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# Being Tamil, being Hindu: Tamil migrants' negotiations of the absence of Tamil Hindu spaces in the West Midlands and South West of England

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**ABSTRACT** This paper considers the religious practices of Tamil Hindus who have settled in the West Midlands and South West of England in order to explore how devotees of a specific ethno-regional Hindu tradition with a well-established UK infrastructure in the site of its adherents' population density adapt their religious practices in settlement areas which lack this infrastructure. Unlike the majority of the UK Tamil population who live in the London area, the participants in this study did not have ready access to an ethno-religious infrastructure of Tamil-orientated temples<sup>1</sup> and public rituals. The paper examines two means by which this absence was addressed as well as the intersections and negotiations of religion and ethnicity these entailed: firstly, Tamil Hindus' attendance of temples in their local area which are orientated towards a broadly imagined Hindu constituency or which cater to a non-Tamil ethno-linguistic or sectarian community; and, secondly, through the 'DIY' performance of ethnicised Hindu ritual in non-institutional settings.

**KEY WORDS:** Tamils; Hinduism; migration; ethnicity; religion; ritual

## Introduction

Reena<sup>2</sup>, -a woman in her thirties from the Tamil-majority region of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka-migrated to the UK 12 years ago. After spending several years in an area of London where she was surrounded by Tamil neighbours, she moved with her husband and children to a town in the South West of England, drawn by lower house prices and a more affordable lease for the family's grocery business. Like the majority of religiously active Tamils, Reena is a Saivite<sup>3</sup> Hindu, and my visit to her

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<sup>1</sup>For simplicity, the English term 'temple' is used in preference to the Tamil *Kōvil* or the Sanskrit *Mandir*. My use of other Tamil terms follows the transliteration suggested by the University of Madras' Tamil Lexicon.

<sup>2</sup>Participants' names are pseudonyms.

<sup>3</sup>Venerating the God Siva.

home had begun with a viewing of the family's *pūjā* (worship) area: an alcove in the spare bedroom which had been transformed into a space for devotion through the addition of colourful pictures of Hindu deities. As we discussed the role of religion in her everyday life, Reena spoke with enthusiasm about the Tamil-run Hindu temples that dotted London – a feature of life in the capital that she sorely missed in her current home. When I asked if she had ever visited the small Hindu temple housed within a former church hall which I had noticed in the town centre, she replied:

I went two or three times, but I didn't feel like this is my temple – a sad feeling like that. Because where we're from it is different. They are Gujaratis and they use the colourful [stone], but our God is always dark colours stone, and *pūjā* is different there. That's the reasons in my mind that it's not fixed as my temple.<sup>4</sup>

From Reena's perspective, being Hindu was closely bound with a sense of ethno-linguistic identification – with being Tamil – echoing Eulberg's (2014, 124, emphasis in original) observation that amongst Tamil Hindu migrants in Switzerland '*Tamilness* is ... as important as *Hinduness* ... Tamil Hindu traditions are mostly seen as part of Tamil culture.' But unlike Eulberg's respondents<sup>5</sup>, Reena's relocation to a town where the number of Tamil families could be 'counted on two hands', meant that temples which observed this specifically Tamil mode of Hinduness were not readily available. Reena's attempt to negotiate this absence by worshipping within a temple run by Vaishnavite<sup>6</sup> Gujaratis – the majority within the small local Hindu population – which I had passed earlier in the day had proved unsatisfactory, and even emotionally unsettling, due to that temple's divergence from the aesthetic and ritual familiarity of the Tamil temples in which she had worshipped in northern Sri Lanka and, latterly, in London.

Although containing elements of orthopraxy common to Saivites across the sub-continent, a number of features differentiate the mode of Hinduism followed by most Tamils, which combines Saiva Siddhanta philosophy with the mysticism of the Tamil Bhakti saints. Saivism in the Tamil regions is marked by a strong devotion to the God Murugan, whose cult-worship pre-dates Aryan influence (Clothey 1978, 23–34), but who, through a process of 'Sanskritisation', entered the pantheon as one and the same as Skanda – warrior son of Siva and Parvati (Flood 1996, 129). Tamil Nadu and the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka are additionally home to rich 'little traditions'<sup>7</sup> which focus devotion on a host of 'village deities'. These include numerous localised manifestations of Amman (the Mother), and 'Fierce Gods' with

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<sup>4</sup>Levels of fluency in English varied amongst participants in this research, and my treatment of the 'imperfect' English of some follows Laurie et al. (2011), who refrained from correcting the linguistic idiosyncrasies of their Nepali research participants in data presentation, in recognition of English as a globalised language with different and valid forms which reflect the contexts of its speakers.

<sup>5</sup>As Eulberg (2014, 119–120) reports, in contrast with the UK, but in common with several other northern and western European states, Sri Lankan Tamils form the largest South Asian migrant population within Switzerland. Consequently, the Hindu 'temple public' is simultaneously an ethnicised 'Tamil public'.

<sup>6</sup>Venerating Vishnu in his multiple forms.

<sup>7</sup>Hinduism has been conceived as comprising the 'great tradition' of the Sanskritic texts, alongside 'little' or 'folk' traditions of worship of local deities – a distinction articulated by the anthropologists Redfield and Marriot in the 1950s (Stewart 2002, 406), but more recently problematised (in relation to Hinduism and other world religions) as an abstract categorisation which has little resonance with the lived religious experience of devotees (Vertovec 2000, 40; Werbner 1998, 5).

'violent origins and vengeful natures' who 'may protect or attack' the humans who fall within their 'hot gaze' (Mines 2010, 232–237). The regionalised version of Saivite Hinduism has become closely bound with expressions of Tamil ethnic identity, and in both Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, Murugan, through his pre-Sanskritic/Aryan origins, has become a figurehead of Tamil cultural resistance to threatening external forces; be this Sinhalese nationalism or a hegemonic North Indian-centric state (Geaves 2007a, 35, 57–89; Waghorne 2004, 228). Tamil ethnic and religious identities are also closely intertwined at a more everyday level. In an ethnography of rural Jaffna for instance, Suseendirajah (1980, 347, quoted in Fuglerud 1999, 162) observed that villagers answered the query 'what is your religion?' with 'Tamil': 'Religion could not be conceptually separated from language – Tamil language and Saivism are ... for them two sides of the same coin', while Geaves (2007a) recounts a similar conversation with a Tamil Hindu taxi driver in Malaysia. The temples of Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka also differ architecturally from those in more northerly parts of the subcontinent. Ornately carved towers (*gōpura*) mark gateways into the temple complex and shrines, while deity images are usually carved from black granite (as described by Reena), as opposed to the colourful or pale images common elsewhere (Dempsey 2006, 3–4; Michell 2000, 88).

Like the friends and neighbours Reena and her family had left behind, the majority of Tamils in the UK continue to live in the Greater London area, with this population concentration allowing the development of an ethno-religious infrastructure of Tamil-orientated temples which incorporate many of the regionalised specificities described above (Geaves 2007a, 173–195; Taylor 1994, 195–211; Waghorne 2004, 196–225).<sup>8</sup> London is also home to a growing number of public Tamil Hindu ritual events, such as chariot processions where the deity is removed from her/his home within the temple and paraded through the streets, 'dissolving the boundaries that normally prevail between divinity and humanity' (Nabokov 2000, 8–9). A procession I attended in north London was a colourful and noisy affair, necessitating the closure of roads and an army of volunteer stewards. To the accompaniment of drums, horns and the chanting of the crowd, Murugan was carried through the streets upon an adorned palanquin, while devotees performed *vrata* – fulfilling a vow of obligation to the deity by carrying a *kāvaḍi* (burden). Women carried *pāl kāvaḍi* (a pot filled with milk) upon their heads, whilst two men, barefoot, clad in *vēṣṭis* (sarongs), and shouldering heavy and elaborately decorated wooden frames, performed a trance-like dance at the head of the procession, having earlier endured piercing by small silver spears through their cheeks and the flesh of their backs.<sup>9</sup>

Unsurprisingly given this rich ethno-religious landscape, most existing work on Tamil Hindu religiosity in the UK has focused on London (David 2007, 2008, 2009,

<sup>8</sup>At the time of writing, an Internet search and anecdotal information from informants revealed there to be at least 20 Tamil-run Hindu temples in the Greater London area. One of these, the Sri Murugan Temple in East Ham, is purpose built in the traditional architectural style, while the others are housed in a variety of converted premises. Construction of a second purpose-built temple (also in East Ham) began in 2014.

<sup>9</sup>These suggest the *vēl* (spear) carried by Murugan. The fulfilment of *vrata* through piercing (*vēl kāvaḍi*) or through other forms of endurance such as fire-walking is undertaken 'in a painless trance in which Murugan is seen as lending his own strength and vigour to those who are truly devoted to him' (Frazier and Flood 2011, 277; see also Clothey 2006, 181–183). For further description of the rituals accompanying a Tamil chariot procession with *kāvaḍi* in London see David (2012b, 456–458).

2012a, 2012b; Taylor 1994; Waghorne 2004).<sup>10</sup> While the prevalence of Tamil-run Hindu temples in London may preclude the need for Tamil Hindus to worship in temples orientated towards a different ethno-linguistic or sectarian tradition, this was not the case in the fieldwork locations of this research – the West Midlands and South West of England – where Tamils' population density is low. In these locations Tamil Hindus were unable to access regularly a Tamil-orientated temple, and this paper is the first to explore ways in which this absence is negotiated in these non-London locales. For some participants, temple visits were no longer a regular routine, but had become an infrequent occurrence, entailing a trip to London. Others had taken a 'DIY' approach by participating in small-scale collective acts of ritual and ceremony within the setting of ethnic community associations. Alternatively, Tamils worshipped (or had attempted to worship) in spaces orientated towards other ethno-linguistic Hindu communities in their local area (most often Gujaratis). While in some cases the unfamiliarity of the versions of devotion encountered in these temples was overcome through a focus on a connecting bond of broadly understood Hinduness, for other participants, like Reena, the difference in the aesthetics and modalities of devotion that they encountered in these spaces precluded a sense of de-ethnicised, faith-based identification: instead, Hinduness and Tamilness remained inseparably intertwined.

## The context of the study

### *Religion, ethnicity and diaspora*

Momentarily broadening our lens beyond the Tamil Hindu case shows that religion and ethnicity have a close but complex relationship. Religion has the potential to supersede other modes of identification such as language or statehood as a primary marker of belonging or exclusion<sup>11</sup>, while in other cases religion is figured as synonymous with ethnicity, or reinforces ethnic identification.<sup>12</sup> This complex relationship is transposed to sites of migrant settlement. Religion may buttress an ethnicised diasporic identification, as transnational religion is one tangible means through which links are maintained to the place of origin (Beckford 2000; Brettell 2003, 83–91; Levitt 2001, 10). The religious spaces established by migrants in settlement sites can additionally become a nexus for interaction with co-ethnics through the reproduction of practices familiar from the common homeland(s) (David 2012b, 463; Vásquez 2010, 132), with such 'ethnic congregations' functioning as spaces where community is created, as platforms for claim-making, and as access points to the resources and networks required to transition to life in a new society (Bonifacio and Angeles 2010, 1;

<sup>10</sup>An exception is work on The Community of the Many Names of God (or Skanda Vale) in rural Wales by Geaves (2007a, 2007b) and Warriar (2010), which I will discuss later in the paper.

<sup>11</sup>Examples include the religion-based population transfers between Greece and Turkey in the early 20th century (Brubaker et al. 2006, 239), the re-definition of Punjabis as Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs during the bloody Partition of the South Asian subcontinent (Enloe 2006, 201), and tensions between white, working-class Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (Aldridge 2007, 150–152).

<sup>12</sup>Enloe (2006, 199–200), for instance, observes that 'to be born Croat is to be born Catholic', Brubaker et al. (2006, 278) report the 'strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity and the central role of churches as agents of socialisation' amongst the Romanian majority and Hungarian minority in the Transylvanian city of Cluj, while agitation towards an independent Khalistan relies on Sikhs being distinguished from Hindu Punjabis (Brass 2006, 88).

Goulbourne et al. 2010, 106–108; Johnson et al. 2010, 219; Pasura 2012, 37–40). But the capital stemming from religious commonality is not limited to ethnically bound social spheres. It can also provide ‘space for engagement’ and ‘opportunities to cross social boundaries and forge ties’ with the ethnic majority in the state of settlement, or with other minority populations (Bonifacio and Angeles 2010, 5–6; Glick Schiller, Çağlar, and Guldbrandsen 2006; McLoughlin 2010, 542). Other scholarship documents a trend towards a displacement of ethnic identification by religion, in particular amongst second- and third-generation descendants of Muslim migrants who embrace a universalised Islam detached from cultural, ethnic or national particularities (Bendixsen 2010, 95; see also Eade and Garbin 2006; McLoughlin 2010, 575). In the British context, religious identification has been encouraged by the identity politics of multiculturalism, within which ‘faith communities’ have been viewed by government as a means of engaging with minorities. While commentary on this phenomenon has focused on Muslims (for example, Ahmad and Evergeti 2010; McLoughlin 2010), Knott (2009) highlights how the desire for a seat at the public-policy table motivated the development of UK Hindu representational bodies cross-cutting linguistic, ethnic and caste differences, while in her study of British Hindu youth groups, Raj (2000) attributes moves towards a universalising Hindu identity to resistance to racialised categories which young Hindus perceived as conflating them with stigmatised Muslims (‘Asians’) or positioning them as foreigners despite their status as UK citizens (‘Indians’).

Religion, then, potentially offers Hindus in the UK a faith-based identity alternate to, or experienced alongside ethno-linguistic identifications. A scholarly debate around migrants’ religious practice has concerned whether dispersed populations with religious commonality can appropriately be described as ‘diasporas’ (McLoughlin 2010, 540). The possibility of ‘religious diasporas’ is contested, with Cohen (1997, 189) arguing that only Jews and Sikhs may be identified as such, as these faiths comprise ‘discrete ethnic groups’ with tangible homeland orientations in the Zionist and Khalistan movements. Others have countered that Cohen’s definitional parameters are overly limiting, arguing that a homeland orientation may be expressed through symbolic or aesthetic attachments and need not involve a ‘myth of return’, as, for example, between globally dispersed Zoroastrians and ancient Persia (Hinnells 2005). Within similar terms, Vertovec (2000, 10) has argued that Hinduism’s ‘inextricable roots in the social system and the land of India’, and a tendency amongst Hindus to sacralise India as a ‘spiritual homeland’ makes the characterisation of a ‘Hindu diaspora’ plausible. But as Nesbitt has highlighted, any discussion of a ‘Hindu diaspora’ must necessarily recognise that this designation needs ‘decoding’, in terms of ‘the ethnicity (Gujarati, Punjabi, etc.) of those involved, and their *sampradya* (a tradition focused on a deity, often regional in character)’ (Nesbitt 2006, 196; see also Baumann 1998, 99–100). Hindus in the UK are highly diverse in terms of language, ethnicity, caste and migration histories, and hold ‘differing cosmological and philosophical beliefs’ (Knott 1987, 159–160) – most centrally in following either the Vaishnavite or Saivite tradition – and the relationship between ethnicity, *sampradya* and broader Hindu identity has played out in varying ways throughout the history of Hinduism in the UK, and particularly in the establishment of Hindu institutions. Bowen (1987) for example, identifies the organisational trajectory of Hinduism amongst Gujaratis in Bradford: from initially seeking commonality with other Hindu migrants to the emergence of more specified formations on the basis of translocal identities, devotional

preferences and caste, through to an ultimate re-assertion of broader commonality in order to form outward-facing representative bodies (Bowen 1987). Vertovec meanwhile, has described the 'possible trajectories of specific sub-traditions' as:

- (1) remaining intact, as represented by processes of community 'fission' ... ; (2) homogenizing parochial forms through lowest common denominators of belief and practice (as developed within Hinduism in the Caribbean) ... ; (3) promoting a kind of ecumenism, in which a number of forms co-exist under a kind of umbrella organization ... ; (4) universalizing a specific form (such as the Hinduism of the VHP [Vishva Hindu Parishad]) by claiming it to be all-encompassing; and (5) cosmopolitanism, whereby the possibility of multiple, successive forms is celebrated. (Vertovic 2004, 34–35)

While, writing in the 1990s, Vertovec (1995, 146) characterised UK Hinduism as 'segmentary ... reflecting traditions specific to provenance, caste and sect that are practised and institutionalised' – option 1 within the above model, others have recognised that diasporic religious spaces and practices, as well as 'reproduc[ing] caste/ethnic/regional distinctiveness' may also re-negotiate boundaries (Nesbitt 2006, 200–201). Eck (writing on the North American context, but with equal applicability to the UK) observes that, 'in some areas there are sufficient numbers of immigrants or a sufficiently strong sectarian identity to enable a regional or sectarian group to form a temple that virtually replicates what they have known back home', while in locales where populations are less numerous or concentrated, 'Hindu immigrants ... have had to negotiate a wider sense of "we"' (Eck 2000, 224) by finding means of transcending ethnic and sectarian difference. In Leeds for example, the city's first temple was established to cater to Gujarati *and* Punjabi Hindus, neither of whom had sufficient numbers to fund and establish a temple by themselves (Knott 1986, 1987) – a situation mirrored by the initial 'seeking commonality' stage of Bowen's (1987) trajectory model of Hindu organisation in nearby Bradford. So too, the demographics of migrant settlement have led to the emergence of unfamiliar religious formations *within* ethno-linguistic Hindu communities: for example, the mixing of Gujaratis of different castes, and of those who migrated to the UK from East Africa with direct arrivals from India in Coventry's Shree Krishna Temple (Jackson 1981). Writing in the late 1980s, Knott (1987, 157) argues that the context of Hinduism in the UK offers researchers 'an opportunity to examine the question of religious change', to explore 'what happens to a tradition when it moves to a new geographical and social location'. The questions Knott poses and addresses (along with other scholars) through empirical work – 'has [Hinduism] remained unchanged? Been engulfed by other ways of being? Developed new forms' (157) – are explored here, in relation to the Tamil Hindu case, at a new register: how do devotees of a specific ethno-regional Hindu tradition with a well-established UK infrastructure in the site of its adherents' population density (London) adapt or negotiate their religious practices when they move onward to areas which lack this infrastructure, and where, if a local Hindu infrastructure *is* present, it is dominated by the norms of a different ethno-linguistic or sectarian Hindu tradition? Taking Tamil Hindus in the West Midlands and South West as a case study, the study explored a range of responses to the local absence of ethnicised religious spaces, the strategies developed to negate or rectify this absence, and the consequences for the relationship between these migrants' ethnic and religious identities.



### *The study*

Like the Tamil population itself, the regionalised Saivite Hinduism described earlier in the paper transcends state borders, and is practised in South India, northern Sri Lanka and the South East Asian, African and Mascarene sites of the colonial-era diaspora, while more recent migrations have carried these traditions to the Global North. It is usual for research on Tamils in the UK to focus on the numerically superior Sri Lankan Tamil section of the population, but this study involved Tamil participants of diverse state origins, including Sri Lankan, but also Indian, and in much smaller numbers, Malaysian and Singaporean.<sup>13</sup> I conducted fieldwork in towns and cities in the West Midlands and South West of England between 2010 and 2012, including interviews and observational research in community associations and places of worship as part of broader project concerned with diverse forms of identification amongst Tamil migrants (Jones 2013). Of the 56 Tamils interviewed (individually and in groups) for this project, 38 self-identified as practising Hindus<sup>14</sup>, and it is the narratives and experiences of this sub-sample which inform this paper. Of these, 17 originated in Sri Lanka, 19 in Tamil Nadu, and two in Malaysia or Singapore.<sup>15</sup>

The extent to which Tamil migrants of diverse state origins can be considered part of a 'Tamil diaspora' or 'community' is complex and contested. I have found Werbner's (2002) notion of diaspora as both an 'aesthetic' and 'moral' community to be a useful framework for assessing this issue, with my recent research (Jones 2013, 2015) suggesting that Tamil migrants of diverse state origins subscribed relatively unproblematically to a trans-state Tamil diaspora when understood in aesthetic terms: 'the flow of mass popular cultural products from the subcontinent, and by nostalgic reinscription in ritual and ceremonial of the pungent tastes and fragrant smells, the vivid colours and moving musical lyrics of a lost land' (Werbner 2002, 12). However, when an understanding of diaspora as a 'moral community of [transnational] co-responsibility' was introduced, identifications fractured, given the differing experiences of politicised Tamil ethnicity in the respective homelands (and consequently differing migration experiences), the centrality of the Eelam movement<sup>16</sup> to the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic sphere, and

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<sup>13</sup>No Tamils from the Mascarenes or South Africa were encountered in the South West or West Midlands in the course of this research.

<sup>14</sup>A further six stated that they were from Hindu families but were themselves atheist or agnostic, while ten were Christians (seven Roman Catholics, two Anglicans and one Pentecostal) and two were Sunni Muslims. This composition of the broader sample reflects the religious landscape of the Tamils' historical homelands. In both Tamil Nadu and the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka, Christians constitute the largest religious minority – a legacy of historical contact with Europeans (Raj and Dempsey 2002, 1). Sunni Muslims represent a smaller religious minority at around 6 percent of Tamil Nadu's population (Directorate of Census Operations 2001), while in Sri Lanka, although the Muslim population are mainly Tamil speakers, they are considered a distinct minority and were subjected to mass forced displacement by the LTTE (Wickramasinghe 2006, 263–264).

<sup>15</sup>To provide further detail of the sub-sample: the majority of Sri Lankans had either entered the UK as refugees, or as the spouses of settled refugees following a transnational marriage. Participants of other state origins had arrived as higher-education students or skilled workers, or as the spouse of a migrant in these categories. The majority of interviewees were in their twenties or thirties. Twenty-two were women and 16 were men. Seventeen resided in the West Midlands and 21 in the South West.

<sup>16</sup>Towards an independent Tamil state in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

non-Sri Lankan Tamils' conflicting views as to the extent that this long-distance nationalist project was (or should be) 'their struggle' (Jones 2014).

Following Werbner's model, diasporic religious spaces may be understood as part of the aesthetic diasporic realm, and Tamils of different state origins mingled and worshipped together in several of the religious and ritual spaces described in this paper. This replicates Waghorne's (2004, 207–214) description of the Sri Murugan and Shri Mahalakshmi temples in London as attracting Tamil devotees of a range of state origins, and of Geaves' (2007a, 205) observation that some London temples strive towards the 'creation of a uniform identity that is Tamil Hindu' and which downplays differences of geographic origin, caste and localised ritual practice. However, in other cases, temples are demarcated (officially or informally) as the domain of Tamils of particular state origins. Several London temples were described to me as 'Sri Lankan temples', while the critical mass of Tamil residents in London supports the emergence of ever more trans-localised forms of worship: for instance, the establishment of a small temple in Ilford by Mauritian Tamils to remedy, in the founder's words, 'the lack of a Mauritian touch in the way festivals were celebrated' in other Tamil temples in the London area (Sri SivaShakti 2010). Considering the ethnically and religiously diverse Nepali population of the UK, Gellner, Hausner, and Shrestha (2014, 131) write: 'Diasporas have a tendency to break up into multiple sub-diasporas, when there are sufficient numbers to support fragmentation and where there is sufficient cultural difference on which to base organisational separation.' Given that, unlike in London, the Tamil populations in this project's fieldwork sites were insufficiently large to support the development of specifically Tamil-orientated Hindu temples, it follows that there is also, at present, insufficient scope for the kinds of fragmentation seen in some cases in the London context. At the time of the research, there emerged little evidence that a particular sub-section of the local Tamil population was consistently dominant within local ethnicised religious institutions or practices, and even in those community associations (which practised 'DIY' religious rituals) which were numerically dominated by Sri Lankan Tamils (due to that sub-group's numerical dominance in the local area), Tamils of other nationalities appeared to be welcomed. As the Tamil populations encountered in this research continue to grow<sup>17</sup>, it will be valuable to monitor whether such fragmentation as has been observed in the London context and reported in relation to other diasporic religious communities in the UK occurs.

Returning to Werbner's framework, in the Tamil Hindu context, state-based particularity may also emerge when the contested realm of the moral community 'intrudes' into the aesthetic domain of religious or ritual space. Despite the LTTE's outwardly secular philosophy, which utilised language and ethnicity, rather than religion, as 'idioms of identification' (Goreau 2014, 224), during the years of conflict the organisation took pains to enmesh itself in ostensibly non-political settings which were important in the lives of diasporic Tamil communities (McDowell 1996, 33), including Hindu temples. Some London temples supported the LTTE by collecting donations and holding *pūjās* to commemorate 'Heroes Day' – an annual memorial for deceased LTTE fighters. Others faced extortion, including the extraordinary case

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<sup>17</sup>As seems likely given observable on-going processes of chain migration in these sites, as well as a broader UK trend of migrant dispersal away from traditional settlement areas (Simpson and Finney 2009).

of the Eelaptheeswarar Alayam Temple in Wembley, whose Chairman was detained by the LTTE during a visit to Jaffna and forced to sign over control of the temple and its funds (Human Rights Watch 2006, 21–22). Furthermore, Tamil religio-cultural markers were appropriated by the Eelam movement: *bharatanatyam* for instance, a devotional dance which originated in the Saivite temples of South India, has been described by David (2007, 10) as an ‘essential ingredient’ of Heroes Day events, with performances depicting a mother sacrificing her sons to the secessionist struggle. An association with the LTTE may have discouraged involvement with such temples by Tamil migrants of non-Sri Lankan state origins, some of whom are ambivalent (or hostile) towards the Eelam project (Jones 2014, 2015).

In addition to these institutional factors, there may also be differences in the meanings invested in religious devotion by diverse Tamil groups within diaspora settings given the uniquely Sri Lankan Tamil experience of violent forced migration. Jacobsen (2009, 183), for instance, argues: ‘The misfortune of Tamils in the modern nation state of Sri Lanka is an important context for understanding the religious rituals in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora’, while Ganesh (2014, 236) suggests that ‘the trauma of violent displacement from homeland with loss of property and death of relatives combined with the struggle of the new environment trigger existential crises which religion often functions to defuse.’ Although Jacobsen’s and Ganesh’s respective fieldwork locations in Norway and Germany differ from the locations of my research in that they were not a site of contact between Tamils of diverse state origins, I remain attentive to this potential difference in Tamil migrants’ responses to religious spaces and practices in the discussion that follows, which focuses on participants’ religious and ritual practices, as well as the intersections or negotiations of religion and ethnicity these entailed. I begin with consideration of participants’ use of UK Hindu temples, which occupy varying points between ethno-linguistic or sectarian particularity and broad inclusivity. I then discuss the ‘DIY’ performance of ethnicised ritual in non-institutional settings.

### Hindu temples

The most publicly visible spaces within which Hinduism is enacted in the UK setting are temples, and the establishment of temples ‘has been generally recognised as being of great social and cultural, as well as religious, value’ to the UK Hindu population (Vertovec 2000, 124). As noted earlier, the establishment of the UK’s Hindu infrastructure has, to date, involved the creation of institutions which both reproduce ethno-linguistic or sectarian specificity, or foster new collectivities. While for Tamil Hindus in the population hub of London the former was readily available, for those in my fieldwork sites, attending a local temple involved negotiating different kinds of Hindu space.

#### *A South Indian temple in the West Midlands*

One such space is the Shri Venkateswara Balaji Temple of the UK (henceforth referred to as the Balaji Temple).<sup>18</sup> Spread across a 30-acre site in the West Midlands

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<sup>18</sup>Unless otherwise stated, information in this section is gleaned from the Balaji Temple’s souvenir brochures and through conversations with devotees and trustees during visits to the temple between 2010 and 2012.

between Birmingham and Dudley, this purpose-built temple grew from the efforts of a group of Vaishnavite Telugu migrants who in the 1970s began gathering to worship Venkateswara – a form of Vishnu (also known as Balaji) – within the Gujarati-run Shree Geeta Bhawan Mandir in the Handsworth neighbourhood of Birmingham. Construction of the Balaji Temple began in 1997 following years of fundraising; the temple opened in 2000 and was formally consecrated in 2006. The site is designed as a replica of the Shri Venkateswara Temple at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, South India – an important pilgrimage site and reportedly the world’s busiest and wealthiest Hindu temple (Clothey 2006, 38).<sup>19</sup> As with its model, the West Midlands Balaji Temple’s main deity is Venkateswara. But the temple employs both Vaishnavite and Saivite priests, and the outdoor stairway to the main *gōpura* is flanked by two smaller temples: one devoted to Vinayaka (the popular elephant-headed god, known elsewhere in the subcontinent as Ganesh and to some Sri Lankan Tamils as Pillayar) and the other to Murugan. In the temple grounds, more recently constructed shrines house the Navagraha (personifications of the planets) and Siva, while an elegantly fenced pool contains a statue of Vishnu reclining atop the multi-headed serpent Ananta, whose coils represent the infinite universe. The temple commemorates the festivals of the four South Indian linguistic traditions (Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada), as well as events with broad appeal to most Hindus, such as Deepavali. While it is true that the Balaji Temple reproduces a specifically South Indian version of Hinduism (although North Indian Hindus attend in smaller numbers), it simultaneously transgresses difference through its incorporation of Vaishnavite and Saivite priests and deities. Ethno-linguistic boundaries are also straddled through the inclusion of multiple South Indian languages and ritual traditions – as in Glasgow’s Hindu Temple of Scotland (Nye 1995), and in Waghorne’s (2004, 208) account of the founding of London’s East Ham Sri Mahalakshmi temple by a ‘clearly Vaishnava “Telugu fellow”’, who nonetheless began his temple-building career by initiating another local temple dedicated to Murugan – the ‘most Tamil of Gods’. In contrast, temples such as London’s Highgate Hill Murugan Temple have been described as ‘purist’ in their maintenance of an orthodox form of Saivism ‘free from Vaishnavite influence’ (Taylor 1994, 204; see also Waghorne 2004, 199–200).

The Balaji Temple was attended by many of the Tamil participants in the study, of all state backgrounds, with the most regular visitors being those who lived nearby in the West Midlands area. One of my visits to the Balaji Temple accompanied Neriya (Sri Lankan, female, forties) and her family. Together, we circumambulated the shrines to Vinayaka, Murugan and the Navagraha, then joined the queue of devotees waiting to make offerings at the newly installed Siva *lingam*.<sup>20</sup> Later, after receiving *prasāda*<sup>21</sup> in the form of *laḍḍu* – a sweet, sticky ball of gram flour, ghee, nuts, sugar and spices famously served to devotees at the Tirupati ‘mother

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<sup>19</sup>The construction of the Balaji Temple is located within an international trend towards replica Shri Venkateswara temples, an earlier example being the Penn Hills Sri Venkateswara Temple in Pittsburgh (Clothey 2006, 30–57).

<sup>20</sup>An aniconic representation of the God. A naturally formed stone Siva *lingam* was personally escorted by the Balaji Temple’s trustees from the site of its discovery near the source of the Ganges, and installed with grand ceremony in August 2010 (BBC Black Country 2010).

<sup>21</sup>The deity’s ‘leftover food that is now imbued with his or her more purified and powerful “substances”’ (Nabokov 2000, 9).

temple' and replicated in the West Midlands temple's kitchen – we sat cross-legged on the tiled floor of the main hall, watching the Priests perform *pūjās* before the image of Venkateswara. Neriya spoke with some emotion of her attachment to the temple, describing her regular visits as 'giving a feeling of home', with the authentic architecture and performance of ritual closely resembling her experiences of worship during her childhood and young adult life in northern Sri Lanka. Other participants' narratives around the Balaji Temple focused similarly on the authenticity of the architecture and décor, as well as the material and sensory experience of devotion: Puneeth (Indian, male, twenties) for example, described how during his weekly visits to the temple 'I feel that I am back in my childhood itself ... The temple style, the sounds, the smell, the words and all ... I think I'm in a temple in India.' The temple's broadly South Indian focus and Vaishnavite main deity was received unproblematically by these Tamil Saivites: 'Only main deity is different – Vinayaka, Murugan and Siva are there' (Thiru – Sri Lankan, female, thirties).

Another UK Hindu space which can be considered in comparable terms is the Community of the Many Names of God (Skanda Vale) – an ashram in rural Wales. As Warriar (2010, 262) explains, while the majority of monks and nuns at the ashram are from Western backgrounds and profess a 'spiritual' rather than 'religious' calling, the complex's three main shrines dedicated to Vishnu, Skanda (Murugan) and Maha Shakti (The Mother) are 'identifiably Hindu, as are the pujas which the community performs at these shrines a number of times each day'. As such, Skanda Vale has developed into a popular pilgrimage site for UK Hindus, most numerous South Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil devotees of Murugan, but also Gujaratis and Bengalis whose worship focuses on the ashram's Vishnu and Shakti shrines (Geaves 2007a, 223–244). While the devotional experience offered by the ashram differs significantly from that familiar to Tamil migrants through the incorporation of alternative traditions from within and outside Hinduism, other aspects of the experience are highly authentic and represent continuity with pre-migration religious lives. As Geaves (2007a, 224) describes: 'They [Tamil Hindus] recognise the wilderness hilltop location ... as part of the familiar geography of sacred space dedicated to Murugan, the Lord of mountains and animals.'<sup>22</sup> While Skanda Vale's remote location means that it is not a suitable destination for regular worship, a comparison to migrants' experience of the Balaji Temple is instructive in emphasising the importance of aesthetic and sensory authenticity in fostering a sense of belonging to a space which is in other ways 'inauthentic' in its incorporation of numerous ethno-linguistic and sectarian traditions.

### *Negotiating 'inauthentic' religious spaces*

For Tamil Hindus in the South West of England, opportunities to partake in worship in an aesthetically authentic setting such as the Balaji Temple were more limited. No Tamil or South Indian-orientated Hindu places of worship are available, which was mentioned as a downside of life in these locations by participants.

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<sup>22</sup>An instance of diasporic religious spaces 'homologis[ing] the geographical landscape of the new homeland to that of the ancestral home' (Clothey 2006, 17; see also Dempsey 2006, 157–158; Eck 2000, 229–331).

Priya (Sri Lankan, female, thirties), who had moved from London to the South West, explained, 'I am very sad ... The temple, everything I miss it. From London to here I am very missing', while Sujantha (Sri Lankan, female, thirties), who moved to the region from Birmingham, 'like[d] to go to [the Balaji] temple – I used to – but here it's a problem with no temple'.

The Gujarati-run temples available to these Tamils differed significantly from the temples with which they were familiar in their points of origin, and amongst those participants who attended them the degree to which Eck's broad sense of Hindu 'we-ness' was experienced varied. Echoing the comments from Reena presented at the paper's outset, Keerthi (Indian, female, forties), reflected on the deviation of the local Gujarati-run temple from familiar norms of worship, particularly in its material and aesthetic forms: 'In South India all the gods are made of stone – especially the black stone, but if you go to that temple it's marble stone. And we do *pūjā* in different ways in South Indian temples.' But these concerns were superseded by a desire 'to go to temple on the proper days ... [to] not miss the auspicious days like birthdays [and] anniversaries'. For Keerthi and her family then, attending the local Gujarati-run temple was not the best option (as attending a Tamil or South Indian-orientated temple would be), but the best *available* option in maintaining the sacred rhythm of Hindu life alongside the demands of work and domestic commitments. Keerthi's acceptance of this situation was grounded in her accommodating approach to devotion: 'All gods are the same – it doesn't matter – we don't think like that. So it doesn't matter which temple.' This polytropic perspective<sup>23</sup> was shared by Priya who, although sorely missing her regular visits to Tamil-orientated temples in London, did visit the small Gujarati-run temple in the South Western town where she now lived: 'I have gone sometimes. They are different language. God is related one but it is different language so just go and pray and come ... They are worshipping Pillayar, Amman – same. Type of statue is different, but same.' Puneeth, who visited Birmingham's Gujarati-run Shree Geeta Bhawan Mandir (which is located near his home) several times a week in addition to his weekend visits to the Balaji Temple, similarly explained that 'North Indian gods are the same ones – just looking a bit different.' For these devotees, a lack of participation in a specifically Tamil Hindu space did not result in a reduction in ethnic identification *per se*, despite the powerful potential, acknowledged in the literature (for example, David 2012b, 463; Vásquez 2010, 132), for ethnic congregations to buttress ethnic or diasporic identities. Rather, these participants continued to proactively express and maintain their Tamilness in other spheres of diasporic life – through involvement in ethnic community associations or, in the case of some Sri Lankan Tamils, via long-distance activism towards ethnicised political objectives in the homeland – whilst simultaneously identifying with a more broadly defined Hinduness in negotiating their engagement with local non-Tamil Hindu spaces.

For other participants, worshipping in a setting influenced by unfamiliar ethno-linguistic traditions had proved more problematic. Rukhi (Sri Lankan, female, forties) had visited the Gujarati-run temple in her South Western city once, but had not returned despite it being 'the best one for us to get to' as 'it's not an actual temple', contrasting this with the 'proper' Balaji Temple or London

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<sup>23</sup>[S]tressing the unity of divinity beyond apparent differences' (Gallo 2014, 15).

temples. Ravitha (Sri Lankan, female, thirties), who occasionally travels to the Balaji Temple and Tamil-run temples in London, was insistent that there was 'no Hindu temple' in her South Western city. When, in the face of her on-going incredulity, I showed her the website of a nearby Gujarati-run temple, she responded, 'Oh – that one. But that's not our sort of temple', conceiving of her Hindu faith as closely bound with ethno-linguistic identification. The importance of familiarity, as experienced through aesthetics, materiality and ritual content, was articulated by Camali (Sri Lankan, female, forties), a resident of the South West who travelled for several hours to visit the Balaji Temple or London's Tamil-run Ealing Amman Temple on special occasions. Like Reena, Camali was troubled by the aesthetic unfamiliarity of her local Gujarati-run temple, which she explained she did not attend as it was 'too different'. She preferred to 'just do my *pūjā* at home' the 'way I know' and where she could 'feel the blessing'. Here the unfamiliarity encountered at the Gujarati-run temple seemed to disrupt the relationship with the deity and thus the effectiveness and power of devotion, with emotionally unsettling consequences. Writing on Hindu migration to the UK, Knott has highlighted how in the South Asian context, 'generally speaking religion [had been] practised without question. It remained unarticulated. This was only natural when it was part of the fabric of everyday life.' The process of migration and settlement in a non-majority Hindu locale had disrupted this unselfconsciousness: 'when one religion comes into contact with another, and its beliefs, practices, and values become open to question in the new social contexts, the adherents of that religion become increasingly aware of its content' (Knott 1987, 160–161). A comparable process can be seen to be taking place in this case – not through the juxtaposition of these Tamils' Hinduism with the customs and values of a non-Hindu majority, but through exposure to the divergent aesthetic and ritual norms of a non-Tamil or South Indian version of Hinduism. Within the aesthetic and sensory familiarity of the Balaji Temple and London's Tamil-run temples the pervasive 'Tamilness' (or 'South Indian-ness') of the modes of worship practised mean that ethnicity can be unmarked: 'normal, default, taken-for-granted' (Brubaker et al. 2006, 211). But in visiting Gujarati-run temples where the aesthetics of the temple and mode of worship differ, both Tamilness and 'Gujarati-ness' become marked through their otherness from one another (212). While for some participants such as Keerthi and Priya, identification with an overarching Hinduness proved sufficient to negate these differences, for others, like Reena and Camali, it did not.

### **Making sacred space**

An alternate means by which Tamil Hindus negotiated the absence of Tamil-orientated temples was the creation of temporary space for ritual within usually non-sacred settings, and two such transformations and subsequent rituals in these spaces are described below.

#### ***Saraswati Pūjā in the church hall and Poṅgal in the car park***

Saraswati is the Hindu Goddess of knowledge, and her festival falls in the English autumn, towards the close of Navarati: the nine-day festival of the Goddess in her multiple forms. The celebration of the festival by a Tamil community association in the South West of England included a programme of *bharatanatyam* and musical

performances by the members' children, but was marked apart from the group's other regular 'cultural programmes' through the addition of a *pūjā* to the Goddess. The group meet in a hired church hall, and this usually beige-toned setting was transformed for the festival. The women of the association arrived early with armfuls of supermarket-bought bouquets and set to work stripping them of their blooms. These were carefully strung onto garlands and the loose petals collected on paper plates to be scattered during the *pūjā*. A table was covered with a red tablecloth to form a shrine, and held a gold-framed image of the Goddess alongside lamps, offerings of rice and fruits, and school textbooks – symbolising thanks for the gift of education and the hope of blessing in future educational endeavours. No priest was present, so devotional chanting was led by a parent volunteer and echoed by the children, who took turns to scatter petals about the deity images, while a teenaged boy – clad in the priestly garb of a white, embroidery-edged *vēṣṭi* – was entrusted with the task of circling the burning *ārati* lamp before the deity image for the duration of the *pūjā*. In a break with the group's normal use of the hall, everyone had removed their shoes at the door, mirroring the practice on entering a temple and thus reinforcing its temporary elevation to sacred space.

A few months later I joined the same group to celebrate Poṅgal – the Tamil festival which venerates the natural world, and which culminates in the boiling over of a pot of sweet, milky rice in symbolism of nature's bounty. Poṅgal is traditionally celebrated outdoors with the rice boiled over an open fire, and falls in the Western month of January. I thus found myself, alongside the association's members and their children, huddling in the church hall's car park on a bitterly cold (but thankfully dry) afternoon. Again, an unremarkable space had been transformed through the introduction of ritual items. Chalk *kolams*<sup>24</sup> had been drawn on the tarmac and offerings arranged on a printed oilcloth, while the rice was heated over an outdoor fireplace constructed from breezeblocks and placed on a sheet of tin foil to avoid scorching the car park's surface. A male committee member, *vēṣṭi*-clad in defiance of the freezing temperature, recited devotional chants, and the climactic moment of the pot boiling over was met with cheers, before we retreated to the warmth of the hall.

### *'Like at home': authentic ritual and ritual space*

The role of ritual in embodying a sense of familiarity and continuity in the unfamiliar and discontinuous spaces inhabited by migrants is well documented, including in relation to the globally dispersed Tamil population. Clothey (2006, 19) describes the performance of ritual as a 'strategy' by which 'émigré Tamils seek to reconstruct spaces that embody the psycho-cultural-religious landscapes of their lineage', while, each writing on the context of Tamil settlement in Norway, Grønseth (2011, 168) reports that in 'living without the familiar social and religious context, which gave form and meaning to their common social activities and relations', migrants 'perceived life as fragmented', and Jacobsen (2009, 189) recounts how the success of festival rituals in the diaspora are measured in terms of 'completeness and exact likeness' to their performance in the homeland(s).

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<sup>24</sup>Intricate patterns drawn on the ground to invite auspiciousness (Dohmen 2004).



Ethnic community associations played an important role in the transmission of Tamil cultural heritage to UK- born or raised children (Jones 2013, 111–119), and there is no doubt that the performance of ritual in these settings contributes to this function. But these events also struck a strong emotional chord with adult Tamils in a manner relatable to the above discussions of authenticity. An association trustee explained that the decision to hold the Poṅgal ceremony outside<sup>25</sup> had been taken as, ‘at home this would be in the village or on the farm and it’s important to the meaning of the thing that you are out under the sky’ (Suven – Sri Lankan, male, forties). Positive comments on the ‘properness’ of proceedings abounded: all that was missing was ‘the sun and some cows’<sup>26</sup>, and while there was not much to be done about the former’s absence, light-hearted suggestions were made to ‘borrow’ the latter from the surrounding countryside. Later, another association member, Aja (Sri Lankan, female, thirties), reflected on the afternoon’s events:

We are always celebrating Poṅgal in the house before, but just with family and using the pot on the oven ... But this year, this is really so much better. To be outside with the proper fire, even though it was so cold! I feel like it’s the first time in ten years I’ve done it right ... To celebrate it properly, like at home. That really has a lot of good meaning for me ... I am really happy right now.

Notwithstanding the absence of priests whose ceremonial role was taken on by association members, the Poṅgal ceremony and the Saraswati Pūjā represented attempts to create an authentic, if temporary, setting for Tamil Hindu ritual in the most mundane of spaces – a suburban church hall which more commonly hosted aerobics clubs and coffee mornings, and a car park – spaces which were transformed and ritualised by the introduction of sacred objects and the creation of an authentic sensory landscape through the burning of incense and the chanting of devotion. These performances of ritual acted as an emotional and sensual connector to the pre-migration locale, as well as a powerful source of bonding with other Tamils in the local area who shared knowledge and experience of the authentic undertaking of these rituals: an expression of Williams’ (1992, 229) conception of religion in diaspora as an ‘anchor for memory that relates personal and group identity with the past’. As mentioned earlier in the paper, the existing literature on Tamil Hinduism in the diaspora has focused on the significance of the authentic performance of religious devotion and ritual to the Sri Lankan Tamil section of the population, with authors such as Ganesh (2014, 244) highlighting its role ‘as a poignant recreation of the home from which they were violently displaced’. This study’s incorporation of the experiences and narratives of Tamils of diverse state origins offered the opportunity to compare the ways that Tamils from different points of origin ascribed meaning to diasporic religious practice. The research found no conclusive evidence of significant differences in the practice of Hindu devotion between Tamils of different state origins: it was not the case, for example, that one group was more likely to express dissatisfaction with the ‘non-authentic’ setting of Gujarati-run temples, with, instead, variant individual

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<sup>25</sup>The previous year, the ritual had been held inside the hall with an electric hotplate used to boil the rice rather than an open fire.

<sup>26</sup>The Poṅgal festival includes veneration of the cow in thanks for its gifts of milk and fertilising manure, and in Tamil villages the beasts’ horns are decorated with coloured chalk and adorned with flowers.

perspectives on this and other issues emerging within and across state-based groupings. I also found that Sri Lankan Tamils and Tamils of other state origins who did prioritise an authentic Tamil Hindu experience in the diaspora setting talked about it in similar terms of cultural continuity – in particular as essential to UK-born or -raised Tamil children maintaining an ethnic identity and cultural and religious competencies. Statehood-based difference did emerge, however, in the reasoning behind these imperatives. For non-Sri Lankan Tamils, the maintenance of tradition offered through authentic religious or ritual performance was important in terms of allowing children to ‘fit in’ during visits to relatives in India, Malaysia or Singapore, or in the event of a possible future return migration. Ruki for instance, a Malaysian Tamil (female, forties), explained:

When we go back to our origin country the children should know where they are coming from – understanding and adapting. I am proud to say that my girls, if I was to say, ‘what do you say when you go into temple, what do you do, what do you wear?’ – they know.

For Sri Lankan Tamils, whose migration was forced (or associated, through marriage, with an initial forced migration) and, in all likelihood, long-term or permanent, the retention of ethnic identity and cultural competencies through the authentic practice of religion and ritual additionally functioned in politicised terms as essential to the very future of the Sri Lankan Tamil ethno-nation, given that, as Reena put it, Tamil culture and identity was being ‘wiped off the map’ in Sri Lanka itself – a further example of the potential of the aesthetic and moral diasporic spheres (Werbner 2002) to interfuse in migrants’ lives.

For those participants who took part in ‘DIY’ ritual practices within community-association settings, as well as forging a sense of continuity with the ritual spaces of Tamil homelands, events like the Poṅgal festival and Saraswati Pūjā functioned as a means of emplacement within sites of settlement. The role of ritual performance in ‘mak[ing] territorial claims in adopted cities ... [and] assert[ing] equal cultural rights within the society’ (Werbner 1996, 333) is widely documented, and in reference to South Asian migrations this scholarship has particularly focused on religious processions when adherents parade through the public streets, putting ‘actions and objects invested with meanings and values’ on display (Jacobsen 2008a, 7; see also Jacobsen 2008b; Werbner 1996). Analysing processions by Tamil Hindus in London, David (2009, 218) points to the public performance of these ‘embodied customs’ as evidence of increased confidence in articulating ‘specific Tamil identity’ in the migration setting, while Luchesi (2008, 180) describes Tamil Hindu processions in urban Germany as a process of ‘leaving invisibility’ and ‘claiming their own place in German religious plurality’. A similar dynamic could be observed in the rituals arranged by the Tamil Hindu participants in this study. Clearly the Saraswati Pūjā and Poṅgal festival occupied a much smaller scale to the elaborate processions analysed by David, Luchesi and others (Goreau 2014; Jacobsen 2008b, 2009), and additionally, they are not so obviously ‘public’: the closed doors of the church hall concealed the *pūjā* to the Goddess taking place inside, while only the narrow plume of smoke rising into the air and the scent of burning sandalwood betrayed the presence of the Poṅgal festivities, which were largely hidden from the road by the car park’s fencing. But despite these differences, these small-scale rituals offered a comparable opportunity to ‘perform’ ethnicity to the city’s non-Tamil populace. Local journalists were invited to attend, and

consequently a full-page story appeared in the city newspaper featuring photographs of the children in traditional dress. In these 'DIY' ritual performances, Tamilness and Hinduness aligned, both in terms of shared reference points of authenticity and continuity between Tamils, as well as through these events' dual function as 'contact zone[s]' (Eulberg 2014, 121): a presentation of the ethnic community to non-Tamil residents of multi-ethnic and multi-faith settlement locales.

## Conclusions

This paper began by describing the differing levels of ethno-religious infrastructure available to Tamil Hindus in the settlement hub of London (the focus of much of the existing scholarship on religiosity among UK Tamils), and those who have settled in two areas outside of the capital: the West Midlands and the South West of England. The paper considered two ways in which the absence of Tamil Hindu temples is negotiated in these locales: through participation in alternate religious spaces orientated towards a broad Hindu constituency or a non-Tamil ethno-linguistic or sectarian Hindu tradition; or through the temporary transformation of profane settings into spaces for ethnicised devotion and ritual.

Participants' narratives around their attendance of Hindu temples revealed the importance of authenticity and continuity with the ethnically inflected religious customs of the homeland(s). In the West Midlands, the Balaji Temple offers a broadly South Indian version of Hinduism, and for those participants who attended this temple, aesthetic and sensual familiarity was central to its appeal and negated the inauthenticity of an incorporation of various ethno-linguistic and sectarian traditions. The sense of Hindu 'we-ness' broadening beyond the borders of ethnicity or sect described by Eck (2000, 224) was achieved, albeit within the confines of a 'South Indian Hindu "we-ness"'. But in the South West, temples have largely been established in a non-Tamil or South Indian tradition – that of the numerically superior Gujarati population. Participants' narratives around these temples highlighted the unfamiliar aesthetics of the temple décor and differing forms of Gujarati-led Hindu worship. While for some participants these differences could be overcome through identification with a broader sense of Hinduness, for others they could not, meaning temple-based religious practice became limited to the occasional visit to London (or, in some cases, the West Midlands Balaji Temple) to mark a festival or family event. Similarly, in transforming profane and mundane sites such as hired halls and car parks for the performance of ritual, participants created authentic and ethnicised spaces for familiar practice which embodied shared experiences and vocabularies of symbols and meaning – 'cement to bind a diasporic consciousness' (Cohen 1997, 189) – as well as offering a medium through which ethnic identity could be performed and asserted in multi-ethnic and multi-faith settlement locales.

The non-London fieldwork locations of this study thus offered a rich site for exploration of the relationship between religion and ethnicity in these Tamil Hindus' UK lives, disrupted, as it was in many cases, by a local absence of ethnicised religious spaces. The study indicates the range of potential responses and adaptations which may occur when devotees of a specific ethno-regional Hindu tradition with a well-established UK infrastructure in the site of its adherents' population density settle in areas which lack this infrastructure, and where, when a local Hindu infrastructure *is* present, it is dominated by the norms of a

different ethno-linguistic or sectarian Hindu tradition – a situation which may have comparable applicability to other ethno-linguistic minorities within the UK's diverse Hindu population. In London, the ethno-religious infrastructure of Tamil-orientated temples (some even serving specific sub-sections of the Tamil population) and public rituals and ceremonies precludes the need for de-ethnicised versions of Hindu practice to emerge. For Tamils within this landscape, the Tamil way of being Hindu is *the* way of being Hindu. But outside of the capital, in the areas of the West Midlands and South West of England where the Tamil Hindus encountered in this study lived, the lack of this infrastructure meant that the Tamil character of Hindu devotion became marked through its relative inaccessibility or absence. Ethnicised Tamil Hinduness must be negotiated through attendance of trans-ethno-linguistically orientated temples, or temples functioning within an alternate regional or ethno-linguistic tradition. Alternatively it must be actively reproduced by everyday actors themselves through the small-scale performance of ethnicised Hindu ritual in non-institutional settings. The range of individual responses to these contexts encountered in this study show Tamil Hindus in the West Midlands and South West to be operating as religious actors across the possible trajectories or streams of religiosity in diaspora identified by Bowen (1987), Vertovec (2004) and others.<sup>27</sup> This offers empirical illustration of Vertovec's assertion that 'the possible trajectories of identity and tradition in diaspora ... are not mutually exclusive. They are taking place simultaneously worldwide, and often within the same diaspora' (35) – or even, as in this case, within quite small and emerging local diasporic populations, and illustrates a difficulty in predicting whether growing and increasingly diverse diasporic Hindu populations will lead to an open-frame approach to constructing Hindu identity in the diaspora context, or whether ethno-linguistically particularist modes of worship and accompanying institutional development will come to dominate.

It seems likely that the population of Tamils in these non-London locations will increase, based both on a broader trend of migrant dispersal away from traditional settlement areas (Simpson and Finney 2009), and my own observations during fieldwork on those who had relocated from London encouraging Tamil friends and relatives to follow suit by citing comparatively low property prices and a perceived higher standard of living.<sup>28</sup> In the case of one South Western town this has already led to embryonic plans amongst community association members for the establishment of a Tamil Saivite temple: 'We asked the Chairman to make some temple here. Slowly they could build. If we start with the one small hall with the God pictures and everything, then slowly they are making a nice temple' (Sujantha). These plans followed recent growth of the local Tamil population through processes of chain migration – described by Sujantha as 'a nice problem to have' – and offers an example of this Hindu migrant population following the trajectory identified by Bowen (1987) in his earlier fieldwork with Gujaratis: from a constructed commonality of convenience with other non-Tamil Hindus in the local area, towards greater ethno-linguistic and sectarian specificity. As these local populations grow, and as Tamils (and other ethno-linguistic or sectarian

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<sup>27</sup>See for example, Waardenburg's (1988) influential study of differing models of Muslim religiosity in Europe.

<sup>28</sup>It was perceived, for example, that crime rates were lower and schools better than in London.

minorities within UK Hinduism) disperse across the UK to new sites of settlement away from their established population hubs it will be valuable to monitor how this diversification impacts upon the development of local Hindu infrastructures of temples and public ritual; particularly given the range of responses to (de)ethnified religious spaces noted in this research, and the dual imperatives towards ethnified or sectarian particularity and a more broadly imagined diasporic Hinduness.

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