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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 4: ELITE NARRATIVES REGISTERS OF HINDU IDENTITY AND HINDU HURT (1988-1996)

As I established in chapter 3, those who attended the DD temple space consider it to be the first temple in Amsterdam Zuidoost, a mother to the other spaces that have since developed in the neighbourhood. In 1982, the temple board actors explicitly took over the task of establishing a purpose-built temple and became the voice of the community in relation to all temple building processes.

It is first important to establish why the temple board actors entered into a lengthy correspondence with the local district government over the issue of temple space. According to stipulations in national Dutch law, the government will never intervene on behalf of a religious group in order to assist financially in the establishment of a religious building. If the building can be justified as a community-used cultural centre, it may be possible to receive assistance—but the strong separation of church and state is an unalienable fact that has been entrenched since the 18th century in the constitution.

Furthermore, at the local level, any plan to establish a religious building must first be approved under the stipulations of each neighbourhood zoning plan, or ‘bestemmingsplan’. Each piece of land in a neighbourhood has been carefully designated to fulfill a certain role—and only after consulting with the zoning plan and the local district government can it be possible to establish a religious building, but only in a properly designated area (VVRIA 2003, 31).

The DD temple board actors however choose to ignore these two legal facts. Although these issues are explicitly listed in local and national Dutch law, temple board actors as I will explain, sees them as arbitrary laws that are simply invoked because the government sees the Hindu community as inferior. As will become clear, civil servant actors and government actors responded to the body of correspondence with deep regret, but with a firm assertion of the legal situation that would always prevent them from funding a purpose-built temple in the location of the DD community’s choosing.

The narrative registers constructed and mobilised by temple board actors are best understood as an instance of what I identify as Hindu ‘campaigning mentality’ in the Netherlands⁵⁶. Hindu campaigns in the diaspora have been studied as successful and highly visible moments of diaspora grouping. For example, the stamp controversy in the UK (Zavos 2008), which demanded the recall of stamps that portrayed Hindus cradling the baby Jesus (324) the use of deities on clothing and undergarments at American Eagle Outfitters (Kurien 2007), the

⁵⁶ To my knowledge, public intervention of Hindus into Dutch politics and law has not yet been explored through the framework of Hindu campaigning. For more information on the intervention of Hindus into the Dutch education system, leading to the establishment of Hindu primary schools, see Merry and Driessen (2010, 2011), Schwencke (1994) and Bloembergen and Nijhuis (1993).

‘California textbook controversy’ that protested the inclusion of misleading and inaccurate information on the caste system, the Aryan Invasion, and the role of women in public school textbooks on religion (Sippy 2012, Reddy 2012, Jaffrelot 2007) and protesting the slaughter of cow infected with Bovine Tuberculosis at the Skanda Vale spiritual centre in Wales (Warrier 2010) are a few major campaigns that have been successfully⁵⁷ waged in the UK and the US.

As Zavos (2008) notes, a common feature in the performance of ‘Hindu-ness’ through Hindu campaigns requires the collective performance and representation of Hindu hurt, shock and distress contextualised against the backdrop of the rights of recognition and respect that are inherent within a multicultural society (331, Kurien 2007, Prashad 2000). Often, this articulation of hurt and outrage is directed at a specific offense—such as the exhibition of offensive images, as in the campaign against exhibiting the painting of M.F. Husain in London (Anderson 2015), or the slaughter of a cow as a holy animal in Skanda Vale (Warrier 2010).

However, the DD temple campaign did not have such a clear-cut object or event on which to direct its collective performance of hurt. In this way, I make a comparison with Skanda Vale and the M.F. Husain campaign with caution: I see the bid for a purpose built temple as an instance wherein the strategies of campaigning are mobilised, rather than as a campaign in itself, as it too features the performance of Hindu hurt. However, this is tied to the abstract rhetoric of suffering and deprivation of basic rights rather than an issue of religious infringement that could be related to the violation of specific beliefs or standards of decency as in the campaigns mentioned above.

I view the articulation of Hindu hurt as an affective strategy that attempts to collectively articulate suffering. As Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997) note, collective suffering itself can be used as a value where ‘victimhood is commodified’ (xi). It is this ‘victimhood’ that is strategic: as I will demonstrate below, many of the narrative registers that are put forward by elite board members contradict other narratives of identity that circulate inside and outside of the Hindu community in the Netherlands. Yet, these identities are crucial in eliciting profound affective responses to the stalled templeisation processes in the neighbourhood. They become a ‘cultural style of suffering’ (Kleinman, Das and Lock 1997, xiv) that is articulated through the Hindustani experience in both Suriname and Amsterdam Zuidoost. The narrative registers ultimately reflect how community actors connect public Hindu identity in the neighbourhood to temple building

⁵⁷ What is considered ‘successful’ here ranges from eliciting an apology from those accused of offending Hindu sensibilities, the removal of a product or image from public view, or simply the coming together publicly of a group of Hindus during a campaign. For example, while the campaign at Skanda Vale could not protect the infected cow from treatment, the reach of the campaign and the mobilisation in the name of a ‘Hindu’ cause is in my view, indicative of a certain level of success.

processes while producing context-specific registers of hurt where the public struggles of Hindu groups are experienced as personally offensive (Kurien 2007, 137).

My analysis of the narrative registers of Hindu hurt pushes forward Zavos' (2012) study of the emergence of Hindu identity in the public sphere in Britain. He also pinpoints the ways in which 'Hindu organisations have intervended in public life...through, as it were, difference discursive registers' (72). He goes on to mobilise Habermas' theory of translation, where religion in the public sphere must be 'made meaningful' in relation to the moral and legal frameworks of largely secular, modern societies (*ibid.*), and goes on to focus on the ways in which such meaning is made by Hindu organisations in Britain.

However, my findings differ from Zavos', as the elite temple board members who circulate these narratives consciously refuse to engage with legal frameworks. While on the one hand, these narratives speak abstractly about human rights and citizenship rights, they also constantly ignore the legal issues that arise from establishing a religious building. It is instead the affective registers of hurt, betrayal and marginalisation that frame the ways in which these elite board actors have chosen to articulate Hindu identity to a wider public.

Part II examines two stages of the campaign mentality behind establishing a temple in the neighbourhood: from 1988-1996⁵⁸, before the government leased a temporary space to the DD community, and 2010-2015, when the courts ruled that the community must vacate the temporary space and the years following this traumatic moment. These two stages point out the importance that templeisation processes (whether successful or not) have played a role in defining the Hindu community in Amsterdam Zuidoost. In particular, they have led to the establishment of symbolic⁵⁹ boundaries (Barth 1969, Lamont and Molnar 2002) between members of the DD community and 'other Hindus', and distinctions within the DD community itself. These distinctions not only highlight the moral values that Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost use to distinguish themselves from

⁵⁸ The body of correspondence I analysed began earlier, in the 1970s and continued up until 2010. However, I focus on late 1980s up until the late 1990s in order to demonstrate that the need for a temple was articulated before the local government had agreed upon leasing out a temporary space. Rather than rely on the archive to describe the situation after 2010, I found it much more fruitful to speak to various community actors and stakeholders.

⁵⁹ According to Lamont and Molnar (2002) symbolic boundaries are 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, places and practices, and even space and time' (168) while social boundaries are 'objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities. They are also revealed in stable patterns of association...' (*ibid.*). Symbolic boundaries, then, often denote moral boundaries, and are key in fashioning diasporic and ethnic subjectivities through assertions of who is worthy and who is not (Lamont 1992, 1). Social boundaries are obstacles that pattern social interaction in a specific way (Lamont and Molnar 2002, 169). Symbolic and social boundaries are inextricably linked; social boundaries exist only when symbolic boundaries have been largely agreed upon and mobilised (*ibid.*)

others, but also reveal new moral standards by which the community should ideally live and organise themselves. These standards are inextricably linked to an emerging sense of an ideal Hindu identity, where Hindus are visible, united, democratic, engaged and active as a group. The first symbolic move towards actualising these standards is the building of a community-use temple that cuts across sectarian and personal differences among Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

I focus below on five narrative registers that emerge in the early 1980s in the correspondence between temple board actors and local government actors: Hindu-as-citizen, the helpless coolie, ambivalent orientalism, multicultural competition, Hindu exceptionalism and Hindu isolationism. These registers are often contradictory, or are mobilised simultaneously.

As I engaged closely with the body of correspondence, it also became clear that many of these registers, particularly that of ‘the helpless coolie’ and ‘ambivalent orientalism’ could be adopted or shed at will by temple board actors. As I will address below, the projection of Hindus as victims also undermines existing narratives of their status as well integrated and socio-economically successful ‘model minorities’ that emerge around the same time as these narratives circulated in correspondence and press releases (van Niekerk 2000). It is therefore crucial to see these narrative registers as the strategic construction of Hindu identity through the greater frame of Hindu hurt or Hindu violation. Often, as I detail below, these registers are abandoned or ignored if they are not viewed as effective in increasing the chances of successful temple-building processes.

It is also important to keep in mind that this correspondence was sent on behalf of a representative body, the temple board. The members of the temple board are indeed members of the community, but they do hold a distinct position from devotees or temple volunteers. Decision-making, architectural planning and financial record keeping were exclusively concentrated among representatives within the temple board. As my respondents revealed to me, during this period the temple board did not openly provide other community actors with any information about financial or architectural development plans. Therefore I refer to these voices of the temple board as elite, as they were in the unique position to construct the various narrative registers I explore below.

We Hindu Citizens: The Narrative Register of ‘Hindu citizen’

In the following excerpts from correspondence from 1988 and 1989 the temple board actors articulate their need for a temple in the neighbourhood by comparing their position in relation to ‘other’ religious minorities who have been successful in establishing a public place of worship, as demonstrated in the two letters below:

‘...Religion and culture are difficult to divorce from each other, especially for the Hindustanis. A group that neglects their religion and/or culture is doomed. Hence, there is a need to rescue ourselves and future generations. Especially in a country like the Netherlands, a

rechtsstaat⁶⁰ ... [You the local district government Zuidoost] *must help us in our 15 year battle to crown the right to our own faith with the [development] of a real Hindu temple. There are churches for different denominations, synagogues, mosques, but no Hindu temple. If there is justice in this land, the need for the temple [is part of it]. We need all [your] help and cooperation... Yours!!*

'If we cannot give warmth, understanding, cooperation and support to each other we cannot live happily. We therefore ask from the government this warmth, understanding, support and cooperation to happily live our religion, culture and tradition. For this kind of happy life we need the temple. Give us it finally, [after] 17 years of asking, begging, requesting. DO JUSTICE FOR THE HINDUS.'

The temple board actors early on inscribe the 'government'—and it becomes clear later that this relates to government officials at various levels—as a barrier to the development of Hindu public religion in the neighbourhood. Unlike other successfully represented groups, the Hindus have not been allowed their basic rights as citizens to develop their religious identity. In 1991, this point is reiterated in another letter to the local district government:

'...The Surinamers, moreover, naturally have the Dutch nationality...No one shall want to deny that religion throughout the whole world still plays an important role in the lives of most people. Religious belief and religious freedom are basic rights, far and wide, in most countries. Also the Dutch constitution guarantees every resident that basic right.'

Across these correspondences, we see that the need for a Hindu temple is articulated as a basic right that should be available to the Hindu community in the Netherlands as citizens under the law. It is interesting to note that the temple board actors have explicitly named the government as an impediment to the community's development, while they enjoy membership from a legal point of view, but are hindered from enjoying the benefits that accompany such rights.

Strategic Stereotyping: The Register of the 'Helpless Coolie'

Building upon the register of Hindus as citizens, a powerful context-specific narrative to express Hindu hurt comes from the conflation between Hindustani and Hindu identity in the neighbourhood. The temple board actors represent their lack of temple space through a specific narrative of victimisation that negotiates between their place in society as rights-bearing citizens on the one hand, and as docile and disenfranchised formerly indentured labourers. The correspondence between the PBKS temple board and the local district government develops a strategic use of the 'coolie' stereotype (Torabully 1992, 1996, Carter and Torabully 2002, 58-62)

⁶⁰ 'Rechtstaat' translates to 'rule of law'.

to inscribe their unique place as victims in Dutch society in relation not only to the Dutch majority, but other, more visible minority communities.

Unlike campaigns waged in the US and the UK which often articulate hurt through their position as minorities in a multicultural society, (Prasad 2000, Maira 2002, Kurien 2007, Bhatt and Mukta 2000), the campaign for DD temple articulates itself also through the voice of formerly colonised indentured labourers, or ‘coolies’, as victims who had been forced to uproot their lives for the sake of the Dutch government. In mobilising this narrative register the temple board actors attempt to establish a historical link between their experience as colonised subjects and their lack of a temple space in contemporary Dutch society.

There are significant parallels that can be drawn between the register of the ‘helpless coolie’ and what Khan (2004, 167, 2007, 147) identifies as ‘betrayal’ narratives in Indo-Trinidadian diasporic consciousness. She points out that the condition of being betrayed or tricked by British colonisers into signing up for a period of indenture in the Caribbean has contributed significantly to how Indo-Caribbean identity in Trinidad is articulated and collectively remembered (2007, 148). What is more, the marginalisation of the Indo-Trinidadian community culturally and politically in Trinidad further perpetuates their place as second-class citizens (2007, 154). However, a major divergence between Khan’s discussion of Indo-Trinidadian consciousness and the ‘helpless coolie’ narrative among temple board elites is that the latter is used strategically. As I will demonstrate below, the appeal to a collective identity as ex-colonised labourers is made in response to certain legal parameters. In fact, many of my respondents reject such a way of identifying themselves or their histories as Indo-Surinamese Hindus.

At this point it is useful to introduce what Torabully calls ‘Coolitude’ (1992, 1996, Carter and Torabully 2002) as a counter-narrative of indentured experience. After studying Aime Cesaire’s construction of *negritude*, Torabully developed coolitude as an identification that has at its core the journey across waters. As Bragard notes, ‘Coolitude...relies on the nightmare transoceanic journey of the Coolies, as both a historical migration and a metonymy of cultural encounters’ (Bragard in Carter and Torabully 2002, 15). Torabully focuses the experience of Coolitude on the sea journey and the transformative space of ships. The crossing of the *kala pani*, or ‘dark waters’, meant caste defilement and the excommunication from social groupings, as re-admittance would come at a high price for return migrants and require purifying rituals (Singh 1988, 9). Torabully therefore sees the sea voyage as a space for ‘the metaphorical construction of new identity’ (Carter and Torabully 2002, 158) wherein the world of the indentured labourer shifts from something static to something hybrid and complex, where languages, cultures, and imaginaries mingle (ibid.)

There is a rich body of literature that explores the experiences of Coolitude (Dabydeen 1988, Dabydeen and Samaroo 1988, Naipaul 1961, Ramdas 1996, 2011, Vianen 1988). The experience of coolitude is a redefining of a relationship with India and homeland in relation to other cultures in the setting of ‘adaptive homelands’ that is necessitated by a rediscovery of often forgotten or silenced memories of voyage and sea travel. The result is a complex rather than reductive approach to culture and identity (Carter and Torabully 2002 194, 215). In devising coolitude, Torabully wishes to nuance the complexities of the indentured experience. Carter and Torabully (2002) lay out a discussion of ‘Coolitude’ that explores not only hybridity and survival, but the ways in which indentured labourers adapted to legal systems, bureaucracies and languages which to them were previously unknown. In doing so, they hope to undo much of the stereotyping that the ‘coolie’ has endured throughout history at the hands of colonial officials, writers, and historians.

In contrast to Torabully’s project of Coolitude as a celebration of the productive power of cultural hybridity, particularly focused around ocean travel (Torabully and Carter 2002, 158) the temple board actors strategically mobilise the idea of voyage—not only the initial crossing of the *kala pani* to Suriname, but the mass migration to the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s—as a key symbol of their marginalisation in Dutch society, rather than their creative hybridisation of culture and experience. As formerly indentured Hindus, they have been compelled to ‘serve’ the Dutch government since the colonial era and they are still treated like second-class citizens when it comes to establishing their religious buildings in the Netherlands. Moving between their place as rights-bearing citizens and eternal ‘voyageurs’, the temple board grafts the history and traumas of uprootedness onto that of Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

Carter and Torabully (2002) note that the ‘helpless coolie’ (51) was a well-established trope by the nineteenth century, where the docile coolie was complicit in the work they were doing on the plantations. The docility of the coolie and their desire to work hard on plantations became a major narrative to justify the smooth running of plantation economies (*ibid.*) It also played a key role in reconciling the idea that Indian labour had been coerced and or forced with the fact that Indian labourers often extended their indenture contracts. The idea that working hard as a coolie in endless servitude therefore became part of the ‘nature’ of the Indian indentured labourer, unwilling to rise above oppression (50-1).

The idea of the docile Coolie, hardworking yet helpless in moving up in the world and escaping their situation, is a key stereotype that temple board actors mobilise in their correspondence, as noted in this letter from 1988:

‘I want to explain to you, especially for Christian and other [non Hindu] Dutch people why the rights of a minority group must exist in this society. It is now 115 years ago that the Dutch

government searched for a workforce in India to develop agriculture in Suriname. With many promises and beautiful commitments, many people there [in India] were persuaded to risk this big step [moving to Suriname]. It was, however, a decision made under moral pressure... We all know the history. The Hindus, naturally trustworthy, diligent and tolerant have never taken up the sword to fight against injustice. That is not in our nature. Tolerance, patience and large resilience are the properties that have developed out of the Hindu philosophy. In Suriname, the Hindu community is one of the strongest pillars of the economy of the country. The basis for this pillar rests largely on religion, the strength of family and tolerance... We have had patience and tolerance for 115 years in Suriname, the beliefs of our fathers and the morals and habits of the motherland India—these formed the sources where we constantly draw the strength to go through [with life]... We had our temples where we could experience our faith, and where we Hindus could be among [other] Hindus... Since the independence of Suriname, Hindus had to again migrate to the Netherlands. Again the [Hindu] population's roots have been yanked [away from them]. For 115 years, the Hindu population was rooted in the soil of Suriname and then again a great part of the population had to move...'

While Torabully focuses on the crossing of the dark waters as a distinguishing feature of coolitude, the Hindustani experience is here inscribed through the trauma of twice-migration, from India to Suriname and Suriname to the Netherlands. While the first move to Suriname was traumatic and difficult, it was also seen as necessary in order to better their social position. While in Suriname, Hindus flourished, not only because of their docility and commitment to work, but their ability to built temples and connect with each other⁶¹ as a community, played upon the idea of the eternally subservient coolie that could survive only on the strength of family and religion.

Soon after, the same letter quickly shifts between registers, reminding the government of their rights as citizens on the one hand, while also reiterating the trauma of forced migration that was thrown upon them:

What threatens a large part of [our] Hindustani community losing sight [of their religion and culture]? Our ties with India the motherland, but especially the impossibility to live as a Hindu [in the Netherlands] just like we could in Suriname... We have a right to speak against the Dutch government, we can say: We find that we have a right as Hindus to live with all religious and social rights of other citizens... We had these rights in Suriname as well!'

⁶¹ Indeed, temples became a ubiquitous presence in plantation economies throughout the world (Carter and Torabully 2002, Vertovec 2000, Hoefte 1998, Eisenlohr 2006, Lal 1991, Parekh 1994) and represented the early development of 'official' Hindu presence in the Caribbean (Vertovec and van der Veer, 1991).

Looking at these two sections of the same letter, a contradiction emerges within this narrative register of the 'helpless coolie': on the one hand, the strength of their religious convictions, morals, and family bonds have made it so that Indian indentured labourers in Suriname have been able to flourish as hard working, honest people. However, upon moving to the Netherlands, their right to 'live as Hindus' is directly threatened, and it is not made clear how the strength of family or moral teachings does not apply to the context in the Netherlands. As Warriar (2012) and Sippy (2012) both note, this type of contradiction between the strength of Hindu religion and its perceived vulnerability has a unique place in articulations of Hinduness.

In response to these correspondences in 1989, the local district government wrote a letter outlining the legal parameters of a request to build a temple, focusing especially on the fact that if a temple was to be built, it can only be done so on leased land:

'In answer to your letter, we inform you that we cannot honour your request [to build a temple on unleased land]. Land is represented by a land-price, and this land price is determined by the proportion of the area the land occupies...On the issue of local government land according to certain cost guidelines, local government land can only be given out in leasehood...In other words, the land cannot be given out at a symbolic or token fee, as you request.'

The local government clearly outlines the legal parameters of the situation, but the temple board actors respond to the local government again with their need for non-leased land as a matter of the community's past as helpless indentured labourers:

'We received your letter...We are surprised [by the letter]... Clearly, we wish to state that we are not strangers who wish to benefit from the Dutch government. Our ancestors have for 116 years laid the foundations of your financial empire. Because of the Dutch government, we immigrated twice. The last time is because of the misrule of the Dutch government, with no consulting of the Surinamese people in relation to the transfer of sovereignty. To be short, I request you urgently to move our request up in the agenda, and take into account the above [issues] cited here...You have in your aforementioned letter emphatically said that you in no other way than in leasehood can release council land...you lose sight [of the fact that] you are called to serve the interests of all who live in your community... We until now have not been helped [in establishing our temple space] because the government hides behind [all] kinds of official council decisions and regulations...In practice, it shows that the local district government randomly interprets policy and freedom, while they [give] the motivation of their decision[s] to the outside world, and especially to us, without logical arguments. As economically weak [people] we have no single defense against this kind of random decision making.'

Here, the temple board direct relates their request to build a temple to their experience of twice-migration, where the transfer of sovereignty caused panic among the population (Dew 1988, Oostindie 2011). The ‘forced migration’ that the temple board actors imagine as part of the hurt that Hindus had to endure is therefore seen as a reason why the Dutch government should donate a piece of land to the community as a way to compensate for past wrongs.

The narrative register of the helpless coolie goes on to articulate the temple as a form of repayment for colonial rule six years later in 1995, as the head of the temple board delivered a public address during the 122 anniversary of Indian migration to Suriname in front of a large gathering of Hindustanis. This moment signals a key performance wherein the struggle of the temple is related and performed in connection with the commemoration of Hindustani migration to Suriname. A print version was also mailed to the local government as a press release. This press release restated the points put forth in 1989, particularly that the stalled templeisation process was directly related to the position of Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost as a disenfranchised, formerly colonised community:

‘We are very happy today that a great number of you have accepted our invitation on the commemoration day of the immigration of Hindustanis [to Suriname]... Because of the independence of Suriname we were forced to leave the ex-colony of the Netherlands and to settle permanently in the Netherlands... For our religion and culture this was devastating... One of our greatest needs is a religious ‘Temple-centre’. We have to welcome you today under an open sky: As ex-colonised people of Netherlands we think this is very disappointing. We have made requests to the government to establish, according to our religious beliefs, our own ‘home’ [a temple-centre]. We find this very sad, because politicians and council workers have made many promises about establishing a ‘temple centre’ here [where we stand]...’

Again, the narrative register restates that the Dutch colonial government is directly responsible for uprooting the Hindu community in India and Suriname, and the naturally docile Hindu worker went, without protest, where the colonial power dictated. However, without the strength of religion, their time in Amsterdam Zuidoost has become unbearable, with the threat of losing sight of the family values that Hindu temples inherently foster:

‘We understand your [the community’s] disappointed reactions to this news. Because a temple-centre is part of our identity, the lack of a centre has caused many youngsters to lose their way because their identity is missing. It appears that the experiment with different races in Suriname that had to serve the Dutch cause is being continued here in the Netherlands, with the same goal and negative result. To us it seems that the government still has not understood that crushing minority cultures and their religions does not have a positive effect on Dutch society and even less so on religious minorities themselves...’

Here, the temple board actors clearly link Hindu identity to a visible, purpose-built temple. The reason they do not have one, they go on to argue, is because the Dutch government is caught up instead in re-establishing their dominance over Hindus, as they did in Suriname. This point contradicts ideas in earlier correspondences from 1988 (see above) that state that religious freedom in Suriname was guaranteed without any intervention from the Dutch government.

The press release then takes on the sensitive issue of representation. Although in national contexts like America, the UK and Canada, Hindu campaigning has been heavily focused on problems with various mediatised and academic representations of Hinduism (Zavos 2012b, Anderson 2015, Hawley 2000, Narayanan 2000, McDermott 2000, Smith 2000, Kurien 2012, Sippy 2012), in this case the temple board actors feel it is the government that misrepresents the community as a way to stop them from developing a legitimate public identity through a temple space:

‘...That the Dutch government wants to suppress the feelings of ‘self-identity’ follows from the creation of “white organisations” that have to organise religious and cultural festivals for the Hindus. The intention of these organisations is to create insurmountable blocks in the way of Hindus who wish to establish a temple for themselves...It is hard to accept that after 122 years, the Dutch government’s mentality hasn’t changed.’

The idea of ‘white organisations’ representing Hindu interests and organising Hindu events undermines the idea of self-representation. Keeping in mind the continued influence of pillarisation on ethnic organisations (see chapter 1) the idea of ‘white organisations’ appears to undermine the idea of empowering minorities by allowing them to run their own associations. It is however, unclear to what ‘white organisations’ the temple board actors are referring.

As Zavos (2012) argues, the ecumenical organisations in Great Britain exercise a great amount of power over how Hinduism is represented in the public sphere (71). It seems that the temple board actors also see the issue of representation as a power struggle, casting ‘the Dutch government’ broadly as a body that wishes to control the ways in which Hindus are presented in public by withholding land on which they can build a temple.

A specific narrative that is mobilised within the strategic use of the ‘coolie’ stereotype is their weak economic position. Rather than a community of successful middle-class professionals who can come together to fund large temple spaces in the American diaspora (Kurien 2007, 89) or a community with enough social capital to seek the assistance of large temple complexes in India (Narayanan 2006, 231), temple board actors demonstrate that Hindus of Amsterdam Zuidoost can only appeal to the sensibilities of fellow-citizens who can make a donation in 1988:

'Of course, with respect to the actualisation [of the temple] there are mostly financial snags. It is clear that the building of a temple is a costly affair. The 80.000 Hindustanis who belong to the economically weak [faction of] society can never raise [the money] themselves. There shall have to be an appeal to our non-Hindu 'co-countrymen'. One guilder per Dutch citizen will soon make 14 million Guilders...A large part of the Dutch society feels themselves uninvolved in Hindustani problems. Perhaps they will say 'Why should we pay now for the mistakes that the past [colonial] government made? ...We want however to appeal to the Dutch citizen's sense of human rights and justice: We ask them to question [the government] and make a financial contribution'.

In suggesting that the non-Hindu Dutch citizen may question why they must be responsible for the mistakes of 'past [colonial] governments', the temple board actors attempt to inscribe the idea of colonial misrule in the imaginations not only of Hindustanis, but in the imaginations of the non-Hindustani Dutch citizen as well. By paying attention to the lives of former colonised groups in the Netherlands, Dutch citizens may become aware of how 'the government' infringes on the Hindu's rights as citizens of the Netherlands.

Unlike temple building processes among middle-class Hindu groups in the US and UK that operate without outside help, and those processes among Sri Lankan Tamils in Switzerland who are statistically below the socio-economic average (159), the temple board actors feel that their temple space is an issue of national importance and injustice. They make appeals outside of the community for funding. This is also a direct appeal as-citizens-to-citizens: whereas previous appeals to the rights and religious freedoms accorded to them as citizens of the Netherlands, the narrative above asks mainstream Dutch society to act in solidarity to solve this 'Hindustani problem'.

The Helpless Coolie' vs. the 'Model Minority'

The narrative register of strategic 'coolie' stereotyping is particularly unsettling when it is contextualised in relation to the ways that my respondents have spoken about their views on their ancestry and the system of indentured labour. As Lynnebakke (2007) aptly points out, often the stereotype of 'coolie' as disenfranchised and economically weak is rejected by members of the Hindustani community. Rather than focus on the marginalising elements of the twice-migration narrative, my respondents often presented the condition of twice migration as one that set them apart from various other groups and taught them to 'get ahead' in life upon arrival in the Netherlands.

As Tina told me, the Hindustani community may indeed have descended from indentured labourers, but according to her, there was little connection between their position as

disenfranchised labourers in Suriname and the 'success story' of Hindustanis in the Netherlands today. She pointed out to me time and time again that Hindustanis had a 'high level of education' and 'high income' relative to most other ethnic groupings, and in fact, their phenomenal economic success was now creating problems in the community (see part III).

Especially in relation to their relationship with Indians in the Netherlands, Hindustanis find that the legacy of indentured labour is something to downplay rather than to celebrate. As Lynnebakke (2007) Gowricharn (2009) and Choenni (2011, 2015) have established, there is an increasingly important emphasis put on the role that Indian culture and religion has played in the development of second-generation Hindustanis, sometimes at the expense of a relationship with Suriname.

In particular, the temple board's articulations about freedom to practice Hinduism in Suriname departed greatly from the way that the temple board actors described Suriname as a land of Hindu temples and practices. For example, two young women in their mid thirties, Sheena and Tara, told me that on their visits to Suriname, they rarely visited any temples. Tara, a trained yoga teacher, made trips to India very often for yoga retreats and lessons, and Sheena also made trips related to yoga, meditation and religious pilgrimage. For both young women, Suriname was not a place to experience their religion, but a place to 'party'. In fact, Tara described the challenges she had growing up when she would visit Suriname, as she felt Paramaribo in particular was not 'proud of its temples' the way people in India were. They both also felt that the temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost were much more 'serious' than those in Suriname, and made it a point to visit them as often as possible.

I noticed that often my male respondents were less hostile towards their relationship with Suriname than many of my female respondents⁶², but still took care to distance themselves from any narrative register that reinstated the idea that they were 'victims' because of their ancestry. As Don proudly told me, he had grown up as an educated, middle-class young man in Paramaribo and was encouraged by his parents to pursue higher education, a love for the performing arts and a strong involvement in Indian cultural activities. Although he openly acknowledged that his ancestors had come to Suriname to 'work', he reinstated that their coming to Suriname was in

⁶² Here, I see this discrepancy between male and female voices regarding their relationship to Suriname as a part of the idea that Hindu women are often called upon to be cultural purveyors (Hancock 1999, Brosius 2010, for more general information on women and cultural brokerage in India, see Chatterjee, 1994). As cultural purveyors, the onus to identify as 'Indian' and to perform Hindu-ness is constantly framing the way that they discuss their identity and relationship to India and to Suriname. However, this is outside the scope of this research: I introduce the idea here so it may be fleshed out in future studies.

order to better their chances in life. So too, was the choice to come to the Netherlands an issue of improving his life rather than a choice he made under 'duress' because of colonial misrule or independence from the Netherlands. His voice is particularly significant in this discussion, as it counters the idea that all those who arrived in the Netherlands after the independence of Suriname did so under duress and with little social or financial capital. Don had arrived here after his sister had successfully emigrated from Suriname (see chapter 2) and continued his work as an educator in the Netherlands.

In the same way, a young man in his early thirties named Sergio was very proud of his upbringing as a Hindustani, and his relationship with Suriname and India was strong—he felt that both countries 'shaped his background', and he had had positive religious experiences at temples in Suriname and in India. Although he articulated that his 'distant relatives' had come from India as labourers, he told me how quickly his family had experienced social mobility in Paramaribo, working as professionals, educating themselves and eventually moving to the Netherlands. He spoke of how Hindustanis were 'high-status people' and were often 'obsessed with status' because there was so much pressure to perform at a high socio-economic level.

These counter-voices are not without their problems: They demonstrate the opposite spectrum of the Coolie stereotype, that of the model Hindustani minority stereotype. Elsewhere, I have detailed how the Hindustani community has been framed as a model minority since the early 1990s that inherently values socio-economic success, education, and strong family ties, making it so that working class and working poor identities are often silenced (see Part III). While this is a cultural stereotype that obfuscates the positions of working class and working poor Hindustanis, I find that here it is useful to include these voices that restate the model minority stereotype in order to demonstrate how current discussions of Hindustani identity focus less upon the disenfranchising experiences of twice migration.

It also demonstrates how the coolie stereotype is one that is strategically mobilised by the temple board actors while the model minority narrative is consciously downplayed. The experience of movement and re-settlement can be, depending on context, be framed as both disenfranchising and empowering.⁶³

Above the Rules: The Narrative Register of 'Hindu Exceptionalism'

As mentioned above, local government actors and civil servant actors articulated their position not to fund a temple space, nor to give out a place of choice to the DD community from within the

⁶³ Surely, there are voices that fall in between these two poles, but I here introduce these two, rather extreme forms of stereotypes in order to demonstrate how strategically and easily one can be adopted, while the other can be completely ignored.

strict laws that separate church from state and the laws of zoning within a city. I introduce now the narrative register of ‘Hindu exceptionalism’ that capitalises on the idea that Hindus have certain values and rules that may undermine Dutch laws. While on the one hand they are Dutch citizens, on the other they cannot obey the laws of the land because their religion as well as their economic position dictates otherwise.

Having been unsuccessful in raising funds outside of the Hindu community through donation, the temple board actors compiled a list related to the development of the temple that requests the government to pay for the temple, based again on the community’s vulnerable position, but also on the idea that the Hindu temple would function as both a cultural and religious space—thereby exempting themselves from the laws that state that the government cannot fund a religious building:

1. *‘For some time the discussions regarding the building of a temple and cultural centre annex have been in progress, which is known to you [the temple board of Amsterdam Zuidoost]*
2. *... We assume that you will eventually give us a plot of land [PBKS]*
3. *It is also known [to you] that the supporters of the application abandoned their goods and finances when they came to the Netherlands*
4. *At this stage, therefore, it cannot be expected that they [The Hindu community] can make a substantial contribution to offset the land rent...*
5. *However, the building of the temple and cultural centre annex is a bitter necessity since it shall serve not only [for] religious worship but also for other cultural activities*
6. *Moreover, the centre shall serve as the visible identity for the centuries old Hindu religion, culture and tradition*
7. *The reasons why the applicants turn to you respectfully have been laid out above...Not in the least, [we] want a symbolic amount to be transferred to us [to rent the land for a temple].’*

The ‘symbolic transfer’ then, attempts to alleviate the financial situation that the Hindu community has been forced into due to their quick migration to the Netherlands. Unsurprisingly, the local district government replied to this message and reiterated what they had articulated to the community before.

Although the community received many responses over a period of time that constantly restate the legal restrictions on transferring land outside of leasehold, they ignored these restrictions and in 1990, PBKS temple board actors installed a symbolic ‘first stone’ of a temple at an empty area in Geinwijk, which they hoped would become their new temple. According to a young civil servant actor named Jan, the area that they had occupied in Geinwijk had to remain empty because a water pipe ran through it. Not only did the temple board actors illegally appropriate (however symbolically) a piece of land, they continued to believe that the temple

should be given to them in ownership as a symbolic ‘gift’ from the government, as repayment for past wrongs that have left them financially dependent on the government. This small outdoor area in Geinwijk was, for a time, a gathering space for the DD community, who hoped it would be turned into a temple space in the near future. In a letter written in 1990, the temple board actors wrote:

‘We have a prayer room here where we now stand, near Geinwijk, on the ground, but without a roof and walls. Almost every Sunday [this space] is used in bad weather and in the wind. We are a substantial part of the Hindu community and we stand here at this prayer space with no windows... We asked for a very small piece of all those hectares of land that the Amsterdam government has... Although a symbolic place in the open air has been set up for the development of a temple space, it will not be a full temple until it has its ‘walls’ and the ‘roof’. For practical reasons, this is obviously a prerequisite for any type of building, but we still use this prayer space despite the fact there are ‘no windows’ and it is open to the elements. Possession of the land here also points out the need not only to symbolically appropriate space, but to legally own it in order to feel that the temple, whenever and however it manages to get built, is an inalienable part of the community that cannot be taken away from them’.

The focus on ownership here recalls the precariousness of producing Hindu locality in Amsterdam Zuidoost. By owning the land, the temple board actors articulate that they have a permanent and public stake in the neighbourhood that can produce meaningful feelings of belonging. However, this ownership is something that goes beyond the legal prohibitions that are set out by the state and locality itself: although the temple board actors had earlier articulated their need for a temple based on the rights and rule of law, they also feel that ownership is so urgently needed that they should be exempt from following the rule of law.

While the local government made it clear that a symbolic transfer of property as a reparation was impossible, temple board actors were still determined to protest the decision, given that the Hindu community was especially disenfranchised through their lack of financial means and their position as formerly colonised people. Here, the temple board actors mobilise an unsettling register of ‘Hindu exceptionalism’: they cite a dubious rule that Hindus can only worship on rent-free land:

‘...The adverse decision [to not give land in ownership] is, in our opinion based essentially on implementing the law that [says] in Amsterdam land can only be given in leasehood. This law is inapplicable, as leased land is inappropriate for a Hindu temple. We are of the opinion that the State of the Netherlands, in accordance with the constitution and the principle of freedom of religious practice, must cater to such a large group of Hindus. It must be possible to donate an ideal piece of land? The possibility that hereafter a precedent would be set [for other religious

groups to receive donated land] *is not right. The land will not be used for commercial purposes, but for religion and culture. We share with you that following our religious writings, a 'correct' religious experience is only possible on untaxed land...After waiting for 17 years, you cannot say that the Hindus have had no patience. As the Hindus are an important part of Dutch society, they must still be permitted to live in accordance with their age old rules.'*

There is a vague reference here made to 'our religious writings', although no specific textual references are made⁶⁴ in this letter. The idea that Hindu temples cannot be built on leased land is a striking position to take: major Hindu temple sites around the world are openly leased or purchased according to the real estate laws of individual nation-states. As Kurien (2007) points out, in the US, often leases and land purchases are shared among various members of the community in order to shoulder the initial costs (11). Yet, the temple board actors arbitrarily invented the idea that Hindu land cannot be leased, in order to support the register of 'Hindu exceptionalism'. What is more, the narrative register of Hindu exceptionalism undermines the narrative register of Hindus as citizens, as it requires that the Hindu community be treated outside of the general rule of law, which is alluded to in previous correspondence.

When speaking to a civil servant actor named Hans in his mid fifties, he recalled for me his reaction to the correspondence when he had first read and archived it over ten years ago. He told me that whenever he read the correspondence, 'he became angry' not only because what was being said 'was offensive to the Dutch government', but that the DD temple board actors had 'ignored the separation of church and state'. For Hans, the contradictions inherent in the various registers were of little importance, but the fact that the temple board actors did not accept the rule of law was confusing and infuriating. Although he respected the idea of religious freedom, he maintained that 'nothing could be done' that would undermine the 'separation of church and state'.

Two other civil servant actors that I spoke to together named Jan and Jelle were directly involved in managing and directing the 'temple dossier'. They also reiterated that the official line of response from the government would 'always be the legal response'—rather than engage with other points raised in the letter. Although they were both sensitive to the fact that Hinduism may 'not allow' them to lease land, they knew that the local government would not change their position.

The temple board actors narrate the experience of indenture—the Hindus as a hardworking, docile, yet oppressed and weak faction of society—to try and convince the local

⁶⁴ In some letters of correspondence, there are references made to the Bhagavad Gita or the Vedas that are translated, implying that members of the board had some working knowledge of Hindu texts, and making it all the more conspicuous that a reference to a specific religious writing is not noted here.

government that Amsterdam Zuidoost should be given a temple because of their past and present struggles. Negotiating between the seemingly contradictory narratives of the strength of their Hindu culture, but their position as economically and socially weak citizens, the strategic coolie stereotype becomes an important affective strategy that contributes to the collective victimisation and hurt visited upon Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Not only does the board manipulate the experience of indenture to frame the need for a temple, but they actively fabricate religious restrictions against building upon leased land as a way to circumvent the laws that are time and again cited by the local government.

4.3 Mistrusting Diversity: The Narrative Register of 'Multicultural Competition'

I established in chapter 1 that Dutch pillarisation and visions of a Dutch plural society should not be conflated with multiculturalism. As ethnic welfare organisations flourished in the 1980s under the lingering influence of pillarisation policies, the tendency was also to stress that particular cultural practices should allow migrants to feel 'at home' while adjusting to Dutch society (Entzinger 2006, 179-80, Entzinger 2014, 695). Many of these policies also operated on the premise that migrants would eventually return 'home', and initially ignored the possibility of meaningful integration (Entzinger 2006, 2014).

However, I introduce here the narrative register of 'multicultural competition' (cf. Baumann 1999), as it is as much a feature of post-pillarisation society in the Netherlands as it is of countries that have adopted multicultural policies. Baumann (1999) argues that reifying discourses of multiculturalism (125) create 'community competition', which require that migrants operate as 'pseudocorporate' entities that vie with each other for resources (123-4). Sunier (2009) and van Rooden (2010) observe a similar trend in Dutch society, where prestige is bestowed upon 'religious newcomers' who break through their position as tolerated yet invisible minorities by establishing places of worship in the public landscape (Sunier 2009, 166).

Zavos (2012) argues that articulations of public Hinduism in the UK speak through 'multicultural languages' (72) that are available to Hindu groups across local, national and global contexts. These languages--liberal, plural, conservative, corporate--are ways of mediating diversity (73) that are increasingly mobilised in public life. I put forward here that multicultural competition functions as another powerful narrative register builds upon the production of victimisation in the register of the 'helpless coolie' (see above) and extends it to show that Hindus are ill favoured among the various ethno-religious groups in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The PBKS temple board actors draws attention to various buildings around the city that correspond to 'other' religious groups, while the Hindus 'lag behind' (Baumann 1999) and remain invisible. In particular, the PBKS temple board actors articulate their narrative register of competition through references to success of 'the Muslims' and 'the Ghanaians'.

The Taibah Mosque is often cited as an example as it is arguably the most visible and well-known religious building in the neighbourhood. It is the first purpose-built mosque in Amsterdam that was initiated by a group of Hindustani Muslims who first rented a space in a small room in Amsterdam Zuidoost to gather as a religious group. In the middle of the 1970s, the community wanted to hold meetings in their own mosque space, and began to raise money from Muslims living in Amsterdam Zuidoost and across the Netherlands. According to Oomen and Palm (1994), the initial fundraising plans were relatively unsuccessful, as the group was too small and the costs to build a new mosque were too high (35). However, as the numbers of Hindustani and Pakistani Muslim migrants into Amsterdam Zuidoost increased into the 1980s, there was enough financial support raised to see the project through (*ibid.*).

As Landman and Wessels (2005) demonstrate, since the 1990s, various local and national Dutch government bodies have been increasingly open to the establishment of mosques in designated areas. While, like Hindus, many mosque communities first occupied community centres or makeshift spaces, since 2000 there has been a steady increase in the building of large-scale mosques. What is more, Landman and Wessels (2005) note that, even though neighbourhood actors are sometimes vocally against these spaces for the sake of ‘preserving the architecture’ of an area (1126), or vocalise their opposition through Islamophobia (Beck 1999, Feirabend and Radt 1996), mosque building in the Netherlands has been a relatively successful endeavour.

Animosity between Hindu and Muslim groupings among my respondents was not expressly addressed in my research, although based on a preliminary line of questioning and certain experiences in the field, it became clear that across ethnic and social backgrounds, my Hindu respondents felt alienated and disdainful towards Muslim communities⁶⁵. As I mention in

⁶⁵ In this research, I focus on the relationship between Muslims and Hindus exclusively through the lens of multicultural competition due to space and conceptual limitations. Although it is outside the scope of this research to fully explore the implications, I do recall various instances where offensive and violent language was used to describe ‘Muslims’ as others, which I would, based on my research, read as a complex intertwining of contemporary Islamophobia exacerbated greatly by some of the grey Hindutva literature that is easily accessible to my respondents on the Internet. While an analysis of the interviews I conducted did not point to any overt anti-Muslim sentiments among my respondents, I found that informal conversations or remarks made in passing often ridiculed or demonised ‘the Muslim community’. For example, a recent Indian migrant to the Netherlands named Arun was alarmed to hear that I lived in a predominantly Turkish neighbourhood, and once refused to drop me by car to my neighbourhood train station, opting to take me directly to my house because ‘there are too many Muslims near the train station’. A young female respondent in her 30s would also send me derogatory video clips via online messaging systems that ridiculed Muslims and the Arabic language. This caused a large amount of discomfort for me, but when I addressed these ideas with these two respondents they were quick to point out that ‘they were not prejudiced’. Indeed, Jaya had once also told me that the majority of her friends were Moroccan Muslims with whom she shared many interests. The relationship between Hindus and Muslims in the Netherlands should indeed be explored further,

my introduction to this chapter, temple building processes themselves are often articulated as necessary simply because there are publicly visible mosques around the country. This is already the case in the 1990s, as demonstrated in this letter the PBKS temple board actors wrote in 1991:

‘The Muslims received their chance to achieve the completion of their mosque through cooperation from the local government. Since it was clear that the Hindus could not collect their [own] money, the local government was asked for a piece of land to build a temple and cultural centre... Many from the local district government board, even from the national government are convinced that a temple must come [be erected] there... But they have not helped us to move a step further because they do not understand that we are different than Christian reformed, Roman Catholics, Muslims and other believers... For some World religions, and certainly for Hinduism, it is implied that religious experience and daily life are strongly intertwined. India we know is also a country of many temples that are used and visited throughout the year for religious purposes. The tens of thousands of Hindustanis in the Netherlands and that are followers of Hinduism are still without a holy place [temple]. And that [is the case] while even small Christian sects coming from Ghana already have their own place of worship. Not to mention the many mosques in the Netherlands. Zuidoost has already had for many years the Taibah mosque. Because our Hindustani countrymen lag behind other groups... We tried... to establish a Hindu temple besides a cultural centre...’

As I described in chapter 2, many of my Hindustani respondents view the Afro-Surinamese and African residents in Amsterdam Zuidoost with suspicion. This has to do, on the one hand, with the fact that the Afro-Surinamese and Ghanaian groupings in the neighbourhood have been relatively⁶⁶ successful at establishing public places of Christian worship, particularly through strategically coming together as umbrella organisations representing various Ghanaian Christian denominations.

Although civil servant and local government actors firmly deny the request to financially assist the building of a temple, in keeping with the continued legacy of pillarisation and unofficial multiculturalism, the Bijlmermeer renewal plans wanted to reflect the diversity of the neighbourhood. After years of negative responses, the local district government responded to a

although Roopram and van Steenbergen (2013) and Kumar (2013) have made valuable contributions to the field already, particularly focusing on the fascinating intersection between Hindu identity, Islamophobia and national voting patterns among Hindustanis.

⁶⁶ While these groupings have established public worship spaces, they are not without their share of struggles and controversies. Stoffels (2008) and de Witte (2011) note that the Kandelaar church collective also suffered from a lack of funds and awareness of Dutch policies and laws.

letter from the temple board actors and promised to set aside a space in the multicultural neighbourhood for a Hindu temple:

'Your letter...was discussed in the local district government meeting... The board has decided to settle the [issues raised in] the letter once and for all. As an answer to your letter, we however cannot, do more than repeat what we have already confirmed in our previous letter of 12 May 1989. For brevity, we refer you to this letter. We regret the accusation of arbitrariness, abuse of power and inadequate and improper management that you make in the letter. We recognise however, the interest for a religious and cultural centre for the Hindustani community especially in our district. We are therefore willing to, when planning for Amsterdam Zuidooost (urban renewal programme) to reserve a possible piece of land in the Geinwijk [area]...'

This was an encouraging moment for the temple board actors and Hindu groupings in Amsterdam Zuidooost. While the temple board actors respond positively, they continue to reiterate boundaries between 'Hindus' and 'other minorities', especially the Hindustani Muslims who worship at the Taibah Mosque:

'...We rejoice that Amsterdam Zuidooost sees the need for a temple and cultural annex in the renewal planning project. It is in the meantime well known that we, for more than 17 years—in vain—have been busy trying to establish the aforementioned annex. It may also be known that this is a case of great importance for large groups of Hindustani Dutch. We believe that you do not sufficiently realise the weight of the general interests that are at stake...We refer to these hard facts because of the enormous inequality that Hindus suffer from, related to other—similar—religious groups...We are informed that the local government has provided large sums of money for the building of the mosque for Hindustani Muslims. Also, we know that the temple board of the mosque is totally bankrupt, but that you made a ruling so as to pay the property taxes...Given the above, we request you to reconsider your earlier decisions and consider giving the plot of land for the building of the temple and cultural centre annex in ownership [rather than in leasehold].'

As Sunier (2009) argues, the opening of the Taibah Mosque in 1985 was a symbol of the increased prestige of Hindustani Muslims and their ability to restructure the public sphere to include a Muslim public space (171). In the same vein, Verhagen (1987) observed early on that the Hindu community in the neighbourhood is without a temple space, while the Taibah mosque has already opened for the Muslim community in Amsterdam Zuidooost (72). The fact that 'countrymen' of different religious backgrounds were successful in establishing themselves is especially frustrating, which in turn fosters an atmosphere of suspicion, disdain and fabrications about which groups are successfully lobbying the government (cf. Baumann 124, 1999).

Often, the Tabiah mosque came up in my conversations with community actors and civil servant actors, who both admired the way that the Muslim community came together to build up

the space, finance it and maintain it as a community space. As Jelle told me candidly during an interview:

'With the Muslim community, it was easy to build the mosque. They come with a plan, they came with the money, and we found a place for them to build. With the Hindus they cannot even come together to decide on a [design] plan'.

Jelle was aware that even with the Taibah mosque, there were financial problems in the early stages, but he was particularly adamant that the Muslim community in Amsterdam Zuidoost had good 'knowledge' of how to present a plan that laid out clearly how the building would be financed, and how to work within legal constraints.

By now it is quite clear that the body of correspondence I have presented so far reveals much about the narrative registers of Hindu identity and templeisation processes, but the unsettling and rather puzzling fact that the temple board actors, as representatives to the government, did not take the time to consult with other Hindu groups around the country who were also trying to establish temples, nor were they particularly interested in consulting with legal or professional experts, beyond architects, who may have been in a position to help them navigate through the legal aspects of temple building. In 1990, a representative of the local district government met with the temple board to discuss issues of building a temple. To this point, the local government actor was sensitive to the community's position, but firm about the legal parameters of money, making particular reference to the Ghanaian community and therefore rejecting any requests to bend the rules for the Hindu community:

'I have confirmed my previous statements that I wish to put effort into establishing a Hindu temple in Amsterdam Zuidoost. I consider it of great importance for the Hindu community. I have also re-confirmed that first off, the Hindustani community needs to do something on their own before anything [the building of a purpose built temple] can happen. Because, as I have told you, religious spaces, whether they are churches, mosques, synagogues or temples, must be established by the communities themselves. That means that you have to collect money within your community. You have told me that your people are in a disadvantaged situation right now and there is presently a lack of support. In principle, I am sensitive to that, but in the meantime I have told you that the Ghanaian community is in a comparable situation but has been able to finance its own prayer-room...'

Indeed, the Ghanaian community had many initial problems in finding the finances to set up a church in the neighbourhood. In the end, groups came together to form an umbrella organisation made up of smaller churches that would share overhead costs to maintain a building to be used jointly (Stoffels 2008, 18-19).

As Jan told me, there was a ‘genuine feeling’ among government and civil servant actors that the temple board actors were ignorant of the laws that separated church and state and the complicated zoning plan parameters that were a barrier to their plans to develop a temple. At the same time, Jan and Frenck felt as if there was ‘no effort’ put into exploring these aspects of temple building during the 1980s and 1990s, and only with trying to ask the government for a donation, despite being told repeatedly it would never be possible.

Related to this, the register of multicultural competition reveals an unsettling tendency to fabricate government positions on other ‘favoured’ religious minority groups (here, the ‘Muslims’ and the ‘Ghanaians’), rather than to explore how these groups were able to develop their own spaces successfully (Oomen and Palm 1994). In turn, rather than focus on a fundraising campaign or enter into dialogue about financing such a plan, the fact that other religious groups had set up public places of worship was strategically articulated as another form of Hindu hurt related to the weak economic position and social alienation of Hindus.

The Narrative Register of ‘Ambivalent Orientalism’

Embedded in the language of multicultural competition is another powerful narrative associated with ‘coolie’ identity in the nineteenth century—the Indian indentured labourer as an alien religious and cultural ‘other’. As Carter and Torabully (2002) argue, the Indian indentured labourer was often seen as an exotic other (62). In turn, Hindu indentured labourers were met with disdain because of their religious practices, associated with ‘idolatry’ (Hoeft 1998). Temple board actors mobilise this narrative in close connection with Orientalist visions of Hindutva, where their ancient and glorious Hindu religion and culture (Anderson 2015, Bhatt and Mukta 2000, Rajagopal 2000) is misunderstood by Dutch government actors.

I identify this as the narrative register of ambivalent Orientalism: Like the previous two registers, the stereotypes associated with Hindus as exotic, ancient ‘Others’ is contradictory. It fluctuates between being a positive source of pride from which the greater Dutch population can benefit, and an alienating burden that leaves Hindus and Hinduism as forever misunderstood by government and civil servant actors. Again, these fluctuating meanings are applied to different contexts by temple board actors in order to best articulate their outrage and hurt over the ongoing temple building issue.

As Rajagopal (2000) notes, appealing to the Orientalist constructions of an ancient Hindu culture help Hindus in the diaspora to assert their cultural superiority, despite belonging to a minority religion. In the letter below, the temple board actors narrate the importance of Hindu culture in contemporary Dutch society as an important reason why temple building should be supported by the local government:

'Our lives, thoughts habits and religious/cultural practices go back to very old wisdom, these writings have endured for some 4000 years. This is not unimportant: [In them] lies the great potential to live in harmony with nature, with the world, and with our fellow people. Only [potential] for the Hindus? No, absolutely not! Also in Western rational thinking do we come across encounters between people from all walks of life...It is very possible to merge the good things out of both Eastern and Western thinking...That is good for all the people that live in this country.'

This excerpt from the letter is not unlike discourse in diaspora temples where programmes are set up to explore the connection between Eastern and Western spirituality, or to cater Hindu teachings to lifestyles in the West (Narayanan 2006, 242). This 'harmonious' joining of Eastern and Western worldviews also echoes earlier nationalist sentiment that has been popularised throughout modern history by Hindu spiritual figures such as Vivekananda (Kanungo 2012, 122, see also Basu et al. 1993) and Rajneesh (Urban 1999).

While the excerpt above focuses on the harmonious connections between 'Eastern' and 'Western' mentalities, in 1996, the commemoration for the 123 anniversary of immigration from India to Suriname put out on the anniversary of Indian migration to Suriname laments the marginalised position of Hindus due to their exotic, 'Eastern' beliefs. Rather than mobilise the narrative of pride and glory, the temple board actors reinforce their otherness in relation to their position as 'non-Western' (Said 2003[1978], Sakai 2000):

'...We would also like to name an [other] anniversary [on this date], the anniversary...Of the great failure, the anniversary of the big 'No' from the government. Because nothing has changed and nothing is improved...The government cannot or will not understand that our belief is more than the 'way of life' that they think they know. It is correct that this is unknown [to others outside of the community]. It is our non-Western belief that they apparently distrust. There are many contradictions between Western and non-Western thought, so perhaps Hindu religion, philosophy and tradition is the reason why we are still standing in the open air [rather than in a temple].'

This again undermines the model minority stereotype wherein the strength of Hindu religion forms the backbone of the community's socio-economic integration in the Netherlands (Choenni 2015, 46). As many respondents have said to me, Hindu religion is the often the source of their strength. For example, Tina felt that her religious background helped her to deal with problems in her career, helping her to 'keep calm' during particularly stressful periods. Sergio also felt that his religious background had helped instill in him certain values and 'ways of approaching life' that could help him navigate through his teenage years growing up in the Netherlands. He felt that Hinduism taught him to 'be himself' and gave him self-confidence as a child.

The ambivalence surrounding the idea of being an exotic, Eastern 'other' is therefore strategically articulated: on the one hand, temple board actors find it advantageous to highlight how the 'West' can learn from Hinduism, as many Hindu leaders and diaspora temple programmes have done before. On the other, they further inscribe Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost as irrevocably marginalised due to their beliefs.

Rejecting an Umbrella Identity: The Narrative Register of 'Hindu Isolationism'

Finally, I highlight the narrative of 'Hindu exclusiveness' that emerged as temple board actors significantly contested a rumour of a co-operative, pan-Hindu temple across Sanatan Dharm and Arya Samaj communities. This marks one of the most significant ideas of 'Hindu-ness' that temple board actors circulate: that the DD temple of Amsterdam Zuidoost is envisioned as a strictly Sanatan Dharm space. The DD community will not (and cannot) be expected to accommodate or co-operate with 'other Hindus'.

Sanatan Dharm and Arya Samaj

In the Netherlands, most Hindus identify as Sanatan Dharm, most often translated as 'eternal religion' and is often conflated with 'Hinduism' (Fuller 1993), and a smaller percentage identify as Arya Samaj reformists. Vertovec (2000) outlines the main facets of Sanatan Dharm as the public and 'mainstream' face of Hinduism: Sanatans tend to rationalise their faith and belief system, they incorporate tenets of neo-vedantin philosophy, they assert that Hinduism, like Christianity is a 'world religion', they favour Sankritic 'great traditions' over localised worship, and appeal to a 'pan-Indian' Hinduism, and there is a great emphasis placed on devotional religion or *bhakti* (12). As the 'eternal religion', my respondents that follow Sanatan Dharm see it as the primordial form of Hinduism, and that there is a direct link with their contemporary practices and those carried out in ancient times.

By contrast, Arya Samaj practices foreground the revealed sacred texts, the Vedas, as the key source of religious knowledge. Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83), the founder of the Arya Samaj began as a monk of the Dandi order and continued to fight in the same vein as his Guru for a return to the Vedas (Jaffrelot 2007 29). Key to his discourse on the Vedas is the glorification of the Vedic period, which he felt were 'free from the blemishes of polytheism and caste-based social hierarchy' (Jaffrelot 2007, 30). The Vedas were not only considered spiritual, but were also the cultural heritage of the people of India, expressed through the language of the gods (Sanskrit). Dayananda reinterpreted the caste system as a merit-based system rather than a hierarchy, where caste identities functioned complementarily (Jaffrelot 2007, 9).

The Arya Samaj movement has had a great influence in the Hindu diaspora, particularly in plantation settlements that imported Indian indentured labour such as Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, Natal, and Fiji. The movement was involved in missionary activity overseas that Dayananda was said to advocate while he was alive (Navarane in Sharma 2003, 116). The first Arya Samaj representative in Suriname, Bhai Parmanand, came in 1911 from British Guyana to the neighbouring Nickerie region, where the movement first took root in Suriname (Hoeft 1997, Rambaran 1990, 150). As the movement began to take hold, various organisations dedicated to the movement began to grow out of Nickerie and into the capital, Paramaribo.

My second-generation Sanatan Dharm respondents downplayed the difference between Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharm. The idea of a universal ‘Hindu’ identity seemed to be much more important. However, this was not the case in the 1980s and 1990s: Amidst the stalled attempts and frustrations that templeisation processes in Amsterdam Zuidoost brought on, the temple board actors found themselves outraged by an attempt by the local government’s newsletter to discuss the Sanatan Dharm and Arya Samaj communities as a united whole. The temple board actors projected themselves as custodians of an ancient culture and religion and articulated that the Arya Samaj community only adhered to one small part of the tradition. What is more, the Arya Samaj should be considered an offshoot of the Sanatan Dharm tradition, the ancient and original form of Hinduism to which the DD temple community adhered.

In 1989, at the same time that the DD temple board was corresponding with the local district government about developing a purpose built temple space under the urban renewal plan in Amsterdam Zuidoost, they sent out an accusatory letter which begins by asserting that those outside the locality cannot be grouped with the DD community:

1... ‘You [Local district government Zuidoost] wish to propagate the ‘unity’ of all Hindu groups. We wish, for clarity, to say that you refer to the idea of ‘unity’ among the established Hindu groups that are in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Indeed, there can be no involvement expected with groups that are located elsewhere or in another municipality. They can only grant moral and material support... We wish to emphasise that groups and/or persons that only follow the Vedic teachings and are united in Arya Samaj are not in ‘unity’ with the Arsha Dharma, and [‘unity’] cannot be brought about. The difference between Arsha Dharma/Sanatan Dharm and Arya Samaj is too great to bring them together...’

This marks a moment wherein the processes of temple building are explicitly linked to boundary making *within* the Hindu community. The idea that these two groups could share a public space is a source of profound offence for it undermines the parameters of worship and belief of Sanatan Dharm by conflating it with a ‘new’ Hindu movement. The idea of representation remains central: The temple board actors feel as if the local government is trying to dictate who is

a 'Hindu' without consulting the community members themselves. In their indignation towards the government, the temple board actors themselves set out to project boundaries between the Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharm. By saying that their Sanatan Dharm way of worship and belief is more deeply rooted in history than the Arya Samaj movement, they attempt to shift the definition of who is considered to be an 'authentic' Hindu.

The issue continues to be of grave importance for the temple board actors, and a press release is sent out in 1989 detailing the differences between the community in response to an article circulated in 'The New Bijlmer', a newsletter dedicated to detailing the changes under the urban renewal plan in the neighbourhood:

'The temple board wishes to distance itself from the decision that was expressed in the article in 'The New Bijlmer'... In this article, the impression arose that all difficulties regarding religious cooperation between the different Hindu religious groups have been resolved. That is a misrepresentation. This article demonstrates that the government still does not understand the reasons why we want to build the Hindu temple Devi Dhaam ... The article said that they [the local district government] would bring all Hindu groups together to participate in the establishment [of the temple]. It is important here to make it clear that the Hindu groups are made up of two very separately moving sects. The Arsha Dharma, ie. the Sanatan Dharma (the original Hindu religion) and b. The Arya Samaj, (the group of Nobles). It is not to be expected that both these groups can cooperate under one roof. That is why we think that cooperation between these two groups is impossible... No matter what experts shall say [about] the reduced costs if these two groups work together...Practically speaking, it is not possible. The differences in expression of faith are comparable to the situation inside the Christian faith during the Reformation. The [local district government] board however still insists that all Hindu groups are united....All other [Hindu] organisations can only assist as organisations, because they all have their own goals. Another view [from another Hindu group] means nothing more than a delay. That the Jehovah's Witnesses and other Christians shall not cooperate together, despite the fact that they both use the Bible is the same reason why the Arya Samaj and the followers of Sanatan Dharm will not come together'.

Here, the temple board actors emphasise that there is too much scriptural and ritual difference for the two groups to be placed together through the language of being 'ancient custodians' who protect the oldest form of Hinduism.

Perhaps most significantly, the temple board articulates that Arya Samajis do not need temples to worship:

‘Although Hinduism is not a religion in the Western sense of the word, there are tendencies, or directions that are similar to Christian denominations. The oldest, and to our followers, the most important direction is the Arsha Dharma or Sanatan Dharm. The Arsha Dharma gave birth to the oldest holy scriptures: the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagvadgita. Thus the Arsha Dharma is the custodian of the oldest inherited beliefs and rituals inside Hinduism...Hinduism, as we said already, is not a religion like Western Christianity. It is more like a tolerant cosmology here on earth and a relationship with the deities. There are different currents inside Hinduism and outside Hinduism that [continue to] exist next to each other. For example there the Arya Samaj, the youngest belief-system inside of Hinduism. This system accepts only the Vedas and rejects reincarnation and replaces the deity with pure spirituality...[The Arya Samaj] has no need for temples, unlike the Sanatan Dharm. They [the Arya Samaj] can come together in community centres...There are other directions [of worship] to name but none of these directions hold the old rituals as honourable as do the Arsha Dharma. No other direction inside Hinduism has such a need for a holy place for prayer, meditation and celebrations as Sanatan Dharm currents.’

While scholars have noted a tendency for many Hindu communities to embrace pan-Hindu modes of worship as an ecumenical strategy (Williams 1992, Pati 2011, Waghorne 2004, Kurien 2007, Hutter 2012, Zavos 2012b), the situation between Sanatan Dharm and Arya Samaj groups here points out what Ramey (2011) calls ‘the limits of Hindu inclusiveness’, a counter-trend where the emphasis on ‘Indian’ based Hinduism and Hindutva narratives push communities who cannot relate to such a narrative to the margins, therefore strengthening the ties between their regional and religious heritage (Ramey 2011, 210-11). This correspondence marks an instance which limits Hindu inclusivity, as forming an ‘umbrella’ or pan-Hindu organisation or alliance, an ecumenical strategy that has been a key feature of successful temples throughout the Hindu diaspora (Zavos 2012b, Williams 2012, 1988, Pati 2011, Waghorne 2004, Eisenlohr 2006). In Amsterdam Zuidoost, the limits of exclusiveness are part of the weak presence of a strategic group identity or ecumenical strategy. Rather than focus on the financial benefits of a strategic grouping with Arya Samaj followers, the temple board actors are more concerned with controlling which kind of Hindu should be permitted to participate in templeisation processes. The necessity of temple space becomes an important aspect in limiting who is considered a Hindu: As the Arya Samaj can congregate in ‘community space’ (Rambaran 1991), their sense of identity is far less tied to the actualisation of a temple centre in the area.

What is more, the temple board is not interested in associating with other groups of Hindus (be they Sanatan Dharm or Arya Samaj) who do not live in the area:

'The Hindu community in Amsterdam Zuidoost is in need, not the whole country. We cannot immediately house the [Hindu] communities of the whole country in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The planned space and cost is barely sufficient for the community in Amsterdam Zuidoost.'

Recalling the stakes involved in producing Amsterdam Zuidoost as a Hindu neighbourhood, the limits of inclusiveness also extend to those neighbourhoods of Hindus outside of Amsterdam Zuidoost. Like the earlier correspondence regarding the limits of inclusiveness in relation to Arya Samaj practitioners, this narrative register excludes all 'other Hindus' in the Netherlands. Boldly contradicting and undermining earlier appeals to 'co-countrymen', the temple board actors here exclude the idea of an underlying 'Hindu' identity that may help establish a purpose-built temple in the neighbourhood.

Part II has so far explored the construction of Hindu identity in relation to templeisation processes from the point of view of elite temple board actors' correspondence. The letters written to the local government to convince them to support a purpose-built Hindu temple ignore building policy parameters and legal constraints and instead develop a dialogue around their perceived hurt at the hands of the colonial government and greater Dutch society. Central to this hurt is the idea that the government is constantly interfering in the representation of Hinduism to the wider public. Although the narrative registers that articulate this hurt are often contradictory and at times even unfounded, it constructs a powerful image of a disenfranchised 'Hindu community', whose lifelong hardships are symbolised especially through its lack of a temple.

Chapter 5 moves forward to the critical event of May 2010: the closing of the DD temple space that was temporarily made available. It looks at how media actors and community actors shift the narrative of victimisation so that 'the community'--those Hindus practicing at the DD temple-- are victims not of their circumstance as former indentured labourers, but of their own deceptive temple board. In this case, the affective strategy of Hindu hurt emphasises the corpothetic (Pinney 2004) elements of the mediatised narratives of the evacuation of the temporary temple space in 2010.