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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 6: COMMUNITY-BASED NARRATIVE REGISTERS OF HINDU HURT (2010-2015)

### ‘Rules are Rules’: The Aftermath of 2010

While Chapter 4 and 5 have so far focused on the ways in which community actors have been set apart as victims of their temple board and the decisions of the local district government, I found that my respondents also built their narratives of the ‘selfish temple board’ by focusing on their wish to ‘follow the rules and laws’ that the local district government had laid out. While the community indeed suffered without a temple, they did not expect to be allowed to stay in a space that the law had ordered them to evacuate.

As Sheela told me, she had been put in a difficult position as the DD temple closed. Although she had stayed on to try and find a solution to the order to evict the temporary temple space, she had begun worshipping at LSHT after it opened. Although she found the closing of DD traumatic, she also maintained that people had to ‘obey the rules’. She felt a tremendous sense of loss as she helped to pack up the temple space that day in 2010, but she did not feel as if the government had ‘done wrong’ against the community—rather, it was the community, and particularly the temple board, who had not acted appropriately and not respected the legal parameters within which the temple issue fell. She had started to worship at another temple because ‘a temple is a temple—it doesn’t matter where it is or who runs it, it is a place to come together’.

Sheela’s opinion that ‘rules are rules’ came up very often among those of my respondents who felt that the DD office had closed because of negligence on the part of the temple board. This led some to have conflicting emotions about the events, such as Tina’s.

Tina felt that she had the necessary skills (familiarisation with Dutch laws and the needs of the community) to begin a ‘new chapter in DD temple experience’ as she described it to me. This meant that the ‘old ways of complaining’ would have to be abandoned, and rules would have to be respected, especially by moving the deities and evacuating the temporary space. At the same time, she felt that there was a history of ignoring the plight of Hindus as they tried to build their temple in Amsterdam Zuidoost. ‘We are the minority among the minority’, she told me more than once. Yet, she felt that this problem was created not only by local district government’s supposed ‘favouritism’ of Ghanaian and Muslim religious groupings, it was the ‘old temple board’ that had exacerbated the problem with the local district government by ‘refusing to acknowledge the rules’.

As Sieta also argued, those members of the old temple board who tried to ask for a temple space from the local district government were driven wholly ‘by their own egos’ and not at all by the wishes of the community. She felt that not only did the community want their own temple

space, but many people did not want ‘hand outs’, nor did they see themselves as ex-colonised victims:

*‘This is only the view of a few, certain people...If you should honour people, you should honour them, they were the people that first started the temple under a tree, but they should have been sensible...You should not get sentimental and lose everything [that you have been given]...The government will not help you [build a temple] you have to do it yourself!’*

Sieta summarised the position of the old temple board as being ‘sick in the head with power’. Indeed, I had heard this from Srinivas, a male respondent in his late 40s who was also very involved in the relocation process of DD temple. When I asked him about some of the narrative registers that appeared in the correspondence, he became visibly agitated, and warned me not to believe ‘everything that these sick people write’. When I asked him to elaborate upon what he meant by ‘sick’, he told me that earlier, temple board members were only interested in projecting themselves as the ‘leaders of the community’, and felt that they ‘did not have to obey the rules’. Srinivas was particularly convinced that ‘we would still have DD temple if those people were not in charge’.

It is clear that many of the current community members involved in the DD temple contest the narrative registers that early temple board actors constructed through the correspondence with the local government between 1988-1996. However, it is also clear that community actors feel conflicted: while they may not agree that they occupy an ‘ex-colonised’ position, they do feel that they have been overlooked by the local district government. Yet, it was never made clear to me how the local government had overlooked the Hindu community. When pressed to substantiate such claims, community actors cited the fact that other communities had successfully built up religious buildings, while the Hindus still waited to build their temple.

In this way, the lack of knowledge about the zoning plans and national law prohibiting the intervention in religious building projects persists today beyond those elite board members who entered into correspondence with the local district government. There are still many in the community that are misinformed about the role the government can play in the temple—although, as I will demonstrate in chapter 8, this is something that has changed significantly since 2010.

Now, I turn back to elaborate further upon the role of the ‘old temple board’ in the closing of the temporary DD temple space. The following sections will explore the new symbolic boundaries set up between the ‘old’ way of thinking and visions of the future of temple building in the neighbourhood.

### **Lachmon Syndrome: Bureaucratic Indifference and Moral Capital**

As we have seen in chapter 4, the temple board took on the very prominent responsibility of producing and inscribing Hindu identity through their correspondence with the local district

government. However, chapter 5 demonstrates how the media played a large role in ‘demonising’ the temple board and setting out a boundary between the greater community and temple board members and the beginning of chapter 6 has laid out how current community actors feel that the temple board, not the local government, was responsible for the closing of the temple.

As I continue to unpack the narrative register of the ‘selfish temple board’, I suggest here that the temple board is viewed in similar ways to an unwieldy and ineffective bureaucratic body. Much like Weberian ideas of modern bureaucracy and the growth of administrative tasks across factions of society, the temple board is a body that values power for power’s sake (Weber in Blokland 2006, 40). The bureaucrat, for Weber, much like the temple board member, is one who values ‘professional secrecy’ in order to hold on that power, keeping ‘their knowledge and intention to themselves’ (*ibid.*).

This analogy is of course rather novel: the temple board, as I introduced in chapter 4, acts as a *representative* body for the community, rather than a body that works in-between the state and society. A bureaucrat is seen as detached from representation, focused only on the rules and administration that govern and order a state (Herzfeld 1992). At the same time, however, the temple board shares with bureaucracies the role of working closely with government actors, and presiding over the administrative tasks of temple spaces. I argue there that while a key feature of the modern Hindu temple as a ‘civil institution’ (Waghorne 2004) is the increased ‘bureacratism’ of temples, this is not only in relation to the administrative tasks it handles, but the symbolic structure of the temple board as a disinterested and ‘unconnected’ body (Herzfeld 1992, 77) in relation to the wider temple community it represents.

In Amsterdam Zuidoost, the pressure to develop and maintain temple organisations has led to increasing value placed on the formation of temple boards run by a chairman<sup>69</sup>. As van der Burg and van der Veer (1986) note, the Hindustani organisations in the Netherlands that were started because of government subsidies to ethnic welfare organisations made it so that many organisations started and ended quickly with very little regulation over how finances should be spent or how the committee should be organised. Their research also recalls the struggles between members of the community who vie for positions of power (526-7).

When I spoke to Tina about the organisation of the temple board and the way she felt the closure had been handled, she mentioned that the ‘old temple board was dysfunctional, as they represented the interests of only a few people:

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<sup>69</sup> I use ‘chairman’ rather than the gender neutral ‘chairperson’ because even today, temples throughout the Netherlands overwhelmingly have men as the head of their boards (Choenni 2015, 80).

*‘Behind an organisation is always one person...And if that person has a bad name in the community...No one will want to work with that organisation...A change was very important in the temple board, also the community wanted that change...The temple board is responsible for the whole thing [the closing of the DD temple]...A few people created this situation...And they don’t want to give up their position [on the temple board]...Some people think that if you’re a chairman, you have some position in the community...But they have problems with [handing over the position on the board] ...And even if you are aware that you are responsible for the temple closing, you still want to stay in that position. You want to hand over the position to your son or daughter. You see it [serving on the temple board] as a business! This kind of thinking is what should change.’*

On a separate occasion, I spoke to Sharlinie, who had not stayed with the DD community when it moved to an office space. As I mentioned in chapter 3, Sharlinie disapproved of the decision to move to the office in the first place. Sharlinie was a committed volunteer so she found the events leading up to the closing particularly traumatic. Having worked so tirelessly for the temple community, she was shocked that she and other members of the community could have been manipulated by the temple board and left without a temple space. Although she had since moved on to worship at another temple, I could see the anger and sadness on her face as she described how the temple’s ‘power-hungry’ temple board had reduced the DD temple community to nothing:

*‘All they did is [collect] money money money...Everyone asked ‘When do we build?’...They had a lot of chances to build a temple...But they were playing ‘boss’...Everybody believed them because they talked nicely to everybody. Everybody liked them...The temple board said ‘We’re going to do this, we’re going to do that’. Everyone thought ‘Yes, the temple will come, the temple will come!’ Everyone believed him[ the former chairman]...They gave them everything that they wanted...A few of us go to SSD temple now...But DD temple was very, very, nice. You felt at home. For years I cried. I was sick of it...I hated the people [involved in the temple board]. They had a lot of chances to build a temple. But everybody wants power...’*

In his recent discussion of Hindustani organisations, Choenni (2015) describes the tendencies Tina and Sharlinie bring forward in Hindu organisations as ‘Lachmon Syndrome’, named after the long-serving Hindustani politician in Suriname, Jagernath Lachmon<sup>70</sup>. The

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<sup>70</sup> Jagernath Lachmon was leader of various Surinamese political parties, most famously the VHP, the United Hindustani Party, beginning in 1949. He was the first Hindustani lawyer to practice in Suriname and presided over the second largest political party and the official opposition around the time of independence. Lachmon’s hold on the VHP was strong; he wielded significant power within the country and the party (Dew 1978, 75) see also Ramsoedh (2001, 96-9), van der Burg and van der Veer (1986, 521).

tendency is for (mostly male) appointed chairmen to stay in their position for many years, as it demonstrates a position of prominence and power within the community. Often, the chairman will appoint members from his own family so that some measure of control can be concentrated in a family unit. Most importantly, the chairman often falls into a position of complacency, as the idea of democratic elections in Hindustani organisations is virtually absent (79-80).

Tina and Sharlinie's comments both illustrate that members of the temple board wish to hold onto their position in order to hold onto their power. Kurien (2007) recognises that positions on boards and committees reinforce socio-economic power among her upper-middle class respondents in America (79). However, in the case of the DD community, members of the community of working class background held these positions, and the power is more so a 'marker of dignity' (Dickey 2013, 218-19) rather than a reinforcement of upper-middle class status.

### *The Narrative Register of the 'Secretive Temple Board'*

As the Weberian analysis of bureaucracy points out, the way that bureaucratic power is guaranteed is through secrecy (Weber in Blokland 2006, 40). Kurien (2007) notes that issues over secrecy and the democratic running of a Hindu temple are heated topics in 'temple politics'. In particular, her research highlights how accusations about secretive and undemocratic behaviour were publicly enacted through exchanges in local American Indian newspapers (97), leading to legal interventions.

As my respondents narrated to me, the temple board had 'acted in secret' directly after the closing of the DD temple. I discussed these issues Maya: As I mentioned in the previous chapter, she and her mother, Sharlinie, had attended DD temple since she was 12 years old--every Sunday until it closed:

*'After it closed you could really see that it hurt people...It was such a shame how it happened...And after it happened it was like 'Here you go! It happened again!'...Again it happened just because of money or the organisation doing things wrong, things aren't open, even the government doesn't tell [the temple board] everything that's going on...'*

When I asked her to explain what she meant by 'again', she mentioned that it was the 'same story': that a few people that thought they were 'community elites' operated in secret and did not involve the community in any decision making.

There was also a sense of secrecy surrounding the reason why the temple board did not pay to reserve a plot of land even though funds had been raised within the community. A long time devotee named Trishna, a woman in her 50s, told me quietly that: *No one knows what really happened...Money was stolen—I think'*. This uncertainty around why the DD temple had to close is one of the key elements of the narrative of victimisation that the community perpetuates, framed

in a strict boundary between the temple board as insiders dealing in secret with money and politics, while the outsiders, or devotees proceed with their lives, going to the temple, blissfully unaware of its impending closure.

Sheryl, who now visited SSD temple told me that ‘The reason we don’t have DD temple anymore is because of people from the temple board’. She maintained that the local district government was doing their job and that it was the duty of the temple board to make sure that a proper place was found to build the new temple. I found that many people who had begun to visit other temples in the area felt this way. Although on the one hand they told me they cried when the temple closed, they also felt that the situation was inevitable because of their temple board. In the end, the closure was caused by mismanagement, greed and deceit on the part of the temple board, not the local district government.

At worst, the local district government may not have tried ‘hard enough’ to come to a solution, but it was not their responsibility, Maya told me, to report back to the community—that was the responsibility of the temple board.

Although many volunteers and community members were demanding answers to where their money had gone, or how the temple board had failed to use their money to secure a plot of land, the temple board continued to be an insider organisation that operated in secret. Sharlinie recalled for me the way that a new group of people appointed themselves as the temple board shortly after the court ruling to evacuate the temporary space was announced:

*‘It was like a coup! They must be ashamed, [of themselves] they did a temple-coup! They go and get rid of the old temple board, and a new person becomes the chairman. I consulted with a friend of mine...she said ‘Come together and put the pressure on the city council...[say that] you have to give the place to us because we’ve been here 15, 20, years...This is yours now!’ But the new people [on the temple board] didn’t want to...’*

Here, Sharlinie highlights again that temple boards, even the newly, self-appointed board, still acts according to their own wishes. Rather than think about what is best for the community, their priorities are not to ‘keep Hindus together’ in a time of great disruption and trauma.

#### **‘They Moved Them in the Dead of Night’: Moving the Deities as an Articulation of Secrecy**

One of the most controversial and traumatic events for many of my respondents occurred when the newly, self-appointed temple board attempted to move the deities from the Devi Dhaam temple space. The narrative register of the ‘selfish temple board’ became intimately tied to aspects of this story—particularly their secrecy and their lack of respect for the gods in favour of their own interests and whims.

Removing the deities was highly controversial: they had been installed by a priest and could not simply be taken out of the temple as there were strict rituals that had to be followed. As

long as they remained inside the temple, the local government would not demolish the small building or attempt to move the deities themselves, as this would cause major controversy at a volatile time: the media had already accused the local district government of being insensitive.

During an emotional interview, Sharlinie narrated the event for me:

*'At 7'o clock, [a member of the temple board] hired cars to pick up the murtis at night. I got a call in Utrecht [from a devotee] that someone is coming to take the murtis [deities] away. In secret! I drove 140 km from Utrecht and I came down to them stopped I yelled down to them: 'How can you think that you are the owner of the murtis? Because you are the chairman?'...They were doing it in secret...When I reached Engeldonk [area with the temple] the police came and stopped all the cars...We stopped them [the temple board] from secretly taking the murtis away.'*

Another account from Sieta told a similar narrative:

*'What I didn't know was that when I was away for the weekend, [a member of the self-appointed temple board] decided to move the deities. Not the temple community, not the temple board [as a whole] but one person [from the temple board] decided. How can one person decide to move the deities? They have a temple board! I can't decide, you can't decide, the temple board must decide! They have to make the decision together.'*

Both Sharlinie and Sieta's account of the day that the deities were almost taken demonstrate that the temple board was 'acting in secret', without any regard for the community's well being. They also point out that at the time of the closure, rather than come together as a visible and united group of 'Hindus', people in the community scrambled to occupy positions of power. The problem is articulated not with moving the deities itself, but that the decision to do so was hidden from the community.

Sieta's account also highlights an important aspect of the distance between 'temple board' and 'community.' Although a committee, the temple board often acts under the guidance of one prominent personality. When I discussed the DD temple board and the closing of the temple with Sieta, she drew a distinction between the community who had donated money and those members of the temple board who had used their funds for their own self-interest:

*There are many Hindus living in Zuidoost. They have donated lots of money to the temple. All the money from the temple is gone. Every time, every time, there is no report given to the police...They donated murtis, money...The temple board was a family clique. They went and built more houses in Suriname, meanwhile they are working in a garage! But there was no research into where the money had gone and never had they kept records of what had happened. All these sorts of things, this is typical. We as Hindus put our trust in one person, and that person misuses it...It is totally not difficult to come together, if you remove everyone's egos...There was a temple board, but the temple board didn't decide anything, one person decided it! How that can be, I*

*don't know...They said, 'Oh the local district government is doing wrong!' They made a sensation in front of the camera...The local government did not do anything wrong, they were working under the law...There are so many people, especially elderly people...They are the believers but [now] they are so disillusioned by this kind of behaviour [of temple boards].'*

Community members go to lengths to distance themselves from temple board members that they felt had shut them out of decision-making processes. Many felt that the temple board was the reason they did not have a temple today, and others felt that this was just another sad story in a long line of deceptions in the community perpetrated by temple boards.

### **What Ought to Be: Narrative Registers of the Ideal Temple Board**

Based on their traumatic experiences, the community also revealed to me strong opinions of how a temple board should ideally operate in the future. Continuing to see the role of the temple board member as a marker of dignity, an emphasis on education, public speaking and leadership skills, as well as a commitment to transparent representation became apparent. Tina, who had always referred to the importance of well-educated representatives, felt that there is now a marked change in the outlook and backgrounds of DD community members:

*'...If we are ever in the position to have the ground back [for DD temple] it is because of our network...If you look at the new people visiting the temple [office space], it is the well educated people...Some internal change will happen in the temple. My grandmother expected different things than I expect [from a temple board]...*

Although Tina was actively involved in the new temple board and in bringing about the change she felt it so greatly needed, she took care to identify herself with the community, 'we', and to discuss the temple board as 'they' or 'them'. She also told me that the temple board shares a fundamentally different set of values than she did—wanting only to pass their position as chairman down to sons and daughters (see above).

The idea of a 'good temple board and good leader' that is capable also came up when Don discussed his views on how to actualise plans for a purpose-built temple:

*'If you have a good temple board, have good people and have a good leader and can speak to the government then you can find a good place to make a temple...That's why you need people to fight.'*

When speaking about the lack of relationship between the community and the temple board, Don again stressed that Hindus are not 'victims'. When I spoke to Don about the role community actors outside of the temple board had to play in the closing of the DD temple, he was adamant that the role of temple-building cannot fall to the temple board alone. While he agreed that the Hindu community had 'suffered', he did not accept that this suffering had to do with being economically and socially disenfranchised. Like many community actors, Don considered the

Hindu community to be a ‘successful’ grouping that had a high level of education and wealth. He instead framed Hindu hurt as a profoundly in-group issue related to a lack of solidarity among community actors themselves, and between community actors and temple board members, which has made it so difficult to establish a purpose-built temple in Amsterdam Zuidoost:

*‘The community in Amsterdam Zuidoost has a very big mouth to talk, but when it comes to donating, volunteering, they can’t. And this is one of the biggest problems of trying to build a temple...If there was a good temple built by the community, then I’d go more often...I find that the temple board from DD was not capable to fight against the government. They haven’t enough resistance fighters and they don’t speak in an intellectual manner... And the community did not stand behind the temple board. They should stand up and protest...This also comes from the idea that the temple board did not have a bond with the community. This is one of the most important things, they had no link...The whole community should pull together...I have the feeling that the community is still not behind the temple board...The fighting spirit is not there. It is only a small group, the culturally minded have a fighting spirit. But we need leaders. We need a leader who can really inspire. We see it in India, they supported Modi. We have to fight for our identity, the Hindu identity...’*

The direct reference to current BJP Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, who has openly associated himself with the RSS points to a specific vision of Hindu group identity that is also important to articulations of diaspora Hindutva. The constant anxieties of being too weak or divided in order to act in solidarity (cf. Anderson 2015, 51, see also section 6.4) can be remedied by a charismatic leader. Not only should a leader be able to attract a following, members of the community should be willing to support the representatives of the community.

Don’s comments on solidarity were not isolated: many of my respondents spoke about its importance, or the problems that arose because it did not exist. Below, I consider the ways that my respondents view solidarity as part of their Hindu dharma, and ultimately connect their experiences with templeisation to the articulation of solidarity as an aspect of Hindu identity.

### **Redefining Dharma<sup>71</sup>: The Narrative Register of ‘Solidarity as Duty’**

The value placed on solidarity is framed as an aspect of dharma. The idea of solidarity as duty emerges as another powerful register that undermines that of the ‘helpless coolie victim’, and the idea that the ‘selfish temple board’ made victims out of community actors who trusted them to find an appropriate temple space. The fact that Hindus in the neighbourhood could not come

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<sup>71</sup> It is outside the scope of this dissertation to fully flesh out the many interpretations of this term, in the vein of Warrior (2010) and Sippy (2012) I treat the term as a signifier of moral duty articulated in religious terms. However, as I will show in Part III, what is considered one’s dharma also relates to civic and political terms. What is more, dharma in the diaspora Hindu context is often articulated based on the everyday realities of life rather than abstract religious principles.

together as a group under the label ‘Hindu’ was expressed to me as a failure to do one’s duty as a Hindu.

As Zavos (2012) notes, the ‘lack of unity’ narrative is a prevalent motif in militant and nationalist Hindu politics in Hindu diaspora communities in Europe. After the desecration of a deity at a temple in Wembley in 2003, the British diaspora Hindu newspaper *Asian Voice* reported that members of the community had witnessed the desecration without intervening (83-4). A similar attack occurred in the Hague in 2010, when a group of young men identified by the temple’s priests had urinated on murtis in the temple’s gardens (Choenni 2015, 210). The priest mentioned that he was not scared of such acts and that he was had weapons near the door and chased the young men away. However, while he was prepared to fight for the temple, community actors did not use this instance as a moment around which to mobilise.

I also find it useful to draw another comparison to Warriar’s (2010) study of the Skanda Vale Bull controversy. Similarly, the campaign used dharma as a powerful mobilising factor, where dharma was framed as part of the fight in solidarity to protect Shambo, the bull infected with Bovine Tuberculosis, and ‘adharma’ as letting the government and health officials decide the fate of their bull on their own terms. As Warriar notes, these frames of ‘dharma’ and ‘adharma’ corresponded to a Hindu code of morality and ethics that the community must uphold and protect (267).

Sippy (2012) also details how protecting dharma has become a key mobilising factor among public protests among Hindus in America. She recalls receiving various emails that implied that dharma was being attacked when planning an academic conference on representations of Hinduism, which she argues presents a curious disconnect between the image of a strong, eternal Hindu dharma on the one hand, and a fragile dharma that must be protected, on the other (34).

The 2010 closure of DD temple space has led community members in Amsterdam Zuidoost to view group solidarity as an aspect of their Hindu dharma. The DD community is concerned with protecting dharma from those within the community—temple boards, priests, self-interested individuals—who do not prioritise the development of a united Hindu community. The idea that dharma is in general a sense of loyalty and solidarity with fellow citizens was well contextualized by Don, who connected solidarity not only as what ought to occur between community members, but as a religious and moral duty:

*‘Dharma makes you strong...[It makes you] think of your fellow people...I think it is good that I’m a Hindu...I have a sense of duty, that is one of the things. I am not here alone, I am here with my fellow-men, and I am inclined to help many people...Dharma and culture are one thing, right? Because I carry the culture of my ancestors with me, that reinforces my dharma. But, it also*

*strengthens me to deal with the culture here [In the Netherlands]. I look for the good things of these cultures, and I apply that in my life...'*

Don went on to lament the fact that the Hindu community did not make the same connections he did between dharma and the rights guaranteed to Dutch Hindu citizens:

*'It is a part of your dharma [to fight] because you have rights. You have the right to your belief in Hinduism. It is your right according to the laws here [in the Netherlands]. Anyone can make a school, anyone can make a temple or church that is the law, and that is why you have to fight for your right [to build a temple]. That is also dharma, fighting for your rights...'*

At first glance, it may appear contradictory that Don mentions that 'anyone can build a temple' according to 'law', given that earlier I presented his critique of community members who did not understand the legal implications of trying to protect the DD temple space. However, as he mentions, dharma is not just a sense of duty inherited from Hindu principles, but one that is also compatible and dependent upon the laws and cultures of the Netherlands.

As my respondents began to open up to me about the circumstances around the DD temple closure, dharma-as-solidarity became a key register of Hindu hurt that was strategically mobilised to justify the community's lack of a temple space, much like earlier registers of victimisation had done. I also observed that now, the register had shifted to point out how community members victimise themselves and do not have the will to come together as a strategic group in the first place. I noticed that such a register conveniently absolved some of respondents from taking greater responsibility for the closing of the DD temporary space.

Maya felt that what held Hindus back in the community had little to do with their history as former indentured labourers, as now the community 'studied hard' and 'was focused on making money'. It was not their place historically as victims vis a vis Dutch society, but that they think dharma is about making money and being successfully integrated, rather than acting in solidarity with fellow Hindus:

*'That is a big difference between our communities and other communities, because you have you have other communities that don't say and [but] do, but in our communities there's nothing like doing, only saying, at least what I've seen. That's also why we still don't have one big temple while we have so many big mosques...Because we don't unite...The Hindustani community in Holland, they have always wanted to be like the rest. They always want to adapt a lot...And if it would be possible they would disappear in the Dutch community. So I think for them, they say I don't want my kids to be all the way [sic] dharma-focused. To them [Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost], that's danger...We need to going, hanging out with the Dutch and having the values of the Dutch as well...'*

Maya's comments were striking to me, given that she had earlier told me that, although she had come to the Netherlands as a young girl and had some trouble adjusting, she felt now that she was at 'home' and felt 'more or less like a Dutch person'. These comments were not uncommon among my second-generation respondents, who felt that the Netherlands, in some way was 'home' and the place to which they could most easily relate. However, ideally, as Maya's comments illustrate above, a Hindu in the Netherlands should not let their values 'disappear' and should work towards being active and uniting with other Hindus.

I suggest that Maya's comments should be construed as a window into the ambivalent relationship the Hindu community in Amsterdam Zuidoost has with the idea of integration into Dutch society. The 'pressure' to integrate, as Maya said, directly conflicted again with the image of the well-educated model minority who can simultaneously possess Dutch values and one's ancient Hindu/Indian culture<sup>72</sup>. Ideally, Maya felt that Hindus 'should be Hindus first', especially in times when the community is 'suffering'. However, the pressure to focus on individual success makes it difficult for many Hindus to understand how important solidarity actually is. At the same time, she noted to me that these are the same people who are angry that they still do not have a purpose-built temple in the neighbourhood. The problems, she said, lay mostly within the community itself: once people understood the importance of solidarity to Hinduism, it would become possible to build a temple in the neighbourhood.

#### ***What Could Have Been: Articulations of Solidarity as an 'Ideal'***

As I mentioned at the beginning of chapter 6, there are many community actors who contest the need to protest the DD closure, as they feel that the evacuation is legally justified. However, some members remained fervently committed to the case, on the grounds that a holy space can never be moved, despite being told that rules had been broken.

In her capacity as a volunteer at DD temple, Sharlinie was particularly upset with the lack of solidarity the DD community showed. She explained to me that she had tried to organise protests, but was met with little support. She spoke to me about how she imagined solidarity across the Hindu community would have saved the temple:

*'Who is the local government?! We have our murtis there [In the DD temple]... how [will] they haul the murtis out of there? They wouldn't move them, because Holland doesn't want a problem with Indians. We have to fight for this place... [I said] everyday we'll stay here with 100 people, I want to see the police come in... 100 people! We stay here, we sleep here. We are together. I wanted to see that happening... I called the chairmen of all the temples, I called the*

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<sup>72</sup> Choenni (2011, 2015) refers to this as 'Integration, Hindustani style', where the values of hard work, sobriety and thrift are related to strong roots in ancient Indian culture—compatible with the demands and values of Dutch society (45).

*temple board of the Sanatan Dharm... They must help us! I called everyone [and said]... We are making a protest: 'They can't make us move, we began here, this is Devi Dhaam, you can't move the murtis from there' ...I said, we should stay [in DD temple], we cook there, we stay there, then we'd see what kind of government would come with a bulldozer [if we did that]... I made so many protests, I wanted every religion to help us...Indian people, Surinamese people, yoga people, [RSS] shakha ...we should have [gathered] their signatures!'*

Sharlinie was particularly upset that no one had felt it was their duty to join the DD community in their protest. She told me that every community felt 'safe' with their own temple or public space and did not feel the need to involve themselves with 'other Hindus'. Here, Sharlinie articulates her longing for a strategic essentialism (Spivak 1988) that undermines the elite temple board members' previous visions of locality-based Hindu exclusivism: Perhaps an inclusive Hindu identity could have been the basis for a successful protest against government eviction.

After the DD temple space was ordered to evacuate, Tina felt that there was 'too much effort' spent trying to communicate to Hindus in the community that they should come together to re-establish the DD temple space. She recalled many wasted evenings trying to plan meetings, only to have members of the community cancel them or refuse to attend:

*'I know you have to work together to get somewhere... But one of the main important things is the agreements, appointments that you make with each other, you have to fulfil them. And you can fool me one time, two times, three times, but it's not acceptable for me... Our goal [those who supported DD] was you know, to make one community... They [the other temples] know I am fighting [for the land back]!...People are busy with their own things. People are not active...People are too much behind material things to say 'Let's put our time and energy to the well being of society or community' ...Temple is always a community. By the community, for the community! From the moment I stand up from my chair, til now, I'm active [to re-establish DD temple]'*.

I observed also that lack of solidarity is a reoccurring anxiety in relation to the engagement of younger generations in temple activities<sup>73</sup>, as they blamed the events of May 2010 and the lack of solidarity that followed as a major deterrent for young people to get involved in temple activities. As Mr. Chandra told me, the impetus behind LSHT is to 'attract young people back to their culture' after the trauma of the DD closing. While he remained optimistic that his attempts to

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<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to recall chapter 3, where the temple board actors also expressed concerns about younger generations 'losing their way' without a temple space in which to come together. Indeed, the concern about second and third generation youth and their place in the temple has been a recurring theme among many of my respondents. While this research project is concerned with those who attend temples, future research into those younger generations who do *not* attend temple spaces would be a valuable complement to this project.

unite young people in his temple space were working, Sieta was not as optimistic, and felt that all the fighting and lack of solidarity during the time of the DD closing had permanently scarred young people:

*Younger people are seeing what is happening [in the temples] and they're saying 'This has nothing to do with me'...the older people maybe are more 'believers' and they say 'Okay we have to find a place where we can go back to our roots', and the young people are saying 'Oh, they're fighting again? What is this about? They [the community] can't join with each other?' and they're leaving. So we're losing a lot of our youth because of this circus. You know, 'til now none of these organisations has shown me that they are working for the community, one by one they go for[work for] their own ego...With their mouth they're talking about doing things for the community...It should be transparent, you should be giving to the community...saying 'I'm going to do it for the community'.*

#### **'They Were Too Divided': Civil Servant Actors' Narratives of Solidarity as Duty**

Finally, it is important to note that, although not articulated expressly through the language of 'dharma', I found that opinions of stakeholders outside of the community also mirrored these ideas of 'duty' to operate officially as a well-defined group wishing to establish a public space of worship. This is couched in a more legal-moral sense, that may including 'swallowing pride' and working together as a community in order to meet the legal requirements necessary to establish a purpose-built temple.

When I spoke to Jan and Jelle about the constant struggle to build a temple, they made it clear that the community did not come across as strong or united to the Chamber of Commerce or to the local district government. Jan mentioned that:

*'...There was never a moment when they said 'We together are going to build a new temple'. The political wish [on the part of the local district government] was that we wanted to build this temple...It was also always not clear who were the spokespeople of the temple board. We say, 'we'll go to the Chamber of Commerce', and there were other people there [instead of the original temple board], they [the temple board] changed always...We got the feeling that they do not trust the government, but we also got the feeling they do not trust each other...It's not that the government doesn't trust the Hindu community, it's just that nothing happened [with the initiative]...For sure, there was the wish to do it [build a temple] but they did not have the power to do it...They were too divided'.*

Jan and Jelle both maintained that there was 'a lot of power in working together', and found it puzzling that there was so much resistance to co-operating within the community. As Jan mentioned to me, he felt that working with Muslim communities was 'much easier' as 'they can come together to get a project done'. The same struggle for solidarity, according to Jan, was not

apparent, at least to civil servant actors who were involved in facilitating mosque-building processes.

As Jelle told me, what was most puzzling about the lack of solidarity is that the limitations of inclusiveness that temple board actors and some community members imposed upon themselves were self-harming, as co-operation eased the financial burden. Money for a temple space could have been raised much earlier and then, as he understood it, the ‘problem of not having a temple would not be there’.

As the DD community came to terms with their loss of their temple space, they articulated their trauma through narrative registers of the ‘selfish temple board’ as well as the ‘divided Hindu community’. Upon reflection, members of the community inscribed group solidarity as a key aspect of their religious duty and have become vocal about electing new board members and representatives that understand how integral group solidarity is to the process of templeisation in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

#### **Stichting Temple Organisatie (SMO) and ‘Hindu Co-operation’**

I now turn my attention to one of the most significant developments that came out of the DD closing in 2010: the creation of the first umbrella organisation in the neighbourhood dedicated to building a temple, because it marks a powerful reversal of many narrative registers constructed by temple board actors that emphasis hurt, suffering and trauma to focus on healing through ‘co-operation’.

In 2011, as DD community was still dealing with the aftermath of losing their temple, members of the temple board, although newly (self) appointed, began to search for viable options in order to quickly establish a temple space in the neighbourhood. The local district government decided to call in an independent expert to assess if there would be a possibility, over a short term, to develop a *community-built and community used* temple space in Amsterdam Zuidoost. The emphasis here was clear, as a member working on the DD temple case told me, as the local government was not prepared to provide a temple unless it would serve the greater Hindu community in the area.

Abandoning the limits of Hindu inclusiveness drawn by the temple board in the 1990s, the new temple board and other community members agreed to create an umbrella organisation, made up of four organisations, including the DD community and Asamai.

Such public Hindu organisations play a crucial role in monitoring and controlling how Hindu identity may be projected or appropriated by those ‘outside’ of the community (Zavos 2008, Chaudhuri 2012, Khanduri 2012, Reddy 2012). Zavos (2008, 2012) notes that the Hindu umbrella organisations in Britain ‘project themselves as public authorities on Hindu-ness and as the voice of a community of people...’ (71). As extension of the multiethnic and multicultural character of

Britain, public Hindu religiosity has become increasingly caught up with having a social and political stake in the affairs of the nation-state (71-2). Kurien (2007, 2012) and Sippy (2012) note that members who support the idea of controlling and contesting how Indian and Hindu culture is represented in the public sphere often strengthen American Hindu umbrella organisations.

However, the case in Amsterdam Zuidoost is markedly different. Rather than an ecumenical strategy that is initiated by community actors, it was only after the suggestion of a third party actor that such an umbrella organisation came into being. This also represented a major disruption of issues of Hindu identity and templeisation in the 1990s, as the limits of inclusiveness put forward by DD temple board actors are abandoned. Also, the issue of representation by outsiders which had outraged the temple board actors during the 1980s and 1990s did not seem to pose a threat anymore, as the third party's advice was readily taken by the DD community and other Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

The third-party report begins by reiterating that the community actors themselves wish to work together, and that such co-operation is key to establishing a successful temple:

*Looking back at this dossier, the talks have made clear to me that things have not always operated well. Because of sometimes very unfortunate events, the parties involved are uncertain about what to do and it is unclear what the local district government's policy goals are. With some people this has even led to straight out suspicion and distrust. This is why the dossier has become even more complex than it should have been... A project like this needs well-structured, open discussion between the different Hindu groups in which understanding is shown and respect grows for the diversity that exists within Hinduism. In the talks with groups and persons the moral and practical reservations against the communal use of a temple by different groups has always been discussed...'*

Here, the report inscribes respect and openness as key features of the templeisation process. It goes on to articulate how trauma and distrust in the community can be erased through co-operation:

*'This positive view is confirmed and accentuated by the open and constructive character of the talk that day. On the ground of these positive signals, one can conclude that the quickscan shows that there are no insurmountable moral or practical problems to the building of a communal temple...It would be incorrect however to conclude on the basis of these signals that the building of a temple risk-free. The support for the project is still weak...There should be a forum created in which the involved Hindu communities have the possibility to think about the architecture and the use the maintenance of the to-be-built temple without pressure from the outside. In such a forum, the Hindu groups can explore together solutions for the practical issues*

*that are connected and that will come up later. The support for a community temple can be improved by talks about the solutions to these practical issues.'*

The third party continually refers to the project as 'communal', stressing that it must be used across sectarian differences, yet it must respect the limits of inclusiveness that have been an obstacle in the past. This in and of itself becomes an act of co-operation: the dialogue that will ensue over a community-used temple will serve to heal the trauma of past problems with templeisation processes.

The report goes on to describe the importance of solidarity in the building of a community temple and the very different stakes that the local district government actors and community actors have in the project. At the same time, the third party actor again refers to the anxieties of losing influence over second and third generation Hindus:

*'If the local district government wants to promote the building of a community-use temple in Zuidoost then it will have to acknowledge that a building like that will be seen as a house of celebration and prayer by the Hindu communities involved. This means that every Hindu community should have the possibility to worship according to its own tradition and live and teach that to the next generation. The preservation of identity is a defining condition of a communal temple for every religious community [involved]... That means that a community temple can only function when the different faiths and religions and traditions of the participating organisations are mutually respected and acknowledged. At the same time, this acknowledgement and respect has far reaching consequences for the construction and the use of the building... It is not normal that outsiders are substantially involved in finding solutions for problems that are riddled with religious sensitivities...'*

The third party explicitly cites co-operation within the community as a desirable end in itself. There is also a strongly articulated boundary between insider and outsider involvement: *'...For the involved Hindu groups the to be built temple however in the first place is a house of celebration and prayer, for the local district government it is most of all a building project that accentuates and underlines the cultural diversity of the district Zuidoost. That's why it is within the right of the local district government to inquire about the cultural appearance and social effect that the initiators try to achieve with the temple...'*

Here, the report acknowledges that the local district government has a stake in the temple building process as a production of locality, as it should be concerned with how public Hinduism is represented in a multicultural neighbourhood such as Amsterdam Zuidoost. Both the Hindu community (comprised of various groups) and the local government are therefore described as actors in future templeisation processes. At the same time, a boundary is drawn between the Hindu community who is in charge with the social and cultural function inside the building, and the

government, who is charge of the outward appearance of the building in relation to its neighbourhood surroundings.

As Sunier (2009) has noted in mosque-building processes in the Netherlands, these sorts of divisions are typical and seen as ideal conditions for the swift actualisation of projects. It is the case that the government sees the issue as one of urban planning more so than cultural or social diversity (168). Well-received mosque-building plans (whether they come to fruition or not) are often those that strive to be part of the Dutch landscape through their architectural choices<sup>74</sup> (172, Verkaaik 2012).

Verkaaik (2012) notes in his discussion of mosque-building processes in the city of Almere that various mosque committee actors described their desire to build an ‘anti-mosque’ (166) to refer to ‘mosques that do not look like mosques’ (*ibid.*) and that fit into the architectural norms of Dutch cities, including using ‘Dutch’ materials like brick (*ibid.*, 168). While Verkaaik’s research demonstrates how Muslim community actors themselves wish to initiate design plans that are in line with Dutch norms of design, the report from the third party actor makes clear that this should be the role of the local district government—controlling the outer appearance of the temple, while the community busies itself with the emic task of developing sacred and community-used spaces.

This also implies that the local district government should be working closely with an appointed architect who will eventually design the building. While no mention is specifically made of architecture, it is legally required that an architect rather than community members be called in to design new religious buildings, in keeping with Dutch urban planning permissions about the uniformity of neighbourhoods. This of course erases the dreams of a grand, towering temple and cultural centre that was proposed in the 1990s. Like those working on mosque building projects in Almere, it will become crucial for the community to adapt their visions to the parameters of Dutch architecture.

The report continues to stress the importance of solidarity and co-operation across the diverse Hindu communities, and ends by recommending that this co-operation be symbolised through the formation of an umbrella organisation. The report ends with a somewhat radical suggestion, in light of the early opposition to the idea of a Pan-Hindu identity, to develop an umbrella organisation:

*‘...We have added the suggestion to start a foundation through which the temple board can enter into talks with the local district government about the building of a new temple. The temple board of the foundation should not only be looking at the right place where a temple could be built but*

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<sup>74</sup> Civil servants working on the temple case also expressed to me that a temple cannot be placed anywhere in a city because it cannot ‘interrupt’ the flow of a neighbourhood: a large, towering temple in the middle of a row of honeycomb apartments or newly constructed semi-detached houses would not ‘suit’ the neighbourhood.

*also decide about construction and furnishings...The temple organisation should control the use of the community temple...In anticipation of creating the foundation, the following agreements have been reached. The appointed temple board of the temple foundation should first contact the temple board of the local district government to see if the locations that the local district government have deemed fitting for a temple conform to the demands of the Hindu tradition...'*

Although this recommendation undermines earlier refusals to accept the idea of a community used temple space, the community actors present during the meeting with the expert third party responded positively and decided to form the Temple Organisation Foundation (SMO) to work towards building a temple in Amsterdam Zuidoost.

While I do argue that the report has created a shift in the development of a public Hindu identity, I do so with caution, as it remains to be seen how effective this 'umbrella' identity will be in the future, and for how long such a sense of co-operation will last. It also remains to be seen how the community will deal with such an order to co-operate. Below, I explore my respondents' views on the idea of a co-operative umbrella organisation and the register of 'healing through co-operation'.

#### ***Narratives of 'Contested Co-operation'***

As the SMO umbrella organisation is a 'top-down' rather than community-initiated vision, many members across various temple spaces are skeptical of the SMO as a viable ecumenical strategy, given the history and animosity between people who are now expected to come together and work. One of the most distressing elements is the fact that the SMO is not built on any actually existing solidarity.

Some of the more wary reactions have been from members of Asamai. When I spoke to two Asamai temple board members named Naren and Rahul, they told me that the SMO was created for the government rather than for the community, in order to advance various groups' goals to have a purpose built temple. It is an easier, cost-effective way to go about building a bigger temple and moving past the current stage of templeisation. As they told me, the government had no idea who 'Asamai' was, or any of the smaller temple communities, they instead identified these groups as 'Hindu', so it was important to conform to this identity in order to move into a purpose-built temple.

Another aspect that Naren and Rahul continually stressed is that the SMO would support one community-purpose temple, but that did not mean they would worship together. As it would be impossible to make four front doors, there would be one entrance to four separate, autonomous Hindu spaces. 'The only thing we will share is the front door', Rahul had said to me during one of my first interviews at Asamai, implying that the SMO umbrella organisation symbolises less of an

actual move towards a universally represented Hindu identity, but more of a strategic use of terms that the government can understand that will benefit each individual group.

Members of the community are also skeptical about the work that the SMO can carry out because the organisation is built upon strategy rather than solidarity. What is more, the umbrella organisation reproduces the structure of other foundations that have been flawed in the past, especially the temple board. After struggling for years to establish a temple with an open, honest, proactive temple board, Sieta was cynical about how effective SMO could possibly be, if it were to operate with the same sort of temple board that had existed at DD temple:

*They [the Hindu community] were forced by local district government [to work together]. The local district government said 'We are not going to built four mandirs in Zuidoost. We can build one temple. You have to work together to build one temple.' Also because of the costs...I was not there when SMO was built up, I am not there working with them, I don't know what qualities are there. For me it is more important what they are doing for the community...If you are a community thing, do your community thing, what is good for the people. If you are not doing that, then I am certainly someone who will ask my questions...I am one of the community...For me it is not important who is doing it, but what they are doing...We all fulfill our own job in the community. What I am trying to do now is search for 'Where is the missing link? Where is the cement of this community?' Who can it be? For sure I know that if you are going to look more closely, you can see people who have no affection for each other ...'*

Here, Sieta emphasises that 'co-operation' has proven to be futile in templeisation processes so far. Again, she articulates her problems with co-operation as a lack of solidarity, which makes it difficult for her to feel confident that a temple will 'ever be built in Amsterdam Zuidoost'.

It is also important to note that the SMO does not reflect a joining together (however strategically) of the four functioning temple spaces of Amsterdam Zuidoost as outlined in chapter 3. As Sieta had told me in her experience, the chairman of LSHT had refused to work with the SMO, which she felt was an understandable position:

*They were asked to join SMO but the chairman doesn't want to...they said 'In that group, I'll never be successful'. Maybe he's right. He has a small place over there and he can receive his people, and he is the only boss, he can do as he likes, and working together—I don't know if this is a minor point of him [sic, A weak point in his character], or because he has seen how it is happening and he said 'Okay, at least I have a temple here'...*

Indeed, the chairman reiterated Sieta's observations to me, and felt that first of all, his nature was such that he worked best within his own vision, and that he liked to be in control of his projects. He jokingly reminisced about working under someone at a temple in England and that he

raised enough money and support to open his own temple as soon as it was possible. He was not keen to join with any other members of the community to share a temple space, as he felt that his community was tightly knit. He also felt that attaching himself to a community without a temple space was a step backwards. He was focused on expanding his own group of temples in Aruba, England and Canada, rather than joining up with other temples in the Netherlands.

Similarly, Mr. Ravi of SSD temple space felt that aligning his community with SMO was a risky idea: it could potentially undermine all the hard work he had put in to establishing a his temple space as one specifically geared towards his specific views of Hinduism. He felt that his own space, even though it was not purpose built, was a powerful symbol of how Hinduism had ‘become part’ of Amsterdam Zuidoost.

Those who are aware of the new plans to build the DD temple are somewhat skeptical about the SMO and the space that will supposedly be established. As Sharlinie told me, she would be ‘curious to go to the opening ceremony’ of the new DD temple, but was not convinced that that day would ever truly come.

As Payal told me, any space claiming to be a ‘new DD’ would ‘never be the same’ as the temple in which she had played and worshipped as a child. Even though she said that a move to a purpose-built space instead of the office space would be better, she would hesitate to even call that space the DD temple. In the end, many of my respondents feel that the government pressure to form SMO is an indication of a last resort rather than the sign of a new form of Hindu co-operation and ‘Hindu identity’ in the Netherlands.

At the same time, optimism runs high among respondents who see this as a way to right the past wrongs that had been done during the 2010 closure of the DD temple. As Don had told me earlier, he felt that terms like ‘brāhman’, ‘Arya Samaj’ and ‘Sanatan Dharm’ only serve to divide the community. He told me that ‘the only thing that matters is the fact that we are Hindus’. He felt that working together to build a temple had always been the only available option to the community, and was glad that it was finally happening.

Tina also felt that the SMO was the greatest sign that the new DD temple board actors and community actors had made a break with the ‘old way of thinking’. Rather than perpetuate the conflict between Arya Samaj and Sanatan Dharm, the SMO ‘shows the world that we are Hindus and that is the most important thing for us’. Even though the initiative had been brought about by a third party actor she claimed that it was the community itself that had ‘taken up this idea in the first place’ and made it ‘the most important’ part of the move towards establishing a new temple space. ‘The goddess is going home, and we’re going to be there for her, like a family’, she told me proudly.

