

## **Manifesting Kali's Power: Guyanese Hinduism and the Revitalisation of the 'Madras Tradition'**

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### **Abstract**

Hinduism in Guyana consists of various traditions and subgroups such as the Sanatan, Madras, and Arya Samaj traditions. Influenced by various historical conditions and the dominant Christian influence, members of the so-called Sanatan tradition have sought to establish their practices as the 'Great' or Sankritic Hindu tradition, for example through sanskritisation processes. In this context, specific practices such as possession rites and animal sacrifices were defined as inappropriate and excluded from mainstream Hinduism in Guyana, creating orthodoxy. These 'inappropriate' practices were consolidated in what is today known as the Madras tradition or Kali-Mai Puja, a shaktistic tradition which continues to be marginalised and stigmatised in contemporary society.

Highlighting how members of the various Hindu traditions seek to establish and legitimise their traditions, this article demonstrates that these traditions are constructed in relation to each other and that they are based on socio-cultural othering processes within the heterogeneous 'Indian' ethnic group in Guyana. Based on participant observation and ethnographic interviews, this anthropological contribution discusses that the Madras tradition is an 'invented' yet 'authentic' tradition and elaborates how various socio-political conditions have led to phases of its revitalisation. It raises questions such as: what has caused the resurgence of the Madras tradition in the 1980s besides the economic crisis and authoritarian rule? What role do Madrassi healing rites have for

the popularity of the tradition? How is the growing significance of Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity influencing Hindu traditions in contemporary Guyana?

**Key Words:** Hinduism, Sanskritisation, Madras Tradition, otherness

Indumattie sits in the hammock outside her house, the hooks screeching loudly with every movement.<sup>1</sup> She has tucked in the ends of her long skirt and watches me while I eat the bread and drink the tea she has handed to me on this Tuesday morning visit. Indumattie is a 65-year-old widow from rural Berbice, Guyana, who earns extra money to supplement her pension by occasionally stitching and fixing clothes or by selling bottled sweet drinks to her neighbors. Most of her life she has worked in weeding gangs on various sugar estates in the region. She refers to herself as a Guyanese Indian and a Hindu woman, frequently describing herself as poor and '*prapa punish*' (properly punished; having experienced a lot of misfortune). In our conversations she elaborates the relevance of Kali Puja in contemporary Guyanese society and her personal history. These conversations were part of my anthropological fieldwork conducted in Guyana between 2011 and 2013 with the objective of analysing the material culture of clothing in Hindu ritual and the (re)construction of Indian ethnic identity through dress and sartorial practices in transnational Guyanese networks (Kloß, 2016). The first time I met Indumattie was during a Sunday service at one of the most popular Kali churches in the region, which she attends as a member whenever she is able to afford the cost of travelling.<sup>2</sup>

Kali Puja or Kali-Mai Puja is a shaktistic Hindu tradition, in which the superior deity is the Goddess Kali. She is also referred to as Mariyamman, but usually devotees address her as '*Mudda*' (Mother). The term *puja* denotes individual and communal ritual worship of Hindu deities, in Guyana also referred to as

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<sup>1</sup>All names have been changed to ensure my informants' anonymity.

<sup>2</sup>My informants refer to all public buildings or places of worship as 'churches', regardless of their religious affiliation. Generally, Madras temples are called 'churches' by the vast majority of Guyanese Madrassis, hence it is used in this study instead of the also appropriate terms *koiloo* or 'temple.' If a Hindu temple is termed *mandir*, this refers to a temple of the Sanatan or Arya Samaj Hindu traditions.

'*wuk*' (work, service). The influential priest Jamsie Naidoo promoted the term *Kali Puja* during the 1970s, replacing the formerly used appellation 'Madras tradition' (McNeal, 2011: 214). Today some practitioners reclaim this term to emphasise the respectability of the practices that form a distinct tradition in which the veneration of Kali is a key aspect amongst other practices. In the churches where I conducted research, services are usually held on a weekly basis and include animal sacrifice and manifestations of deities. Healing rituals take place at the end of each service and represent one of the main purposes of *pujas* and Sunday services. Devotees consult Mudda or other powerful deities, who 'manifest' in the bodies of practitioners and cure, for example, physical ailments, mental illnesses, or infertility. They also provide psychological support and counsel in case of domestic problems. When I ask Indumattie when she started to attend the Kali church, she replies that she never used to 'go to churches' as a young girl, and that the reason why she decided to go lately was the illness of her daughter. In the past, her daughter had started to suffer from severe headaches, which were diagnosed as being caused by brain cancer. As Indumattie describes it:

... About fifteen years abee go church. De same church dey. An before duh me does go udda-udda churches, an so on, dem nuh help she. Dem ah tell her, "Let she bathe an let she do she wuk with she own hand", an that wasn't the ting (...). Well, when abee go Blairmont [Kali church] there, Pujari Deonarine been deh dey. An he really wuk hard see me daughta. Wuk *hard*, you know. Over mark hard. You see, when me daughta start to play, throw dong sheself a grong an she roll. An she wuk hard.<sup>3</sup>

She continues to explain that as a younger woman, she used to have problems concerning childbirth and that Mudda helped her to overcome this:

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<sup>3</sup>Indumattie, November 15, 2011, Berbice, Guyana. "...For about fifteen years we have been going to [this] church. The same church [where you and I met]. And before I used to go to a number of other churches, and so on, [but] those did not help her. They told her, 'Let her bathe and let her do her wuk (work) with her own hands', but that wasn't the problem (...). Well, when we went to Blairmont [Kali church] there, Pujari Deonarine was there. And he really worked hard with my daughter. Worked *hard*, you know. Extremely hard. You see, when my daughter started to play [vibrate, catch energy], she threw herself down onto the ground and she rolled [there]. And she worked hard." (personal translation)

When me bout fuh get dem, dem picknee ah born dead. Ah born dead. Tomorrow dem picknee go born, tonight dem dead in me belly. Some ah born an dem ah live wan couple hour an den dead. Well den me been join Ramroop clinic [but ee nuh help]. An whiles me go church, two a dem dead. An me beg Mudda, fuh get wan, an den ee get me dis wan. Get me dis wan. (...) An den ee dead lass year, pass away, brain tumor.<sup>4</sup>

She elaborates that she started to ‘play’ or ‘marlo’ (vibrate, manifest deities), also referred to as ‘catching energy’, during puja, and that for this reason she has become a member of the church. Her description of how and when she started to attend Kali churches is exemplary of a wide range of Kali’s devotees in contemporary Guyana. High costs of medical treatment, failed treatments of illnesses by ‘Western’ medicine, or conceptualisations of afflictions as based on for example spirit possession induce a high number of ‘Madrassis’—followers of the Madras tradition—to attend Kali churches.

In the same conversation, and although conveying her appreciation for Kali Puja, Indumattie further explains that in the wider context of society, the veneration of Mother Kali is a stigmatised practice, which is regularly frowned upon. Indeed, non-Madrassis frequently reproduce stereotypes of Madrassis in conversations and denote them as ‘backward’ and their practices as ‘*evil wuk*’ or ‘black magic’. Non-Madrassis commonly assume that the purpose of these practices is to cast bad spirits on other people or to generally harm them. Sometimes they not only insist that Madrassis sacrifice animals, but also narrate tales of human sacrifices to emphasise the alleged malevolence of Kali Puja. As a result, Kali Puja remains stigmatised and marginalised in contemporary Guyana, not only among Christians and Muslims, but similarly within the Hindu community itself, as discussed later.

Hinduism in Guyana consists of various traditions and subgroups such as the Sanatan, Madras, and Arya Samaj traditions, hence Guyanese Hindus cannot

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<sup>4</sup>Indumattie, November 15, 2011, Berbice, Guyana. “When I was about to get them, the children were born dead. Were born dead. Tomorrow the children were supposed to be born, tonight they died in my belly. Some were born and lived for a couple of hours and then died. Well then I joined Ramroop’s clinic, but it did not help. And while I went to church, two of them died. And so I begged Mudda, to have one, and then she gave me this one. Got me this one. (...) And then she died last year, passed away, brain tumor.” (personal translation)

be considered as a homogeneous group. Influenced by various historical conditions, socio-cultural contexts, and a dominant Christian influence, this article discusses how members of the mainstream Sanatan tradition have sought to establish their practices as a 'Great' or Sanskritic Hindu tradition in Guyana over the course of the twentieth century. Highlighting how members of the various Hindu traditions seek to establish and legitimise their practices, this article demonstrates that the traditions are constructed in relation to each other and that they are based on socio-cultural othering processes within the heterogeneous ethnic population of Guyana. It highlights that they are further influenced by the post-independence context as well as ethnic conflicts. Based on participant observation and ethnographic interviews, I discuss how the Madras tradition is an 'invented' yet 'authentic' tradition, and elaborate how various socio-political conditions have led to phases of revitalisation.

### **The Creation of Guyanese Hindu Orthodoxy**

Hinduism has always been a minority religion in Guyana. According to the latest published national census 28.4 per cent of the Guyanese population is Hindu, while 57.7 per cent is Christian and 7.2 per cent Muslim (Benjamin, 2002). In such a diverse religious context, struggles for authority and community leadership take place, and result in contestations as well as the hierarchisation of religious beliefs and practices. Underlying these dynamics is the fact that Hinduism and Islam are identified with the 'Indian' ethnic group and that both religions are ethnic religions in Guyana (Vertovec, 1994; Khan, 2004). The Indian ethnic group developed largely in opposition to the so-called 'African' group (Premdas, 1992).<sup>5</sup> These groups base their ethnic identity mostly on shared common descent. For example, 'Indians' usually define themselves as descendants of Indian indentured laborers, while 'Africans' describe enslaved Africans as their ancestors. These ethnic groups, as well as concepts of 'Indianness' and 'Africanness', certainly must be considered as socially constructed, as they are defined and continuously reconstructed by social actors, cultural practices, and discourse. They are based on 'othering' processes, as discussed later.

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<sup>5</sup>Both 'African' and 'Indian' are generic terms used among my informants in Berbice.

Hindu religious and other cultural practices performatively recreate Indian ethnic identity in Guyana. When Indian indentured laborers arrived between 1838 and 1917, they carried their religious traditions along with them. Although these are usually considered to have been maintained and ‘preserved’ up until today, they necessarily underwent transformation as a result of migration and transfer to the predominantly Christian society of then British Guiana. Syncretistic processes that resulted from this condition have been analysed in a variety of studies, and thus shall not be expanded upon in this article (Vertovec, 1992; Younger, 2004; 2009). In summary, processes of Christian-Hindu syncretism are particularly noticeable in the outline and organisation of *mandirs* (temples), which are usually one-room buildings with an ‘altar,’ a book stand on which important Hindu scriptures are arranged, and a general seating area. Services are conducted on Sunday mornings and Friday evenings. Various terms have been adopted from Christianity and are defined as ‘translations,’ such as the term ‘church’.

Non-Hindus, among the colonisers as well as among the colonised groups, usually criticised Hinduism as ‘heathen’ and Hindus as ‘idol worshipers,’ denoting Hindu practices, scriptures, and philosophy as inferior to Christian ones. In this context, Hindus had to adopt and adapt specific (Christian) practices, for instance dress customs, to acquire higher social status (Jayawardena, 1966). These practices should not be considered passive acts and mere reactions to the conditions of plantation society with its inherent structures of Christian-British domination, but must also be considered as strategic adaptations and imitations (Bhabha, 2004). On the one hand Hindus were forced to transform some of their practices in order to gain upward social mobility, but on the other hand they also actively transformed certain practices to consolidate and maintain their community and traditions, claiming for instance moral superiority in relation to Christianity (Kloß, 2016).

The transformation of the present mainstream Hindu tradition—the Sanatan tradition—however, was as much impacted by internal transitions and hierarchisation processes as by Christian inferiorisation. Important to note in this context is, for example, the influence of the Arya Samaj, which is a reform movement that developed in British India at the end of the nineteenth century and was transferred by Arya Samaj missionaries to British Guiana in the 1920s (Seecharan, 1993). The movement developed in Indian intellectual circles, where an ‘ethical reform Hinduism’ was urged and Hindu practices

and beliefs were evaluated 'on the basis of Christian influence' (Michaels, 2004, 45). A common trait of these reform movements was the adoption of Christian criticism concerning Hindu practices (Singer, 1972; Bayly, 2004). The presence and popularity of this reform movement urged Guyanese *pandits* (Sanatan priests) to create institutional frameworks and formulate unitary propositions to counter the growing contestation of their authority in society.<sup>6</sup> This directly led to the growth of 'official' or 'mainstream' Hinduism, resulting in the development of a Brahmin monopoly over ritual and the formation of Guyanese Hindu organisations. Indeed, Steven Vertovec denotes the Arya Samaj as the 'chief catalyst for the institutionalisation of a unitary, standardised Brahmanic Hinduism'— (1994, 136f) in the Caribbean. Due to reformism it became relevant to 'quell the air of doubt which the reformists had breathed through the Hindu population' (ibid.).

The process of creating an 'official' or 'Brahmanic' Hinduism has to be considered as the (re)establishment of Sanskritic Hinduism or the 'Great Tradition' of Hinduism in Guyana. On the Indian subcontinent there generally exists a 'higher-level' Sanskritic Hinduism, which is opposed to a 'lower-level' popular Hinduism (Singer, 1972, 46). Sanskritic Hinduism here is defined as based on a 'generalised pattern of Brahmin practices and beliefs that have an all-India spread', while 'popular' Hinduism refers to 'those forms of Hinduism with a local, regional, or peninsular spread' (ibid., 68). Accordingly, as regards the Caribbean context, Vertovec reflects that the various practices and beliefs of Caribbean Hindus have to be explained in terms of 'official' and 'popular' forms of Hinduism. He defines 'official Hinduism' as referring to 'a set of tenets, rites, proscriptions and prescriptions which are promulgated through some institutionalised framework' (Vertovec, 1994b, 125). 'Popular Hinduism' on the other hand denotes 'beliefs and practices undertaken outside "official" auspices (...), so-called superstitious or magico-religious or charismatic phenomena (...), and "cult" phenomena' (ibid.). These categories are not discrete, but have to be regarded as ends of a continuum.

Drawing on my own fieldwork observations and interviews, I accordingly argue that the consolidation of the Sanatan tradition aimed to implement a

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<sup>6</sup>A priest in the Sanatan and Arya traditions is referred to as *pandit*, while a priest or ritual practitioner in the Madras tradition is referred to as *pujari*.

Great Tradition and Hindu orthodoxy in Guyana by excluding particular rites associated with ‘popular Hinduism’ (Younger, 2009, Harms, 2010, McNeal, 2011). This Great Tradition counteracted proselytisation and consolidated the Hindu community as it could also be ‘legitimised’ as a respectable book religion, referring to Sanskrit scriptures and emphasising their great antiquity. The rituals that were excluded from the developing orthodoxy did not disappear, however, but were conducted in secret, as my informants describe with regard to ‘life sacrifice’ (animal sacrifice). Non-Madrassis consider particularly the practices of life sacrifice and manifestation as ‘backward’ and demonic (McNeal, 2005; 2011). In conversation with one of the most respected *pandits* in the Canje and Corentyne areas, Pandit Ramnarine—a 39-year-old Sanatan priest with a large fellowship and great authority due to his knowledge, travels, and popular singing voice—tells me that indeed ‘animal sacrifice’ was conducted in Hindu traditions a ‘long time’ ago, but that these practices were eliminated when ‘men evolved’ and people became more ‘civilised’. He states:

There was a time that animal sacrifice—it’s in our scriptures—that it was practiced, and over the years, coming to learn that it is a cruel act, man has evolved and so should our worship, so should our spirituality... we evolve also. So eventually many temples have eliminated it. It’s still practiced in some temples, but the act of killing has eased a lot.<sup>7</sup>

Followers of the Sanatan tradition focus on a pantheon of Sanskritic deities, such as Hanuman, Krishna, Shiva, Lakshmi, or Ganesha. Particularly popular and referenced scriptures are the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata (Singh, 2012). ‘Services’ are usually conducted in *mandirs* on Sunday mornings. They are congregational modes of worship. Combined with *parbs* (public religious functions) and household-oriented, semi-public functions, such as Hanuman Jhandi, Durga Paath, and Shiva Puran, these form the core of the Sanatan tradition at present.

Both the Sanatan and Madras traditions are constructed in relation and opposition to each other, hence are based on othering processes. Othering

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<sup>7</sup>Pandit Ramnarine, November 8, 2011, Berbice, Guyana.

on the one hand unifies a group by defining inner-group similarities and by emphasising social, cultural, and historical commonalities. On the other hand, othering processes stress differences among people and construct one group as different and 'other' in relation to another. Othering hence emphasises and requires notions of both similarity and difference. It creates group identity on the basis of defining others and by drawing boundaries (Hall, 1996; 2000). Boundaries and differences do not exist per se, but are created to consolidate groups and create categories of people and practices that are perceived as culturally discrete (Eriksen, 1993). Thus, the processes of ascribing and producing difference and sameness both have to be regarded as fundamental aspects in the creation of ethnic and religious groups. Additionally, the dominant influence of Christianity on the development of the traditions must not be underestimated. Christian efforts at proselytisation in the colonial society and the Hindu reform movement Arya Samaj have had significant influence on the development and consolidation of the Sanatan tradition (Younger, 2009). At present and at the wider level of society, Christian and Muslim groups form the constitutive others for Hindu groups. On the local level in Berbice, the Sanatan and Madras traditions serve as constitutive others within the Hindu group itself. For example, Pandit Ramnarine frequently emphasises that he is involved in discussions with followers of the Madras tradition, denotes their practices as uncultured and the people as undisciplined, and defines Madrassis as inferior others. He states:

Because, realise—a lot of those men who are there [at the Kali church], they're heavy drinkers. 'Cause remember, they go there because they get that freedom there. They feel they're not restricted, then. The way you are restricted in a Hindu, in a normal Hindu temple. Right? You're not restricted. Like, if you're a Catholic, then you have a lot of restrictions. Similarly, in these church... temples... or churches whatever you wanna call them, that restriction is not there.<sup>8</sup>

He not only names Sanatan practices as the 'normal' type of Hindu devotion, but also compares 'normal' Sanatan practices to Christian traditions, emphasising Sanatan respectability in opposition to Madrassi worship.

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<sup>8</sup>Pandit Ramnarine, November 8, 2011, Berbice, Guyana.

He further refers to the relevance of scripture in perspectives on Hindu authenticity and respectability, elaborating how he would usually question Madrassis about the scriptural basis of their specific *murtis* (representations and manifestations of deities; statues): ‘You know, some of the *murtis* they worship, I used to tell them: ‘Can you direct me as to where I can read about them? ‘Cause I, in all my readings and in all my travels, I’ve never come across something like this. But you have it. So please, educate [me].’” He unhesitatingly proposes Sanatan superiority and his statements are no exception among Sanatanists. Most Guyanese openly devalue Madrassi practices as ‘uneducated’ and suggest that their beliefs are the result of a lack of knowledge, drawing on the common link between respectability and education.

Sanatanists often explain that another indicator of their lack of education is the Madrassis’ belief in ‘spirit possession’ as the cause of specific illnesses. Madrassi healing practices are frequently denoted as superstitious and ‘black magic,’ hence are positioned outside the framework of (respectable) religions.<sup>9</sup> Respectability refers to the social stratification of society based on morality and is reflected and reinstated through for example religious practices, education, and dress. Its emphasis in the Caribbean is often denoted as a colonial legacy (Wilson, 1969; Stoler, 1989). In British Guiana and from the perspective of the coloniser, respectability was based on Christian morals and values, and therefore Hindus were restricted to lower-status positions. Hindus have challenged this definition of Christian respectability by claiming for instance higher morality and (alternative) respectable standards (Kloß, 2016). Accordingly, McNeal describes how

West Indian Hinduism has (...) incorporated values and biases that take the colonial matrix of respectability as their frame of reference. In order to authenticate their religion, orthodox leaders and their constituencies have sought to ‘modernise’ and purify Hinduism of the more ‘primitive’ aspects of the Indian past, such as animal sacrifice, fire pass, and trance performance. (McNeal 2011, 306)

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<sup>9</sup>The label ‘black magic’ has further implications for Guyanese Indian identity, as some Guyanese Indians perceive the label ‘black’ to be offensive and as implying a lack of authenticity (Kloß, 2016). This is the result of and indicates the tense atmosphere between the ‘African’ and ‘Indian’ ethnic groups in Guyana, as discussed later.

In addition, Sanatanist devaluation of the Madras tradition is influenced by a dichotomous approach to thought and action, spirituality and practice. Some Sanatanists such as Pandit Ramnarine reproduce the common differentiation of mind and body by prioritising spirituality as the utmost and most respectable path of religious activity for salvation. He, as others, indicates that Madrassis are rather 'mechanical' or 'physical', while Sanatanists instead are 'spiritual' people who are able to understand and 'grasp' concepts on a 'higher' philosophical level; something that, according to him, Madrassis cannot do. Madrassis do not reject this differentiation of mind and body, spirituality and action. They emphasise that their physical performance of *puja* must be considered as a proof of their devoted service, effort, and endurance. Sanatan *pujas*, they claim, are for 'lazy' people who 'like to sit' and rather passively receive merit.

The differentiation between spiritual and physical veneration is also evident in the outline and design of the different temples. While the devotion of the various deities in the Sanatan way is conducted usually on and around a single altar, Kali churches consist of various temple buildings that house one to four deities. The performance of *puja* thus requires bodily movement between the various temples, facilitating different embodied experiences. The inferiorisation of action in relation to thought may be contested and criticised, I argue, as action and thought are inter-related processes that mutually influence each other (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987). All *pujas* must indeed be considered as performative and embodied practices, in which actions, thought, relations, and bodies are involved. They are cultural performances that represent and reproduce culturally specific structures and patterns of both thought and action (Tambiah, 1979).

Although usually the differences between the two traditions are emphasised, Sanatanists and Madrassis seldom acknowledge similarities among the practices, overlooking them or blending them out. When comparing the basic outline of worship in both traditions, one may notice similarities in terms of structure and purpose, rather than difference. The objective of *puja* in both traditions is to honor all deities in a prescribed sequence, to welcome them as guests, and to offer gifts to them. As rather differences are stressed and analysed, the relevance of othering processes in the construction of the traditions is again emphasised.

### Bottom-house Wuk

Current and past stigmatisation of the Madras tradition has influenced the development of ‘bottom-house *wuk*.’ Not only Indumattie, but numerous other informants explain that some people try to ‘make profit’ from Madras practices by conducting healing rituals during privately-run *pujas* inside their bottom houses. The bottom house is the open or enclosed space under traditional-style Guyanese houses, built on stilts. Pujari Ramnauth, a 51-year-old widower from rural Berbice, who is involved in contestations of and claims for Madrassi leadership, also frequently criticises bottom-house *wuk*—not only in private conversations, but also during public Sunday services. In our first conversation in October 2011, he, like many others, explains that some people conduct healing rituals at home for those people who are ‘ashamed’ to go to a Kali Puja. He elaborates that these people are, for example, Christians and Muslims, who do not want to publicly acknowledge their belief in Mudda and Madrassi practices. He further describes that for the same reason numerous people attend Kali churches in neighboring villages, so as to not be seen by fellow villagers. The following is an extract from this conversation:

- Pujari Ramnauth:** ...All the nastiness. A lot of people practice the same thing right here. Right here [in their houses, not the temple]. And they endanger other people lives. They practice evil *wuk* and they endanger other people lives. And in order to stop this, then, if every temple be under an organisation, then we can able to intervene in the bottom-house things and so on.
- Sinah:** The bottom-house things; is this what is hidden? The hidden practices, or where they take a lot of money?
- Pujari Ramnauth:** Yes. They do they own practices, and they’re the one who does the charging and fees...
- Sinah:** For the healing, right? They pay money and then they do it, right? I’m not sure.

- Pujari Ramnauth:** Yeah, they pay money. Sometime they doesn't does the right thing because they don't know. If you walk throughout Guyana and aks [ask] somebody to say a proper mantra, the bottom-house people, they don't know.
- Sinah:** Why do they feel they can do it?
- Pujari Ramnauth:** Because they have a little manifestation and through that now, people are, because of the sickness, they will believe that: 'Okay, I will be healed here.' And they go. They pay they money, sometimes they don't heal; it [the money] gone.
- Sinah:** Why are the people going to those people and not to the *mandirs* [where the rituals are free]?
- Pujari Ramnauth:** Because some people believe that they don't want to be seen in a Kali temple. (...) People from other denominations, like Muslims, Christians. They doh want.
- Sinah:** They all go, but they don't want to be seen.
- Pujari Ramnauth:** Hm-hm. So it's a different situation. Likewise you go find people from Blairmont will gone to another village temple. And other village people will come to Blairmont temple. So this is a whole thing which this one don't want to be seen here, that one don't want to be seen there.
- Sinah:** They are not proud of their...
- Pujari Ramnauth:** Right, right. They're not proud of what they are doing. Because they don't *know* what they are doing, what they are up to. Well if they knew, they would know who is the divine mother—that

is why I stress all the time upon teaching people.<sup>10</sup>

To counter stigmatisation and feelings of shame among the many people who attend bottom-house *wuk*, he explains that he is now producing little booklets about the tradition and practices, so that people would gain pride in their traditions through knowledge about them. The link between respectability and education is again revealed. Ramnauth's actions additionally indicate strategies for legitimising the Madras tradition through scripture, hence as book religion. This is particularly relevant in a society in which oral religious traditions are usually inferiorised.

The general criticism of bottom-house *wuk* serves several purposes: primarily, *pujaris* express their concern as to what may happen to the health of a person who is treated in a wrong way. *Pujaris* and devotees often recount various incidents of 'bad treatment' that have led to worsening conditions or death. Secondly, the reputation of the tradition is at stake, as *pujaris* seek to establish and institutionalise it, setting it distinctively apart from *Obeah*, or 'black magic', and as a reputed Hindu tradition in the wider context of society. Thirdly, they counteract what they perceive of as a commoditisation of their practices and their loss of spiritual or religious authority. Bottom-house practitioners on the other hand justify themselves by claiming that Mudda chose them during and through past manifestations, and that they have 'caught' her energy or power then. They comment that the transfer of money for the ritual is not a 'payment' but a donation. This aspect is also commonly pointed out with regard to Sanatan *pujas*, in which the pandit receives *dakshna*—depending on perspective this is defined as either a donation or payment; in official Hindu discourse it is considered a voluntary donation.

### **The Revitalisation of a 'South Indian' Tradition**

Over the course of the twentieth century, the practices excluded from the Sanatan tradition developed into the Madras tradition, as discussed earlier. Madrassi practices have undergone various phases of revitalisation, particularly during the 1920s, 1960s, and since the late 1970s. These phases

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<sup>10</sup>Pujari Ramnauth, October 18, 2011, Berbice, Guyana.

were the result of various socio-historic conditions, in which for example healing rites and group solidarity were particularly relevant and sought. In 1918/19 an influenza epidemic influenced the growing need for healing rituals and community-building (Dunn, 1971). This was accelerated when in the 1920s the agricultural sector suffered due to low export prices for sugar and rice, a condition that affected everyone, but especially the rural Indian population. This situation was aggravated by the Great Depression of the 1930s. The 1960s in Guyana were marked by the struggle for and achievement of independence from Great Britain in 1966. Prior to this, from 1961 to 1964, the country experienced the period of most severe inter-ethnic tension and violence between Guyanese 'Africans' and 'Indians', stimulated by political struggles for power, as well as food scarcity (Garner, 2008). Ethnic tension, economic depression, and food scarcity were repeated during the late 1970s and 1980s Guyana, particularly during Forbes Burnham's authoritarian rule and the colloquially called 'food ban'—the governmental restriction of specific imports to make Guyana an autarkic nation. This context created a need for ethnic group consolidation.

Guyanese ethnic groups developed in the course of colonial rule, but have been maintained and reproduced since then. They were particularly emphasised from the early 1950s due to the process of ethnopoliticisation and general resource competition (Garner, 2008). Ethnic and racial othering is one of the most fundamental and dividing aspects that influences and structures Guyanese public and private life. Negative sentiments and stereotypes towards 'other' ethnic groups are common. These othering processes are further fueled by 'ethnic entrepreneurs' (Allahar, 2004, 121), who draw on prevailing essentialist and/or primordial notions to achieve political goals, resulting in the ethnicisation of the political system and practices of 'ethnic voting'. Politicians of both groups foster and institutionalise anti-African or anti-Indian sentiments in order 'to prevent the other side from coming to power at all costs' (Garner, 2008, 120f). In the 1970s political movements such as the Black Power Movement have led to the consolidation of the 'African' ethnic group and respectively also the 'Indian' ethnic group. As religion and ethnicity are entwined, these movements have also influenced the local religious environment. For the Trinidadian context, McNeal describes how religious traditions such as Orisha were consolidated and institutionalised as a result of for example the Black Power Movement (2011, 269). Ethnicity, politics, and religion are deeply intertwined in Guyana, and for example

voting practices are influenced by religion alongside aspects of race, class, and gender. As religious communities and traditions facilitate the creation and maintenance of ethnic group identities, Hinduism became 'the privileged vehicle of diasporic identification for a revivifying *glocal* Indian ethnicity' (ibid., 267). Despite its history of inferiorisation it provided a means to challenge the Christian-dominated notion of respectability by highlighting the ancient and 'civilised' past of Indian culture and by excluding elements that could potentially be labelled as 'uncivilised'. The 'uncivilised' Madras practices were therefore doubly marginalised, first within general society, and then further within the Hindu community itself.

The development and revitalisation of the Madras tradition must be contextualised within these ethno-political movements of the 1970s, but further within the context of the general transformation of the Guyanese religious environment that commenced in the 1970s and accelerated during the 1980s. This transformation was specifically linked to political and economic changes that occurred in 1980s Guyana. After Burnham's successor Desmond Hoyte initiated the Economic Recovery Program in 1989, structural adjustment programs were implemented that induced the liberalisation of the economy and the privatisation of government-owned businesses. Worldwide neoliberal restructuring led to the growth of charismatic and ecstatic religious traditions, as has been discussed for example with regard to the growth of Pentecostalism in various African nations (Comaroff, 2012; Freeman, 2012; Hasu, 2012). Pentecostalism has similarly increased in Guyana, especially since the 1980s. According to the national census of 2002, the percentage of Pentecostals rose from 7.5 in 1991 to 16.9 in 2002, while membership for instance in the Anglican Church dropped from 13.8 to 6.9 per cent in the respective years (Benjamin, 2002). The growing popularity of Pentecostalism may be linked to its particular adaptability to the neoliberal market economy. For instance, when preaching the 'prosperity gospel', wealth and material success are 'taken as a sign of God's blessing' (Freeman, 2012, 15) and are not opposed to it, as is often proposed by the more orthodox traditions that emphasise humility and modesty. The revitalisation of the Madras tradition, however, cannot be linked to this concept of prosperity gospel, but rather the tradition's capacity to transform the self through ecstatic and charismatic practices. Self-transformation is an important aspect in Pentecostal churches, particularly in those that focus on demons and deliverance instead of preaching the prosperity gospel (Hasu, 2012). Through these practices feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, prevalent among the majority

of Guyanese during this period due to the socio-political conditions and growing economic inequalities, may be dissolved to create a regained sense of agency. Analysing the extraordinary growth rate of Pentecostalism, Dena Freeman elaborates that often people with low self-esteem or feelings of powerlessness start to attend Pentecostal churches, seeking to . . . change their situation. Through their engagement with pastors and other church members, in study, prayer and healing, these people begin to see themselves as valued individuals, part of God's people, a 'somebody' rather than a 'nobody'. Most important of all, they begin to move beyond a passive fatalism and come to realise that they have agency in their lives... (2012, 13)

This also applies to the Madras tradition, in which all members are acknowledged by personal communication and also medical treatment with and through divine manifestations. With this interpretation I do not negate the possibility and capacity of Kali Puja to heal, support, and help devotees, as indeed I have witnessed positive effects among several people, but I argue that besides healing practices, socio-economic conditions have also influenced the numbers of people attending Kali Puja. In this context, a parallel to the development and growth of Pentecostalism may be drawn.

As a subaltern religious tradition the Madras tradition provided its followers with a particular agency and capacity to challenge existing power structures. Madrassi practitioners from Guyana further influenced the development of Kali-Mai Puja in other parts of the Caribbean. Exchange processes and the mobility of *pujaris* between for example Guyana and Trinidad led to the revitalisation of the tradition in both places. This exchange took place especially from the 1970s, when the influential Guyanese *pujari* Jamsie Naidoo visited and was visited by Trinidadian practitioners. According to McNeal, in Trinidad the 'concept of a Kali temple dedicated solely to ecstatic weekly services with an especially strong healing orientation therefore stems from this Guyanese connection' (2011, 173). The effect such an exchange may have had on the practice in Guyana must not be underestimated. My informants frequently emphasise that they perceive Guyana to be 'below' Trinidad and Tobago in terms of socio-economic development, even though they may proclaim and criticise this at times as Trinidadian 'arrogance'. They reflect Trinidad and Tobago's economic development, which was influenced by the oil boom and industrialisation during the 1970s. The possibility to teach Trinidadians about Kali-Mai Puja and to implement specific structures

must have raised the self-esteem of Guyanese practitioners, as it subverted power relations.

The 1970s revitalisation has been particularly relevant in the consolidation of the Madras tradition and its recent mode of worship. Engaging in othering discourse, my informants consider the Sanatan tradition to have derived from North Indian practices and to have been 'imported' by Indian indentured laborers who left British India through the port of Kolkata. They categorise the Madras tradition as South Indian in origin and as 'imported' by South Indian laborers, who left through the port of Chennai, then Madras. However, it must be considered that Kali Puja and Madrassi practices such as life sacrifice and manifestation are not specific to a region in India, but that they indeed are and have been part of popular Hindu traditions or specific caste groups, conducted mostly outside the framework of Sanskritic Hinduism.<sup>11</sup> The classification as solely South Indian is a social construction, a process that supports group formation and serves as a basis for othering. It creates a specific group identity, and by partaking in Kali Puja, the (alleged) Madrassi descent of the practitioners is performatively reinstated or even discovered in this process (Harms, 2010).

The example of the Madras tradition in particular highlights how socio-religious traditions are actively created or 'invented'. According to Eric Hobsbawm, an invented tradition is

...a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (Hobsbawm, 1992, c1983, 1)

Invented traditions appear to be old, but have often developed recently. They serve the purpose of creating a sense of stability and balance in society, thus specific standardised practices are established and are constantly transformed

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<sup>11</sup>In certain South Asian regions such as West Bengal animal sacrifice is conducted within the framework of Sanskritic Hinduism, for example directed towards the Goddess Kali.

to suggest 'continuity with the past' (ibid.). By labelling the tradition as 'invented,' I do not claim that there exist traditions which are 'genuine,' and hence are more authentic. This would reproduce a discourse on the alleged opposition of 'creole' or mixed and 'pure' or authentic cultures. All cultures and traditions are always in exchange and hence are constantly reinvented (Pinney, 2002). By proposing one's religious tradition as ancient, authentic, and originary, the social actor constitutes and reinstates his or her status as well as (high) position in socio-religious hierarchy. As I consider authenticity to be socially constructed, I emphasise that it is not my intention to label the Madras tradition as 'inauthentic' by denoting it as 'invented'.

### **Strategies of Authentication and the Creation of Respectable Traditions**

When particular rites are excluded or adapted to conform to a specific standard of respectability and raise the practitioner's status, in the context of South Asian Hinduism this process has been discussed as Sanskritisation. The concept of Sanskritisation refers to a process by 'which a "low" Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, "twice-born" caste' (Srinivas, 1966, 6). The objective of this transformation is to acquire a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally claimed by the specific group. As caste and religion are intricately related in South Asian Hinduism the concept of Sanskritisation is linked to caste.

No caste system similar to the Indian one has been transferred to and maintained in the Caribbean however. Today, only caste identities exist (van der Veer and Vertovec, 1991), expressed through the term 'nation'. In Indo-Guyanese terminology 'nation' refers to ethnic groups such as Indian, African, or Chinese (Singer, 1967; Allsopp and Allsopp, 2003). Within the 'Indian nation', high and low nations are furthermore defined to indicate status (Roopnarine, 2006, 3). Caste identities have few implications for social actors compared to the notion of caste in India at present. They are mostly pronounced by *pandits* claiming Brahmin identity as a source of prestige and as a means of social differentiation. They do not directly impact work, marriage, or places of residence. Terms indicating caste identities such as '*chatree*' (Kshatriya) have been applied in popular discourse to claim or mock for instance Kshatriya—'thoroughbred' and high-class—caste identity.

At times my informants also refer to ‘Madras’ in terms of caste identity.<sup>12</sup> In this context, Madrassis or South Indians are usually described as ‘darker’ in terms of skin color and in comparison to North Indians, and their hair as ‘curly.’ These proposed characteristics indicate a link that is created between Madrassis and Guyanese Africans, which—from the perspective of some ‘North Indian’ Guyanese—reinstates lower Madrassi status. Accordingly, Madrassi rituals are often denoted as ‘low-nation’ practices.

With the demise of caste, is Sanskritisation, with its inherent conceptual reference to caste hierarchy, still a relevant process in Guyana? Practices that are part of Sanskritisation processes include, for instance, the adoption of ‘vegetarianism, teetotal rules, and the deities, rites, and myths of “Sanskritic Hinduism” as defined in Sanskrit literature and philosophy and as practiced by Brahmans’ (Singer, 1972, 260f). These adoptions have been at the forefront of processes that were directed at making Hinduism ‘respectable’ and at creating Hindu orthodoxy in Guyana. In this sense, Sanskritisation in the Guyanese context may refer to a process of claiming and acquiring respectability by ridding oneself of ‘uncivilised’ practices and elements. It is furthermore a process that highlights the old age and (greater) sophistication of Hindu-Indian culture in comparison to Christian culture. Although no Sanskrit is spoken in Guyana, its continued use in Hindu *pujas* highlights its capacity to authenticate Hindu practices. Sanskritisation in Guyana thus refers to the creation of respectable orthodoxy that invokes notions of a ‘civilised’ and ‘cultured’ Indian past and creates an alternative framework of respectability. It serves and has served as a means to consolidate and maintain Indian ethnic identity.

Specific rituals, as described earlier, were defined as incompatible with a ‘respectable’ religious tradition and were hence excluded. These practices were continued to be practiced, however, although often in secret and referred to as *gao pujas* (village pujas). When (re)gaining popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, these practices became increasingly standardised and consolidated as Madrassi. Deodatt, a 58-year-old cane worker from rural Berbice and a ritual practitioner in the Madras tradition, explains that the tradition has evolved from annual communal *pujas* to weekly Sunday services. He emphasises the role of Jamsie ‘Paplu’ Naidoo in this development, who was a popular *pujari* during this period and had a leading role in the tradition. Deodatt states:

Yes, they start it there. They start it recently. But since Papplu been in the Kali worshipping, (...) some of the churches, unto now, some of the Kali churches dem, they just open and do like a little regular just thing, they burn them *sambrany* and then open dem church and then put wan-wan flower and thing on Sunday, and they done! They nuh manifest! But most of the churches dem now, *do* have manifestation on every Sunday, most of the church. If you got wan hundred church in Guyana, like about, ninety. And like about ten that no manifestation in Sunday.<sup>13</sup>

He explains that most Kali churches today host services every Sunday, a development linked to the ongoing consolidation and institutionalisation of the tradition.

Devotees of Mother Kali actively engage in raising the status of their practices and challenge the persistent stigmatisation and inferiorisation through standardisation, the creation of a Madrassi orthodoxy, and an emphasis on its South Indian origin. They standardise it for example with regard to infrastructure. In Paul Younger's analysis, 'some of the ritual core of it was a careful reproduction of Māriyamma's ritual the worshippers had known in India, but the layout of the temple and the organisational framework in which the ritual is carried out is new to Guyana' (2009, 73). At present practitioners build permanent concrete temples, while in the past only temporary places of worship had been constructed. This development is influenced by the understanding that a religious tradition should own permanent churches and buildings in order to be considered respectable. The link between 'proper' church buildings and respectability is not exclusive to the Madras tradition; Christian missionaries in Guyana had already reflected that buildings lent 'respectability to the congregation' (Dunn, 1971, 85). In all Hindu communities in which I conducted research,

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<sup>13</sup>Deodatt, February 15, 2012, Berbice, Guyana. 'Yes, they started it there. They started it recently. But since Papplu has been in the Kali worshipping, (...) some of the churches, until today, some of the Kali churches just open and do a small, regular thing, they burn their *sambrany* [incense] and then open the churches and then put flowers etc. on Sunday, and then they are done! They don't manifest! But most of the churches now, *do* have manifestation on every Sunday, most of the churches. If you have one hundred churches in Guyana, like about, ninety. And like about ten do not have manifestation on Sundays.' (personal translation)

the continuing improvement and beautification of buildings and *murtis* is of great importance, raising the community's status.

Religious scripture serves as a source of legitimacy and basis for standardisation as well. Its relevance is revealed by Sanatan Hindus' criticism that Madrassi rituals and deities cannot be found in any existing or legitimate Hindu scripture. 'Legitimate' in this context usually refers to Sanskrit writings including the Vedas. Oral traditions are consequently devalued and inferiorised, and emphasis is given to scripture—a view as prevalent in the Caribbean as elsewhere (Sheller, 2003). Initially an oral tradition, Madrassis frequently mention the foundational scriptures of their tradition now. Deodatt, for instance, highlights that Kali Puja 'essentially' is a *gao puja* which is 'prescribed' in the Mariyamman Thalattu. The Mariyamman Thalattu—a Tamil song usually sung during puja to praise and soothe Kali/Mariyamman—was initially orally transmitted, but is now published in small booklets by *pujaris*. These publications, besides providing a 'scriptural' basis for and hence enhancing the status of the practices, are also a means of raising individual social status. The Devi Mahatmya is further referenced as one of the foundational scriptures, which is a Sanskrit text referring to the Goddess Durga, usually associated with Kali and considered her sister or one of her forms. Referential scriptures are sometimes 'discovered' and the various religious leaders use such discoveries to maintain or challenge communal leadership. Pujari Ramnauth, for instance, excitedly explained on one occasion that he had just received a call from an acquaintance who had discovered a document on Mariyamman that had been 'imported' from Suriname recently. This document or scripture did not have any impact on the tradition while I was conducting fieldwork, yet Ramnauth applied it in conversation to claim greater knowledge and authenticity of his Madrassi worship in comparison to other *pujaris*.

Besides building temple infrastructure, emphasising scripture, and adapting to a weekly schedule, Madrassis apply other processes to standardise their tradition and create Madrassi orthodoxy. For example, they include Sanskritic Hindu deities such as Ganga. The definition and promotion of Madrassi *gurus* (teachers, spiritual guides) have become prominent features and during weekly services these *gurus*—usually elder or deceased head *pujaris*—are often referenced as sources of authority. Interestingly, these

processes of standardisation are similar to the processes that characterise a Hindu tradition as Sanskritic.<sup>14</sup>

Within the Madras tradition internal contestations of authority, leadership, and social status take place and have influenced the development of specific Madrassi 'ways'. These variations, namely the English, Tamil, and Vegetarian ways, have evolved over the past decades, the English way having been promulgated particularly by Jamsie Naidoo in the 1970s (McNeal, 2011). The classification of 'English' and 'Tamil' refers to the languages used during worship and spoken by the deities during manifestation. Tamil and English are the 'ways' my informants commonly list. The third way of Madrassi worship, the 'Vegetarian' way, is mentioned less often, and only some consider it a distinctive way. Deodatt however indicates that 'sweet' practices are conducted in the Vegetarian way, meaning that the practitioners reject animal sacrifice and instead use limes and nutmeg as substitutes for goats and fowls. Some informants refer to it as the 'Durga' way, as Durga is considered the 'quiet form' of Kali, who in contrast is described as 'fierce'. The Vegetarian or Durga way may be regarded as a novel process of Sanskritisation within the Madras tradition, in which 'vegetarianism' is applied to emphasise a more Sanskritic, orthodox, or 'respectable' mode of worship. This way remains marginal however – a development that stands in contrast to Trinidad, where 'antisacrifice sentiment has in fact become more prevalent' (McNeal, 2011, 160).

From the perspective of Tamil-way practitioners it would be contradictory to refer to Sanskritised modes of worship as sources of legitimation for Madrassi practices. Instead, members of the English and particularly Tamil ways highlight the Tamil origin as the basis for authenticity. Authenticity in the Tamil way revolves around an emphasis on 'originary' Tamil cultural elements; hence its members often draw on retentionist discourse. For example Pujari Uttamkumar, who distinguishes the English from the Tamil way and claims membership of the latter, considers it the more 'authentic' tradition,

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<sup>14</sup>In his analysis of 'Great' and popular Hindu traditions in India, Milton B. Singer discusses that Sanskritic or 'Great Traditions' are usually characterised by '1. A body of sacred scriptures and texts in which the Great Tradition is embodied and expressed, 2. A class of literati who have authority to read and interpret the sacred scriptures, 3. Leading personalities, such as Nehru and Gandhi, who convey their vision of the Great Tradition to the masses of the people, 4. A 'sacred geography' of holy places (...), 5. A 'sacred calendar' of rites and ceremonies' (1972, 56).

pointing out that in South India Tamil is spoken instead of English.<sup>15</sup> Tamil practitioners claim authenticity on the basis that Mudda speaks Tamil during manifestation—her words are then translated into English.<sup>16</sup> Adherents of the ‘English way’ counter these claims to authenticity by emphasising that as a deity and creator of all languages, Mudda speaks English and wants her devotees to understand her. They see ‘*nutten wrang*’ (nothing wrong) with her English parlance, a characteristic that has significantly influenced the popularity of the tradition and influenced its revitalisation since the 1970s.

Knowledge of Tamil—similar to the knowledge of scripture and philosophy—is used to create status and to contest leadership in all Madrassi ways. In the same conversation with Pujari Uttamkumar of the Tamil way, he accuses Pujari Ramnauth of the English way to be ‘lying’ about his personal ability to understand and speak Tamil. Stating that Ramnauth may be able to ‘read a little’, but not more than that, he calls the Tamil of other practitioners ‘broken’—labelling them as ‘other’ and actively constructing different Madrassi groups. The term ‘broken’ is frequently applied in the context of Guyanese Creole, which most Guyanese usually degrade as ‘broken’ English and as inferior to Standard English, considering its use as indicative of a person’s low social status. Pujari Uttamkumar himself claims appropriate Tamil language skills and proudly displays a certificate issued to him by the High Commission of India in Guyana on the wall of his office, which confirms that he has finished a course in ‘Elementary Tamil’ offered by the Indian Cultural Center in Georgetown in the early 1990s. The relevance of Tamil indicates the tradition’s emphasis on South Indian heritage, which its members apply to create Madrassi group identity and authenticity. Sanskritisation and the emphasis on Tamil language and origin in the Hindu-Guyanese context thus may be interpreted as authentication strategies and processes. They (re)create and are based on different measures of respectability that are influenced to various extents by Hindu practices and theologies, labelled as Sanskritic or Tamil.

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<sup>15</sup>Uttamkumar explains that there exist eight ‘Tamil-speaking Mariyamman churches’ as opposed to approximately twenty ‘English-speaking’ churches at the time of interview in November 2011. He lists Letterkenny, Whim, Port Mourant, Rose Hall, Hampshire, Albion, Canefield, Good Faith (East Coast), and Triumph (East Coast) as Tamil.

<sup>16</sup>Other characteristics of the Tamil way are its limited ‘Tamil’ pantheon and, for instance, different styles of ritual vestment (Kloß, 2016).

## Conclusion

Particularly since the 1970s and 1980s, in the context of independence, nation-building, and ethnopoliticisation, the Madras tradition has been revitalised and standardised, consolidating what may be labelled an invented tradition. However, this invention, as has been illustrated in this article, should not be regarded as marking the tradition as inauthentic, for indeed there exist no 'genuine' cultures. Authenticity, in this regard, has to be understood as a social construction, and in this way the Madras tradition is both invented and authentic. It was created predominantly in opposition to the mainstream Sanatan tradition as well as dominant Christian traditions. Othering processes form the basis of the tradition's construction, as is also the case for the various ethnic groups in Guyana. On the local level, the Madras and Sanatan religious groups have to be understood as constitutive others.

In the tense socio-political and economic environment of the 1970s and 1980s, feelings of hopelessness were common, especially among the rural population, and fostered the revitalisation of the tradition. This development must not be understood as a passive reaction however, but was also influenced by the growing popularity of individual healing rituals and a belief system that includes spirits as causes of illnesses. Of great significance in this process have also been specific *pujaris*, whom Madrassis often label as *gurus* or spiritual leaders. Particularly prominent in the English way, the most popular way at present, is the deceased *pujari* Jamsie Naidoo. Although his status is challenged by 'Tamil way' practitioners such as Pujari Uttamkumar, Naidoo is often referred to as *guru*, a great Madrassi leader, and foundational figure among members of the English way. The figure of Naidoo holds a significant role not only in processes of standardisation, but further in the (re)invention of the Madras tradition. Many times informants such as Indumattie referred to the Indian state of Tamil Nadu—the proposed ancestral South Indian lands of Madrassi worship—as '*Tamil Naidoo*.' They (unconsciously) draw an analogy between Naidoo and the 'home' of the Madras tradition, conflating the now historic figure with ancestral lands and inventing the tradition by creating a suitable historic past. The act of denoting him as *guru* furthermore becomes a means to claim the respectability of the tradition, which remains stigmatised and marginalised until the present day, leading to secretive practices such as bottom-house *wuk*.

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