ramcharitmanas*, reigned (Nugteren 2009, Choenni 2011, 6). This was particularly significant, as labourers recruited by the Dutch came from the east of contemporary Uttar Pradesh and the west of contemporary Bihar (Hoeft 1998, Choenni 2011, Nugteren 2014, Khan 2005), where worship of Rama is highly visible among Hindus (Lutgendorf 1991, van der Veer 1988, Cohen 2007).

¹⁵ Alongside purchasing labour from British India, the Dutch imported labourers from their colonies in Java as well (see Hoeft 1998).

¹⁶ Paramaribo emerged in colonial times as a ‘plantopolis’ (Potter 1998) that developed small settlements for colonial traders (Hoeft 2014, 161). It is now considered a ‘primate city’ where the bulk of the country’s population lives. Paramaribo is the largest and most important city in Suriname; as of 2004 half the population of Suriname resided there and approximately one-third of the population lived in the Greater Paramaribo area (*ibid.*). Since the abolition of slavery, Paramaribo has been traditionally thought of as an Afro-Surinamese city. However, into the twentieth century, traditionally rural populations of Hindustanis and Javanese moved into the city in search of educational and employment opportunities (Hoeft 163, 2014, Hoeft 1998, van Niekerk 2002, 42-52).

¹⁷ However, Hoeft (1998) notes that this view is refuted by ‘revisionists’ such as Galenson (1984) and Emmer (1993) who see the system of indenture as providing economic security for a vulnerable population, not to mention improved social and cultural lives (Hoeft 1998, 3, see also Carter and Torabully 2002). As Hoeft notes, looking only at labourer’s economic motivations distracts from the legal framework of indenture as a system of control over mobility, earning power, and living situation (4).

Indentured migration was temporarily halted in 1870 due to high mortality rates and suspicions that many of the stipulations of the Recruitment Treaty were not being met (Choenni 2011, 6). After the Dutch government made changes in terms of health care and assistance, accommodation and transportation facilities, migration resumed in 1877.

Those who signed up for a period of indentured labour were most often from a rural background. Many who agreed to make the journey were marginalised in their homes and villages: people who could not find work, were not educated, and may be escaping family or financial troubles¹⁸ (Dabydeen 1988, 9). In the beginning, mainly men migrated and family migration was rare (Nugteren 2009, 118). Labourers signed up for a five year contract: after five years, they were given the right to a free passage back to Calcutta, although two thirds of labourers chose to stay in Suriname (Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff 2005, 196, Nugteren 2009, Choenni 2011), where they were given land and the opportunity to start a farm (Nugteren 2009, 118).

After the abolition of the indentured system in 1920, many formerly indentured labourers continued to work in rural areas of Suriname as farmers. The Dutch government supported them in this endeavor, as the decline of the plantation economy meant that the land would still have to be farmed and maintained. The government provided financial assistance of 100 guilders for those who forfeited their right to return to India and stayed to develop the land (Niekerk 2002, 42).

Hindustanis prospered in the agrarian sector, especially as they took over plots of land from Creole¹⁹ farmers who moved into Paramaribo (*ibid*). However, groups of Hindustanis also moved into the city to work as food suppliers and to open shops and markets to directly sell their produce that was cultivated outside of Paramaribo²⁰ (44).

As more Hindustanis moved into the city after World War II, levels of secondary education among Hindustanis began to rise. There were already Creole middle-class and elite populations in the city that had a high level of education, a strong tool of upward social mobility (*ibid*). Their participation in the school system set them apart from Hindustanis. Although there

¹⁸ For a historical perspective that complicates this ‘victim narrative’ of the indentured labourer, see Carter and Torabully (2002).

¹⁹ ‘Creole’ in Suriname refers to the urban Afro-Surinamese population descending from ex-slaves, as distinct from Maroons, or runaway slaves who live in the country’s interior. Creole also denotes people of mixed European and African descent, much like it does elsewhere in the Caribbean and Latin America (van Niekerk 2002,15). In addition, there are discrepancies made between ‘light-skinned’ and ‘dark-skinned’ creoles, as the former are considered to be of a higher social standing.

²⁰ In contemporary Suriname, such an ethnically stratified vision of occupation is relatively outdated: Hindustanis, alongside Creoles, Maroons and Javanese populations have moved into various sectors and established themselves in various parts of the country (van Niekerk 2002, Hoefte 2014). However, the stereotype of the Hindustani farmer, particularly in rural districts like Nickerie, still persists.

were increases in social mobility and education levels among Hindustanis as well, generally their social standing was lower than that of urban Creole populations.

Although it is outside the scope of this dissertation to recapitulate fully the ways that Hindu groupness emerged in Suriname, it is important to note that a self-conscious 'Hindu' identity was virtually absent during the years of indentured migration. Rather than identify as 'Hindu', people often related across caste, village and kinship lines (Nugteren 2014, 333). Around the time leading up to India's independence, a self-conscious Indian identity began to emerge, particularly through the neo-Hindu movements in India that linked Indian origin to Hindu origin. Only after these processes took hold did Hindus in the Caribbean gradually begin to identify as 'Hindu' (334). Although today in Suriname there is no doubt a strong articulation of Hindu identity, especially in relation to Hindustani Muslims, this differentiation also took place gradually and I observe it to be more ambivalent than it often appears to be in academic writing (Choenni 2015, 2011). Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff (2005) note that there was a sense of collective 'Hindustani-ness' in the earlier years of migration, as strict boundaries between 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' were not always relevant for migrants (196). Interestingly, they demonstrate that the idea of a 'Muslim' identity was very proudly 'Indianised' as indentured labourers from Java of Muslim origin did not generally form alliances with Hindustani Muslims (197). Hindustani Muslims are said to have generally felt a strong relationship to India as a homeland (196-7), and that after the Partition of India in 1947, many still remained strongly committed to a 'Hindustani' identity that crossed Hindu and Muslim boundaries (203). In my own fieldwork in Paramaribo, I encountered inter-religious marriages and much casual socializing across Hindu and Muslim boundaries among Hindustanis. While many Hindus I spoke to were proud of their religion, they also related to a broader 'Hindustani' identity that was based on a shared culture (often articulated through popular Bollywood cinema or songs), food, and language with Hindustani Muslims.

Migration to the Netherlands

After the Second World War, there were a few thousand Surinamese people living in the Netherlands. Today, estimates boast approximately 335,000 Surinamese people living in the Netherlands (Choenni 2015, 1997, Nugteren 2009, Gowricharn 2004). Oostindie (2011) describes the migration from Suriname after 1970 as an 'exodus' (33), as it permanently altered the demographics of Suriname: during the 1970s one-third of the population left the country, and today 40% of all Surinamese people live in the Netherlands (*ibid*).

Besides the mass migration of the 1970s, earlier instances of Surinamese movement into the Netherlands dates from the eighteenth to nineteenth century, as masters brought their slaves and concubines over to work as domestic servants (van Niekerk 2000, 66). The beginnings of a large-scale migration trajectory, however, began in the nineteenth century among the elite urban Creole

population of Suriname who sent their children to the Netherlands to study. The pursuit of education in the Netherlands came to symbolise social betterment and upward social mobility, as those who wished to return to Suriname to work in the colonial administration were looked upon favourably if they had a Dutch diploma (van Amersfoort and van Niekerk 2006, 334). Before the Second World War, there were also Afro-Surinamese males who had come to the Netherlands to work as artists, sailors, or ‘adventurers’, but their presence was muted (*ibid.*)

Those who came to study in the Netherlands were relatively well versed in Dutch manners and societal norms and had a good command of the language. Their presence in the Netherlands was relatively unproblematic as they were small in numbers and possessed the cultural and social capital to function in Dutch society (Oostindie 2011, 36, van Niekerk 2002, 44).

Migration into the Netherlands after 1945, much like in France and Great Britain, was a partial inheritance from their colonial past (van Amersfoort and van Niekerk 2006, 323). In the 1970s, the Dutch government found their Caribbean colonies and Suriname to be increasingly burdensome—they were spending more money than they wanted to on economic aid to these colonies, and an already steady stream of migration in the Netherlands (with a population of Surinamese migrants around 4000) was proving to be undesirable. The government decided (rather shortsightedly) that giving Suriname its independence would quell the migration into the Netherlands, and so the Dutch government arrived at a deal with Suriname’s president, Henk Arron, in 1974 to give Suriname its independence in 1975. This came as a shock to the general Surinamese population, and having seen the aftermath of colonial rule play itself out as ethnic civil war in neighbouring British Guyana, many Surinamese residents opted to rush to move to the Netherlands as an investment in their future security and livelihood (Oostindie 2011, van Amersfoort and van Niekerk 2006, Nugteren 2009, 119).

The majority of migrants from Suriname in the years leading up to and during Suriname’s independence were Creole, but the second largest ethnic group that migrated was Hindustanis belonging to various class and religious backgrounds. As Choenni (2015) observes, when Henk Arron came to power in Suriname in the 1970s as a Creole leader, the Hindustani population felt that it was increasingly marginalised in the political sphere (Choenni 2015, 32). Increasing angst about their marginal position under Creole majority rule and their inability to remain economically successful led them to leave Suriname for the Netherlands (*ibid.*). Apart from this fear of marginalisation, Hindustanis felt that education and career opportunities for their children were more stable in the Netherlands, as well as feeling that medical access and a stable economic situation would benefit them (Nugteren 2009, 119).

It is crucial to note that at the time of mass migration into the Netherlands, Surinamers were full Dutch citizens under the law, subject to the rights and protections of Dutch citizens in

the Netherlands. Migrants from Suriname entering into the Netherlands were given a choice to adopt Dutch or Surinamese citizenship. Negotiations in the Hague over ways to stop the ongoing immigration into the Netherlands operated under the false pretense that those who had already settled in the Netherlands would choose to take Surinamese citizenship and return to Suriname. The opposite was overwhelmingly the case, in light of the fact that the offer of full Dutch citizenship upon settling in the Netherlands was extended to 1980, five years after the official independence of Suriname (Oostindie 2011, 54).

Much to the Dutch government's surprise, granting Suriname its independence did not quell migration to the Netherlands. After 1973, it became clear to Dutch officials that the idea of 'return' was unfeasible and undesirable for the majority of people who had migrated from Suriname (Vermeulen and Penninx 20, 2000). There was the continued fear of economic and political instability that caused many migrants to focus on the idea of establishing a home in the Netherlands, rather than to return to Suriname (van Niekerk 2000, Oostindie 2011). After independence in 1975, political unrest led to a military *coup d'etat* in 1980, which meant a continuing stream of migration into the 1980s.

Settlement and Dispersal of Hindustanis in the Netherlands

Between 1974-1980, the Dutch government implemented a policy of dispersal, (*spreidingsbeleid*) which reflected the public anxiety over high concentrations of immigrants in fixed neighbourhoods in the area known as the Randstad--the four major cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Hague, and Utrecht (Choenni 2015, 73, Van der Burg 1990, 96). They were directed especially towards of Surinamese people who did not have networks of family or acquaintances that could house them upon their arrival in Suriname. Shelters, (*opvangcentra*) were placed throughout the country, with one at Schiphol airport and another large one in Putten, East Holland. These shelters were set up to temporarily house, clothe and feed migrants before assigning them public housing throughout the country.

Choenni (2015) notes that after initially being received in shelter centres, most Hindustani migrants from the countryside, (especially rural districts like Nickerie) in Suriname were placed around the countryside in the Netherlands, which is why groups of Hindustanis can be found in remote areas of the country. These groups of Hindustani from the countryside were not familiar with Paramaribo or city life, and were well suited to the countryside in the Netherlands (74). What is more, Choenni's research asserts that dispersal was a beneficial policy, as it allowed for migrants to move into bigger, single-family houses rather than crowd into apartment blocks in the four big cities (74-76). Choenni argues that increased social mobility resulted from the

spreidingsbeleid, as Hindustanis placed throughout the country could become homeowners much more easily (*ibid*)²¹.

However, my respondents, largely of working class and lower middle class backgrounds, contest this experience, as the majority of my respondents hail from working class or lower middle class families in Paramaribo, and chose to settle in Amsterdam Zuidoost because of their connections to people already in the area, and the desire to live in an urban area. Unlike those Hindustanis that Choenni describes, my respondents have experienced limited social mobility.

Direct Indian Migrants

At approximately the same time that migration from Suriname was steadily flowing into the Netherlands, members of the laboring classes in India began to look for work in Northern and Western Europe. The majority of these labourers came Punjab and Gujarat, although many of my respondents had also come from large cities like Bombay.

As Lynnebakke (2007) notes, at the time her research was carried out, there was no study dedicated exclusively to direct migrants from India into the Netherlands. There is still a lack of substantial research on the topic, most likely because the numbers and organisations of direct Indian migrants from the 1960s and 1970s were conflated with Hindustanis.

The narratives of migrants I spoke to told the story of young, working class men leaving their villages to find work. Many first went to Norway and Denmark, and later tried to go to Germany. As it was difficult to get work visas in Germany, many of them then opted to come to the Netherlands. It was interesting to note that none of my respondents that were direct, working class migrants from India had set out with the idea to come to the Netherlands-- it was often called a 'chance' destination.

As the majority of migrants coming in the 1960s and 1970s were single men, some opted to marry Hindustani women who enjoyed full legal citizenship and possessed much more cultural capital in the Netherlands. However, these 'paper marriages' often ended in divorce as Indian men were concerned only with getting passports, and also because of cultural differences related to the role of women in a marriage²² (Lynnebakke 2007, 243).

²¹ See also Choenni (2015) for ethnographic accounts of positive experiences of Hindustani immigration into the Netherlands from Suriname. See van Niekerk (2002) and Oostindie (2011) for discussions of positive Surinamese immigration experiences.

²² Lynnebakke (2007) notes that Indian men often find Hindustani women to be too dominant in a marriage, unlike Indian women. She even notes that Hindustani men themselves have begun to look for brides in India for the same reason (243-4). In my research, the Indian men married to Hindustani women were still married and settled, with children. Some of my Punjabi respondents who migrated in the 1990s and early 2000s now have their wives and young children from India with them in the Netherlands.

The majority of direct migrants that I have interviewed and observed is working class or lower middle class. The more affluent are restaurateurs or work in the import and export of textiles. Those who own restaurants or catering businesses specialise in Pan-Indian cuisine. Although the market for ethnic entrepreneurship in Amsterdam Zuidoost has boomed since the 1970s (van Niekerk 2000), second and third generations of Indians do experience some limited social mobility. Like in many diaspora communities, young Indians in the Netherlands are encouraged to study and enter into professions such as law, accounting, engineering and medicine (Afzal 2015, Maira 2002, Prashad 2000), but the majority of my second generation Indian respondents often take over family businesses or become ethnic entrepreneurs. Those who migrated in the 1960s and 1970s are now Dutch citizens, but more recent migrant workers have entered the country as tourists or with work visas for a limited period.

Afghan Hindus

Although the smallest and most ‘invisible’ Hindu grouping in the Netherlands, Afghan Hindus remain one of the most well organised groupings. After the Taliban regime took control of Kabul in 1996, groups of Afghan Hindus came as refugees to the Netherlands. Throughout the Netherlands, there are about 200 Afghan Hindu families.

Sadat (2008) sets out a timeline of the key points of migration overseas for Afghans: the first being during the 1980s, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the later civil war between the Afghan government and the Mujahideen. He lists 1989-1992 as a period of relative stability when hopes of repatriation among Afghan migrants emerge. However, this is short lived, as between 1992-1996 sectarian wars between the former Mujahideen interrupt any sense of stability, as well as repatriation. From 1996-2001, Taliban rule was established across the country, leading to the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and the most recent wave of movement overseas (334). Sadat estimates that there are approximately 30,000²³ Afghans living in the Netherlands, (the second largest population of Afghans in Europe), although specific data about numbers of Afghan Hindus is unavailable.

Broadly speaking, there are two theories of origin that explain Hindu presence in Afghanistan. The first is based upon Markovits’ extensive research on Sikh and Hindu trading merchants from Northern Sindh and their trading routes into Kandahar and Kabul (Markovits 2000, Ballard 2011), which would suggest that Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan had migrated slowly from over the mountains in India, therefore belonging to a distinct ethnic ‘Indian’ community that settled in Afghanistan.

²³ Den Tillart et al estimate that between 1989 and 1998, 23,480 Afghans applied for asylum in the Netherlands (2000, 4).

On the other hand, Roger Ballard (2011), in a report on the status of religious minorities in Afghanistan, proposes that alongside Markovits theory of a 'settled' Indian origin Hindu and Sikh community, there were also people of Punjabi Khatri origin in the region who should be seen as members of the indigenous population who had resisted conversion to Buddhism and then to Islam (2), and in the fifteenth century aligned themselves with the teachings of Guru Nanak (*ibid.*).

This hypothesis would mean first that Hindu and Sikh presence in Afghanistan can be traced to two ethnically diverse, though religiously similar groups, the Shikarpuris and the Khatri. Secondly, this points to an 'indigenous' Hindu and Sikh presence in the region, and historically contests ideas of an 'Indian' Afghan Hindu and Sikh ancestry.

As Hutter (2012) argues for the Afghan diaspora in Germany, even though they come from cities like Kabul and Kandahar, their religious practices are clearly linked to those of Northwestern India and Pakistan, making it so that: 'Afghan Hindus and Sikhs...are ideologically close to Punjabis and Sindhis' (354). The majority of my respondents trace their ancestry back to India, as I was told stories of 'great-great-great-great grandparents' travelling to Kabul as traders and settling there with their families.

There is a large Afghan Hindu community in Germany, where Sadat estimates that 80.000 Afghans live (2008, 332). Most Afghan Hindus live in cities like Frankfurt and Cologne and have established 'richly furnished, spacious temples' (Baumann 2009, 156). In the Netherlands, Afghan Hindus live throughout the country, and many opted to live close to the German border to be closer to relatives in Germany.

Middle Class Indian Professionals

A recent wave of migration into the Netherlands is that of highly skilled workers in the Information and Communication Technology(I.C.T.) sector, who Upadhy (2011) argues belongs to the 'new middle class' (169). These migrants often come by way of I.T. hubs such as Delhi and Bangalore and arrive for a fixed set of time in the Netherlands. In the 1990s, European countries such as Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands sponsored workers on a contract to visit customer sites and work for a fixed period of time. However, this has changed as major companies such as Infosys, Tata Consultancies, and i-Flex have opened offices in the Netherlands (170). While the majority of my respondents lived outside of Amsterdam in towns like Amstelveen, many of them still attend temples in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

Unlike the labour migrants to whom I spoke, this community of professionals belongs to the educated middle classes. In addition, many had lived in the UK and the US before coming to the Netherlands. They often planned to stay in the Netherlands for a few years, but some of my respondents had liked it so much they had opted to stay for longer periods of time if a project or

job became available. The majority of this professional class has young families, and their children attend international schools where the medium of instruction is English. Parents told me they were not very interested in learning Dutch themselves, much less having their children learn it. Increasingly, communities of ex-patriate, professional Indians arrange events to commemorate religious festivals independent of the Hindustani organisations that have long been established in cities and towns in the Netherlands.

Alongside the groupings that I mentioned here, I have also met and interviewed Hindus from Pakistan, Nepal and Guyana, as well as members of Neo-Hindu movements such as the Hare Krishnas from Russia and Eastern Europe.

So far, I have briefly detailed the four migration trajectories of Hindus into the neighbourhood. I now turn to the idea of ‘Hindu groupness’ and lay out two key moments that continually influence how Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost attempt to construct their community as a group: the ethnicisation of Hindu identity in the Caribbean, and the importance of group identity upon arrival in the Netherlands in order to gain access to funds and resources to establish a place of worship.

How Groups Are Made: Theoretical Framings of Groupness as Strategy

Most often, overseas Hindu communities are studied in the context of diaspora communities--as a group of dispersed people with a connection to a spiritual homeland.

The term ‘diaspora’ comes from the Greek word to ‘disperse’, or ‘to sow over’, and was used to describe the dispersal of Greek people of the ancient Mediterranean world (Brown 2006, 3, see also Cohen 2007, Baumann 2000, Vertovec 2000). However, Baumann (2000) cautions against seeing the Greek term as a direct precursor of the contemporary academic category ‘diaspora’, as the connotation in classical writing and Hellenist thought (popularised in fifth century BCE) was one of dispersal and dissolution into parts that had nothing to do with each other, as in the case of atoms (316).

Baumann (2000) traces the earliest use of the term in academic discourse to African Studies scholars in the 1960s, and the article ‘Mobilised and Proletarian Diasporas’ (1976) that defined the term as any ethnic community that is deterritorialised (Baumann, 2000, 313). From the 1970s onwards, he argues that the changing face of the nation-state in terms of migration and shifts towards multicultural policies and state models demanded new ways of describing groups of migrants who had settled outside of their country of origin, retaining and re-performing many of the customs and ways of life that were performed at ‘home’. The term ‘diaspora’ seemed the best way to describe these communities, although the term first had to be unfettered from the specific Jewish context of expulsion and exodus first, which had negative connotations (314).

In the 1980s and 1990s, discussions of diaspora began to redefine how migration and culture were discussed. However, after a long period of academic attention paid to diasporas, Brubaker (2005) argues that the term 'diaspora' has been stretched to accommodate various changes in semantic meaning and disciplinary orientation (Brubaker 2005, 2). However, he also argues that there are general criteria that cut across disciplinary orientations and semantic meanings such as the condition of dispersion, an orientation towards some putative homeland, and the maintenance of boundaries that preserves a distinct 'diasporic' identity (Brubaker 2005, 5-6). While Brubaker acknowledges the term has shifted in semantics, he also argues that the proliferation of 'diaspora' as a theoretical concept does not necessarily reflect the proliferation of actual diaspora communities, but instead the 'diaspora talk' of certain scholars who adopt a fashionable term to describe communities that *may not necessarily* qualify as diasporas, according to the criteria laid out above (Brubaker 2005, 8).

In the vein of Brubaker's (2005) proposal to discuss diaspora as a stance or idiom, this project considers diasporas to be 'practical categories, situated actions, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organisational routines, institutional forms, political projects and contingent events' (11). To understand how collectivities come into being, Brubaker suggests that we view instances of 'groupness', or the tendency for people within a collectivity to accept and reify their collective self-imaginings, as events. From a research perspective, this shifts focus onto the moments of cohesion and solidarity without implying that these moments are somehow eternal and constant (12).

Building on this idea, Sökefeld (2006) argues that studying diaspora communities can be fruitfully compared to the development of social movements. As he notes at the beginning of his work, Vertovec's meanings of diaspora as a social form and a type of consciousness (Vertovec 1997), are greatly entwined (Sökefeld 2006, 265), and are influenced by mobilising structures such as networks and organisations, framings and practices which render events meaningful and create and circulate shared narratives about them, and political opportunities, which include the institutionalised frames and networks (such as articulations of multiculturalism) which allow for collectivities to articulate their identity (270).

I push to use the term in relation to Sökefeld's social movement approach, which draws attention to the strategic actions and performances community members carry out. At the heart of 'diaspora' are choice, strategy and solidarity, which mark diasporic subjects as conscious agents rather than passive inheritors of tradition or heritage. What is more, the idea of a Hindu diaspora demonstrates how processes of ethnicisation are involved in strategic choices and moments of solidarity that may require actors to share in and identify with ritual and ethnic practices that were previously unfamiliar.

For example, the Hindu diaspora in Amsterdam Zuidoost is overwhelmingly articulated through the ethnic, migratory, and religious narratives of the majority Hindustani community. Although it has been demonstrated that Indians and Hindustanis often develop separate cultural and religious organisations (Lynnebakke 2007), the situation in Amsterdam Zuidoost shows how strategic co-operation across ethnicised groups of Hindus (or narratives of co-operation) are increasingly important to Hindus as they try to establish a purpose-built temple in the neighbourhood. Hindu identity is strategically articulated as Hindustani identity in order to lay claims to rights and freedoms that should be owed to formally colonised Dutch citizens²⁴. Below, I outline the specific features of ‘Caribbean’ Hinduism that have become the ground on which Hindu identity is negotiated in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

The Ethnicisation of Hindu Religion in Suriname

Vertovec and van der Veer (1991) argue that in the Caribbean, Hinduism is an ‘ethnic religion’ that developed under brāhman leadership (Vertovec and van der Veer 1991, 149). They identify three specific developments that contribute to this: First, they pinpoint the ethnic and racial pluralism in the Caribbean during the period when indentured labour was recruited from India as developing a ‘self consciousness about beliefs and practices...exacerbated by the fact that Hindus, deemed idolatrous and holding low position in society...were disdained by members of virtually every other segment of colonial Caribbean society’ (Brereton in Vertovec and van der Veer 1991, 154, see also Hoefte 1998). This self-consciousness led groups of Hindus to realise that their position as a disdained minority religion, and also to begin a process of ‘self-rationalisation’ regarding their choices and ritual practices, which were often measured up in relation to dominant forms of Protestant Christianity in the region. The consequence was that congregational modes of worship became more important, including regular worship services, *pujas* (sessions of worship) and gatherings to recite mythological stories. Second, as members of the communities had finances to build temples after their period of indenture (van der Veer and Vertovec 1991, 154), congregations began to use their own spaces. However, temple building did not become widespread until after the Second World War in Suriname, and many temples today in the capital city Paramaribo have been established in converted old churches.

Third, the attenuation of the caste system was a crucial step in the ethnicisation of the community into a homogenous ‘Hindu’ group. The fact that caste distinctions are virtually absent in the Caribbean has been well documented (van der Veer and Vertovec 1991, 1992 Vertovec 1994, Vertovec 2000, Hoefte 1998, Lal 2006, Gowricharn 2009, Choenni 2015, Nugteren 2009).

²⁴ This does not mean that ‘other’ Hindus in the area uncritically adopt Hindustani ways of ritual, religious and cultural expression, as there is much diversity across the four temple spaces in terms of ritual practices.

Most scholars concede that this happened as early as being left in shipping depots or embarking on a ship, as labourers were recruited from a variety of class, caste, birth community and even religious backgrounds: it was impossible to observe rigid divisions when thrown into close quarters with a such a varied group of people (Lal 2006). Upon arriving in the Caribbean, it was equally impossible to reproduce caste divisions that may have existed in India because it was too difficult to determine commonalities among such a diverse group of people (and van der Veer and Vertovec 1991, 154).

While the caste system may have all but disappeared, the role of the brāhman priest re-visioned itself upon arrival in the Caribbean as well after migration into the Netherlands. The brāhman priest emerged as an authoritative figure from the earliest days of indentured migration. Although brāhman were considered as ‘troublemakers’ by colonial officers and missionaries who disdained their ‘idolatrous practices’ and their reluctance to work under the supervision of lower-caste Indians on the plantation (Van der Veer and Vertovec 1991, 1956), they were not successful in curbing brāhman migration into the Caribbean. Eventually, there was a ‘network’ of brāhman priests working around Guyana and Suriname (Vertovec 2000) on estates that had sponsored rites (Hoefte 1998). Although the development towards a unitary Hinduism may not have been smooth under brāhman patronage, especially since their own ways of worship may differ from each other, it was eventually the case that attitudes towards castes and particularities of worship disappeared as more and more brāhman priests came to prominence: ‘...Because faith in a Brāhman’s [sic] charismatic power was often a function of his popularity, the more liberal priest tended to displace the more conservative’ (Jayawardena in van der Veer and Vertovec 1991, 157).

The brāhman priest in the Caribbean became the ritual specialist *par excellence*, skilled at overseeing daily rituals, funery rites, temple rituals, astrological readings, public sacrifices, healings, exorcisms and removers and practitioners of black magic (van der Veer and Vertovec 1991, see also van der Veer 1994), as there were no ‘lower caste’ communities who claimed ritual specialisation in the Caribbean.

However, as van der Veer (1988) has noted, these varied forms of ritual specialisation are often kept secret or ‘back door’. The official and Sanskritised forms of Hinduism that developed in the Caribbean constitute the acceptable public face of Hinduism, and in the Dutch diaspora especially, it is important that practitioners distance themselves from ideas of black magic—often associated negatively with the Creole Surinamese diaspora (van der Veer 1988). However, this does not mean that there is not a demand for exorcisms or black magic, especially the removal of the evil eye (‘*najjar*’ in Hindustani, ‘*drsti*’ in Sanskrit). Although van der Veer noted that there was a certain amount of secrecy among those engaged in these practices, I have observed in my

own fieldwork that these types of services are often priests' 'selling points', and are offered publicly alongside ritual services in the temple.

However, this presents only one side of an ethnicisation process. While the development of a religion tied to the congregational aspects of the temple and administered by brāhman specialists gives insight into the ways that Surinamese Hinduism has ethnicised, the general idea of Hinduism as an 'ethnic' religion in the diaspora communities has also been noted by scholars who have examined its shifting meanings as a public identity marker in multicultural societies such as the UK. Such shifts reveal the emergence of religious identity as an emerging form of ethnicity that makes visible a new subjectivity (Hall 1990) in the diaspora.

Ethnicisation and Pillarisation: Hindu Identity in the Netherlands

Knott (2006) problematises the idea of religion as a *condition* of ethnicity: she, along with Nye (2001) and Zavos (2008) argue that religion can produce a new form of ethnicity. As Zavos (2008) points out in the UK, against the backdrop of multicultural policies, religion is both 'there and not there' (326) as it negotiates between the ideals of private, secularity and increased visibility of minority religious groups and state-supported religion, Anglicanism (*ibid.*).

In the Netherlands, although there are some similarities with the UK and the US²⁵, the framework of 'multiculturalism' is less relevant than that of pillarisation (*verzuiling*), the vertical stratification of society according to religious background that segmented Dutch society from approximately 1900-1960. From 1900-1960, Dutch society arranged itself according to principles of pillarisation that compartmentalised and segmented social life that establish, in many cases, structural links between secular and religious aspects of life including political parties, churches, schools, newspapers, television stations, and community and leisure associations (Dekker and Ester 1996, 325, see also Post 1989, Lijphart 1975, Schrover 2005, van Niekerk 1998, 2000, Vermeulen and Penninx 2000, Lucassen 2005, Oostindie 2011).

Dutch²⁶ society was segmented roughly into four pillars: Protestant, Catholic, Liberal (or deconfessional) and Socialist²⁷. Pillars were socially exclusive; they encouraged religious, social, educational and leisure relations within pillars. The government supported such a system by allotting funds to build schools, places of worship, or social organisations or media outlets (Schrover 2005, 333). Pillarisation was advantageous because governments subsidised almost all

²⁵ As Penninx and Vermeulen (2000) and Schrover (2005) point out, the term 'multiculturalism' did enter into public discourse, but not into official government policies.

²⁶ Hellemans (1990) points out that pillars have historically existed in Belgium, Poland, Austria, and Scandinavian countries. For a comparison on Dutch and Belgian pillarisation, see Post (1989).

²⁷ As Dekker and Ester (1996) note, the socialist and liberal pillars were far less stratified than the Catholic and Protestant pillars (328).

aspects of pillarised society—schools, organisations, and places of worship (*ibid.*). Dekker and Ester (1996) summarise Lijphart’s reasons that pillarisation was seen as compatible with democracy because it fostered a common ‘national’ identity, it cut across class cleavages, and it allowed for public discussion and mingling among elites of various pillars (328).

The Decline of Pillarisation

The depillarisation process has been described as 3-fold deconfessional process of Dutch society that Bryant (1981) argues includes:

the decline in the religious as a proportion of the total population (from 81.6 percent recorded by the Census in 1960 to 76.4 percent in 1971); the increase in the religious who do not belong to, or support, confessional political, economic and social associations as a proportion of the total religious; and the absorption of confessional associations in new organisations whose constituency is drawn from more than one of the traditional pillars (61).

Historically, as deconfessionalism took hold, multiculturalism was on the rise in Western European countries. While multiculturalism was not fully adopted at an official level in the Netherlands, as it was in Canada and Australia, it was not uncommon for policy makers and officials to refer to ‘our multicultural society’ (Penninx, Münstermann and Entzinger 1998). Yet, as multicultural orientations began to take hold in policy circles, the remnants of pillarisation began to appear again as a ‘zombie category’ (cf. Beck 2001, Meer and Madood 2014, Entzinger 2014) that re-emerges time and again (consciously or unconsciously) as a framework for integration and social stratification.

It was not until the late 1960s that government officials and policy makers began to acknowledge that the Netherlands was a ‘country of immigrants’ (Geschiere 2005, Penninx, Münstermann and Entzinger 1998, Vermeulen and Penninx 2000, Oostindie 2011). At this point in history, it was thought that cultural contact between increasingly diverse groups was an inevitable and desirable aspect of everyday life (Geschiere 2009). Dutch policy makers and politicians were focused, at least ideally, on deeming other cultures ‘worthy’ and valuable²⁸ (Taylor 1992, 64).

Immigration integration policies between the 1960s-1990s were diverse and at times, contradictory. From 1979-1983, a national immigrant policy was put into place by the government, known as the minority policy (*minderhedenbeleid*) that echoed the principles of pillarisation. It was directed towards so-called ‘ethnic minorities’, foreign communities that had

²⁸ Taylor’s (1992) discussion of ‘the politics of recognition’ hinges on the dialogical forging of identity that blurs the lines between self/other, and the coming together of cultural horizons (built up from Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’) wherein mutual respect and notions of cultural worth and value are negotiated (44, 67). Baumann (1999) launches a strong critique that questions Taylor’s ideas of recognition, as they imply a fixed idea of culture that treats some cultures undeserving of recognition (115). For an additional critique of Taylor’s work, see Appiah (1994).

been living in the Netherlands longer than one generation and had demonstrated low socio-economic development for more than one generation. At the time, the policy was exclusively geared towards migrants from the Moluccas (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000, 20). However, the purpose of the policy was to target all groups that were in danger of becoming socially and economically disenfranchised.

The need to refine the minority policy became more urgent into the 1980s, as waves of immigration still did not cease, as many policy makers (still) assumed that it would. On the contrary, immigration was becoming an increasingly important and visible aspect of Dutch society. The Advisory Council on Government Policy (WWR) developed a report that recommended the minority policy address the connection between meaningful work and integration.

Stressing the value of work in relation to cultural integration was geared towards decreasing the rising unemployment rate in the Netherlands, particularly among immigrants. In addition to promoting career and work, the WWR recommended that the government set up programmes that helped immigrants prepare for their new lives in the Netherlands.

In the 1990s, again there was a need to reform policies towards migrants, as promoting work and integration was deemed unsuccessful--the number of unemployed immigrants did not change after implementing the WWR's suggestions (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000). Various programmes to aid in adjusting to life in the Netherlands were also relatively unsuccessful. In fact, the very idea of a 'minority policy' seemed incompatible with the government's approach to policy and culture (Oostindie 2011, Choenni 2011, 2015) that was gaining traction in Dutch society. It became important to set up policies that supported the idea of living in the Netherlands but maintained and celebrated 'one's own cultural identity' (Oostindie 2011, Vermeulen and Penninx 2000, Penninx et al 1999, van Niekerk 1998).

Welfare Organisations and Groupness

One of the most significant developments that encouraged this celebration of one's cultural identity while living in the Netherlands is that of the ethnic welfare organisation. What is more, these organisations also contributed heavily to the stratification of minorities into groups.

These organisations were heavily subsidised by the Dutch government as a means of a grassroots level commitment to integration, while supposedly giving enough space to migrants to enjoy and observe their culture and religion. Much like the earlier days of pillarisation, these organisations were focused on the integration of groups (Tonkens, Duyvendak, Hurenkamp, 2011, 234), most often united under a national or ethnic identity. In the case of the 'Surinamese' community, they were taken as a homogenous population, and the ethnic diversity within the artificial label

‘Surinamese’ (Oostindie 2011, van Niekerk 1998, 2000b) was overlooked (Oostindie 2011, van Niekerk 1998, 2000b). This was a major issue for members of the Hindustani community, who in general felt culturally and socially separate from the Creole Surinamese population, as well as from the much smaller groups of Javanese and Chinese Surinamese who were also in the Netherlands.

The particular development of ‘Hindu’ groupness within this system can be traced to early Surinamese welfare organisations. They have been described as ‘Creole-dominated’ (Choenni 2015, van der Burg 1990, van Niekerk 2000) and led to inner tensions within certain organisations. In 1976, the Hindustani community decided to form its own organisation called the *Lalla Rookh*, named after the first ship to arrive from India in Suriname. The *Lalla Rookh* foundation has become the most important national Hindustani foundation and continues to plan events specifically related to the Hindustani diaspora²⁹.

However, within these organisations, tensions about religious differences also began to rise. Hindus in the area felt that they were entitled to an organisation that reflected their specific religious needs, especially since many Muslim Hindustanis successfully built up the Taibah mosque in the area. Therefore, the need for Hindu organisations was strongly articulated, with organisations such as OM Tryambakam, Pravasi Bhartiya Ka Sachivalaya (PBKS), and others forming (and often closing down) at great speed into the 1980s and 1990s.

Welfare organisations continued to blossom into the 1980s and 1990s, as there was ample financing from the government: people who were unhappy with the way earlier institutions were developed could easily develop their own. That being said, many organisations closed as soon as they opened, as they were built up hastily. Often, family rivalries reared their head in the development of new organisations, and no viable system was set up to make sure that they served the purpose they were supposed to (van der Burg and van der Veer 1986, 526). Little control was exercised over the financial lending, so organisations were virtually free to spend money on projects and ideas without reporting expenditure or output to the government. As the legacy of pillarisation perpetuated itself into discourses on minority and multicultural integration, the idea of Hindu organisations were not only tolerated, but encouraged by officials who felt that communities themselves were the best agents of integration (van Reekum 2012, 593).

²⁹ Also important at the national level is the Sarnamihuis, an organisation that is similarly dedicated to giving Hindustanis a platform to discuss their specific cultural and religious experiences. Sarnamihuis is particularly attuned to the second and third generation, reaching out and planning group discussions and event that takes into account their position as Dutch-Hindustanis and the problems that may accompany their identification across many cultural contexts.

Today, organisations are not so easily supported. In fact, the very idea of the ethnic welfare organisation is largely regarded as a thing of the past. Ethnic groups who wish to form their own foundations must do so from their own funding source. Many community members pay fees to belong to certain organisations, or in the case of temple-based foundations, donations are made throughout the year to maintain space and plan special festivities.

The various policies related to minorities as well as the development of welfare organisations did not live up to the government's expectations, particularly in terms of integration into Dutch society. The strong focus on welfare organisations that were run for and by ethnic groups overlooked one of the main tasks of the Dutch integration agenda: to respect ethnic and cultural difference while promoting the need for interaction with the greater Dutch society (van Niekerk 2000). The idea of cross-cultural education was hardly developed (Cross and Entzinger 1988) which discouraged not only ethnic-Dutch relations, but also inter-ethnic relations. The idea of educating minorities (particularly guest workers from Southern Europe, Morocco and Turkey) reflected less the ideas of cultural pride and more the idea that these migrants would eventually return 'home' (Duyvendak, Hurenkamp, Tonkens 2011, 234, Schrover 2005, Duyvendak 2011, Joppke 2007). It also only recognised groups that had publicly come together as organisations. Furthermore, the focus was on ethno-national groupings, with an almost complete disregard for class differentiation or national heterogeneity (Schrover 2005, 335, Kurien 2007).³⁰ Therefore, it is a mistake to take the move towards recognising ethnic groups as a shift towards an articulated multicultural outlook in the Netherlands (Hurenkamp, Duyvendak and Tonkens 2010, van Reekum 2012).

However, as Schrover (2005) points out, there is a major difference between pillarising Dutch society and constructing 'ethnic' pillars: pillarisation was concerned with organising people who were already considered part of Dutch society. On the other hand, welfare organisations and minority policies were geared at 'outsiders', or immigrants into the country who were in the minority. As a homogenous view of ethnicity that corresponded to national identity, as in the case of 'Surinamese' immigrants, that was often misleading and caused great discomfort among migrants themselves³¹.

The pressure to organise as a group in order to have access to funds was therefore a necessity, especially for religious groups setting out to build public spaces of worship. As Sunier (2009) argues, the establishment of a place of worship is inextricably related to groupness—they

³⁰ Critics of multiculturalism across a variety of national contexts have made this argument. See Baumann (1999) for a general overview, see Kurien (2007) for a discussion of the American case, and see Baumann (1999, 1996) and Zavos (2012) for a discussion of the UK.

³¹ A similar critique has been well articulated by scholars of multiculturalism. See Appiah (1994), Baumann (1999).

reinforce the public display of each other (162).

So far, I have contextualised the process of Hindu ‘groupness’ that frames my research: both the conditions of movement from India into the Caribbean during the time of indentured labour and Dutch policy and structure of society from roughly the 1960s to contemporary times are two key moments of ‘groupness’ that have contributed to the idea of a Hindu group identity that is most often articulated through the experiences and practices of Surinamese Hindus.

It is crucial here to reinforce that the creation of a religious group identity should be contextualised alongside the legacy of pillarisation in the Netherlands. While in Britain, multicultural policies fostered the development of cultural groupness such as ‘South Asian’ identity, the idea that society in the Netherlands is built up and differentiates one group from another through religious affiliation is seen as a continuation of ideas that date back to the 1900s (Dekker and Ester 1996, 327). Although rapid depillarisation processes had taken hold in the Netherlands from the late 1950s, policies couched in pillarisation, such as the 1917 act that allowed for freedom to establish schools based on religious affiliation (Dekker and Ester 1996, 327-8, de Ruyter and Miedema 2000, 133-4), took on new meaning after the large waves of migration from Suriname in the 1970s into the 1980s³². Therefore the idea of a ‘Hindu’ group identity articulating itself separately from Surinamese welfare organisations as an ethnic religion was not met with much opposition, and was to a certain extent supported by the welfare organisation system in the Netherlands.

At the same time, I observe among my respondents that religion is still key category that Hindustanis used to differentiate and distance themselves from other migrants, especially Afro-Surinamese residents of Amsterdam Zuidoost. My respondents pointedly explained that not only their cultural, but also their religious identity can be traced back to India (Vertovec 2000, 3), setting them apart from ‘other’ Surinamese groups. This was why many of my respondents made frequent trips to India to visit temples and pilgrimage sites around the country. In this way, Hindu identity becomes a matter of distinction.

The following chapter brings the issue of locality and neighbourhood into focus, detailing the rise of Amsterdam Zuidoost as futuristic fantasy neighbourhood and the reality of its ethnic and religious diversity. I attempt to narrate the history of Amsterdam Zuidoost from the perspective of my Hindu respondents through ethnographic accounts in order to highlight the ongoing struggle to lay claim to the district as a Hindu neighbourhood by achieving visibility in the built environment.

³² Specifically, Hindu primary schools began to establish themselves in 1988. Although it is outside the scope of this research, it is important to note that public Hindu identity in the Netherlands has been articulated through the Hindu primary schools across the country. See Schwenke (1994) for a discussion of differentiations and splintering within the Shri Vishnu primary school in 1993 in the Hague.